

Can You Hear Me? Do You See Me? *Invisible Voices: Women Victims of the Colombian Conflict*, a Poetic Multimedia Artwork of Resistance

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María Mencía's digital, interactive, practice-based project, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano* / *Invisible Voices: Women Victims of the Colombian Conflict* (2019), is part of the larger interdisciplinary research investigation "Memory, Victims, and Representation of the Colombian Conflict" funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project centers on testimony by women affected by the ongoing Colombian armed conflict. This essay analyzes the project's poetic digital artwork, taking into account the relevance of the women's active participation as well as its multimodal nature, as analyzed through the lens of intermediality theory, which highlights the interconnectedness of different media to allow new means of expression. The multimodal digital aspect of the project with its inclusion of text, images, aural components, and videos allows for the depiction of different ways of expression and provides the reader / user with access to photos, audios, and videos that denote the participants' gestures and involvement in the project. This essay also underscores the importance of the project as a tool that supports agency, resistance, and the building of public memory with pedagogical potential at different educational levels as a unique addendum to textbook histories which cannot present the depth of witness.

Keywords: Colombia, women's voices, armed conflict, multimedia, intermediality. teaching materials

El proyecto digital interactivo de María Mencía, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano* (2019), basado en la práctica, forma parte de la investigación interdisciplinaria más amplia, "Memoria, víctimas y representación del conflicto colombiano," apoyada por el Consejo de Investigación de Artes y Humanidades del Reino Unido. El proyecto se centra en el testimonio de mujeres afectadas por el conflicto armado colombiano. Este ensayo analiza la obra de arte digital poética del proyecto, teniendo en

cuenta la relevancia de la participación activa de las mujeres, así como su naturaleza multimodal, analizada a través de la lente de la teoría de la intermedialidad, que destaca la interconexión de diferentes medios para permitir nuevos medios de expresión. El aspecto digital multimodal del proyecto, con su inclusión de texto, imágenes, componentes auditivos y videos, permite la representación de diferentes formas de expresión y brinda al lector / usuario acceso a fotos, audios y videos que denotan los gestos e integración de los participantes en el proyecto. Este ensayo también subraya la importancia del proyecto como una herramienta que apoya la agencia, la resistencia y la construcción de la memoria pública con potencial pedagógico en diferentes niveles educativos como un suplemento único a las historias de los libros de texto que no pueden presentar la profundidad del testimonio.

Palabras clave: Colombia, voces de mujeres, conflicto armado, multimedia, intermedialidad, materiales pedagógicos

Introduction

María Mencía's interactive practice-based project, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano / Invisible Voices: Women Victims of the Colombian Conflict* (2019), is part of the larger interdisciplinary digital investigation "Memory, Victims, and Representation of the Colombian Conflict" funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project foregrounds the relevance of testimony by women affected by the Colombian conflict, which can be traced back at least to May 27, 1964, "the day military operations began in Marquetalia, and the day the FARC considers its birthday, even though it was not until 1966 that the name was officially adopted" (Pizarro Leongómez 1991, 167).¹ The project highlights its rich digital component that has allowed participants to express their ideas via a variety of digital media, ideas that later were made available on the project's free digital site. Mencía's digital, interactive, practice-based project did not intend to analyze the women's testimonies but rather to support women in voicing and propagating their ideas using digital tools that allowed new ways of expression and the dissemination of their message.

Mencía, a scholar and digital artist, worked with a team of experts in fields ranging from Modern Languages, Media Arts, and Computer Sciences to Human Rights Law in order to address representations of women as victims in Colombia's sixty-year armed conflict. The work features testimonies by women whose personal accounts are largely absent from institutional analyses and reports by private and public entities. In reference to women's testimonial discourse Nancy Saporita Sternbach asserts that "these texts are 'cathartic' for their authors, for . . . the act of writing itself serves as a tribute to the memory of the dead: what has been silenced is spoken and written" (1991, 98). In "Women Writing for Other Women in Colombia's Armed Conflict," María Mercedes Andrade (2015), focusing on

¹ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. FARC is the Spanish acronym for Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), which later added "Ejército del Pueblo" (People's Army) to its name and became FARC-EP.

Patricia Lara's *Las mujeres en la guerra* (2000) and Patricia Lovar's *Las viudas del conflicto armado en Colombia: Memorias y relatos* (2006), states: "Lara, writing for a popular audience, edits her material in order to make it more literary and mixes fictional accounts with the testimonios she collects. In contrast, Tovar writes for an academic public and reflects about the implications of the editorial process in ways that signal the oral character of the original material" (1).

Mencía's project differs from others that rely on oral interviews and traditional publications in its inclusion of hands-on workshops through which the participants expressed their individual and collective memories, memories that would be transformed into digital testimonies and made accessible for free in Spanish and English on the project's digital site. Though Mencía's project is different in nature, it is appropriate at this point to acknowledge that the body of research on gender and the Colombian conflict is substantial. As of 2024:

In the Colombian context, scholars have analyzed gender dynamics during conflict in terms of, inter alia, women's disproportional experiences of displacement and sexual violence (Kreft 2020; Meertens 2001a, 2001b; Meertens and Segura Escobar 1996; Osorio Pérez 2008; Wirtz et al. 2014), gender-based violence against women in the context of war (Kreft 2020; Lavery and de Vos 2021; Svallfors 2023), . . . gender roles within and in relation to armed groups, and women's mobilization in response to violence (Kreft 2019). (Svallfors 2024, 299)

However, only three scholarly articles engage with this digital project: "Co-Creation, Digital Art and Agency: Experiences from a Co-created Digital Artwork Project in Colombia" by Claire Taylor, María Mencía, Rafael Asorey-Cacheda, and Claudia Zúñiga-Cañón (Taylor et al. 2021), "Why #WomenTechLit? Because..." by Mencía (2021), and "El proyecto Voces invisibles: mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano," also by Mencía (2023).

This essay adds to the literature presented above by approaching the project *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano* from a theory grounded in the relationship between intermediality and memory, while at the same time asserting the project's relevance as a source for the study of Colombian history and culture in terms of memory and identity. The study also brings to the fore the ways in which the different media elements (audio, images, video, interactivity) used in the project allowed the participants to express, record, and disseminate their individual and collective memories.

Intermediality is a term used to refer to the intersection of different types of media. Though commonly applied to digital media, it can also be applied to the intersection of

traditional and digital media.² Sara Tanderup Linkis's framework, developed in her book *Memory, Intermediality and Literature* (2019), asserts that "works gain significance as memory works, mediating memory by moving in between media" (12). In other words, works (whether literary or some other type of artistic product) accumulate meaning just as memory does, combining a variety of sensory inputs in order to make a lasting impression. This in turn allows for the intermediality embedded in *Voces invisibles* to be approached from the point of view of the participants as well as from the perspective of all those who access the digital site. Though Mencía's project was part of an interdisciplinary research investigation, her digital work, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano*, emphasized the use of different types of media for recording, producing, and disseminating the testimonies of women who had been affected by the Colombian conflict.

Utilizing this theoretical construct enables us to perceive that the intermediality of *Voces invisibles* promotes the expression of memory and identity by allowing participants to interact with different media. At the same time, it is likely to have an impact outside the circle of women who directly participated in the project. In order to support this idea, this essay will elaborate on the following questions: In what ways has the intermediality of the project generated agency among the victims, potentially filling a vacuum in a society that has not fully embraced the need to hear their voices? How does the project encourage other victims to be part of this historical interactive piece, thereby building deeper cultural memory? How can this project contribute to the study of Colombian history and culture, when most textbooks in higher education do not cover the topic or refer to online sources such as *Voces invisibles*?

Voces invisibles resulted from workshops intended not only to create art as an act of resistance but also to "give voice to the women victims who were participating and constructing a collective memory – a memory where they felt represented" (Taylor et al. 2021, 35). This seminal project, which can be accessed in Spanish and English via its website (<https://www.voces-invisibles.mariaMencía.com>) is a powerful tool to raise awareness of the violence against women during the Colombian armed conflict at local, national, and international levels. This is a site that could be used for a range of educational purposes, as it provides extracts of the women's testimonies expressed through various media in different sections of the project, but especially in the Art (E) work, which is the interactive multimedia part of *Voces invisibles*.

² The *Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines intermediality as: "A generic term for phenomena at the point of intersection between different media, crossing their borders, or for their interconnection, typically in the context of digital media. The term emerged in the 1990s, but usage beyond this basic concept varies greatly" (219).

The Colombian Conflict: Memory and Art / Art and Memory

Throughout the years of the Colombian conflict and beyond the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), art has served as a form of activism in search of justice as well as a means to talk about violence in order to heal and preserve memory in victims and all those affected by the conflict. Anthropologist Alejandro Valderrama Herrera, who specializes in education, human rights, and development, reminds us that “there are alternative ways of addressing and narrating violence beyond a legal and academic perspective, with the aim of understanding and drawing attention to realities that are rarely addressed in the public sphere, such as forced disappearance” (2020, 1). The Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition was created as part of the 2016 Peace Accord “to learn the truth about what happened in the context of the armed conflict and to contribute to the clarification of the violations and infractions committed during the armed conflict and to offer a broad explanation of its complexity to society as a whole” (Comisión 2022). In its final report the Commission states that “121,768 persons are counted as forced disappearances in the framework of the armed conflict between 1985 and 2016, [and] if you take into account the number of victims not counted for different reasons, the estimated number of forced disappearances could reach 210,000” (2022).

Unfortunately, the practice of forced disappearance persisted after 2016. In March 2023, the Red Cross reported that in the previous year, 209 individuals had gone missing due to armed conflict or violence (International Committee of the Red Cross 2023). The gravity of the situation was also apparent in an article published in the newspaper *El Colombiano* on August 30, 2023, the day recognized by the United Nations as the International Day of Victims of Forced Disappearances. This article states: “The ‘International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned that, between January and August 2023, it documented 222 new cases of forced disappearance related to armed conflicts and violence. The events were reported in thirteen departments of the country, of which 67% were registered in Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, and Nariño’” (“Al menos 222” 2023). It is relevant to highlight that, as emphasized in the article, those figures represent only the cases that the ICRC was aware of, and there might be numerous unreported ones due to fear of retaliation. Thus, the figures “do not reflect the exact dimension of the phenomenon” (“Al menos 222” 2023).

Voces invisibles enables individuals to represent in works of art not only themselves and their families but also others affected by the conflict, many of whom still demand justice. This use of art as a way of representing violence, healing, and preserving memory has been a controversial one. As Claire Taylor notes, mnemonic representation in Colombia is a crucial means, though the circumstances are different from those in other countries:

As many scholars have noted, in Colombia, as distinct from other transitional justice contexts, the conflict is not yet a past process that transitional justice mechanisms are subsequently attempting to redress retrospectively. Whereas transitional justice initiatives in countries across the globe from the 1970s onwards, such as those implemented in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru and South Africa, were initiated after a period of transition from either dictatorship to democracy, or from armed conflict to peace, Colombia is an unusual case in that its mechanisms were put in place, and continue to be implemented, during an ongoing armed conflict. (Taylor 2024)

Colombia is still struggling to end the cycle of violence that started many years ago and to come to terms with displacements, posing a great challenge for Colombians demanding peace and justice.

***Voces invisibles* and the Need for Safe Spaces**

Though sociopolitical violence in Colombia can be traced back to Mariano Ospina Pérez's dictatorship (1946–1950), the mid-1960s marked the beginning of the Colombian armed conflict that continued after the 2016 Peace Agreement and persists today as a low-intensity conflict. According to Ubillos-Landa et al., “The bombings carried out as part of the LASSO plan in 1964 and the emergence from 1965 onwards of FARC-EP. . . , the ELN (*Ejército Nacional de Liberación: National Liberation Army*) in the Carere area, and the EPL (*Ejército Popular de Liberación: Popular Liberation Army*) in Alto Sinú, . . . had a significant impact on the country's evolution” (2019, 1). Within this context *Voces invisibles* provides an interactive digital space where Colombian women can express, through testimonies and various other art forms, the effects of the Colombian conflict.

The armed conflict spanning six decades has produced 9,845,286 victims (Unidad para Víctimas 2024), of which 4,943,258 are women. However, it may be assumed that the actual figures are higher since, when it comes to the global study of violence, “the majority of the current literature centers on periods of active conflict, with only a few studies attempting to evaluate the ongoing impact of violence during post-conflict transition periods” (Ubillos-Landa et al. 2019, 1). Research has shown that in “societies devastated by war or post-conflict struggles, women often bear the burden of reestablishing family bonds and developing new interaction resources, while at the same time being more likely to suffer violence at the hands of the community, ex-combatants and family members” (Blay-Tofey and Lee 2015, cited in Ubillos-Landa et al. 2019, 1). Ubillos-Landa et al. also highlight that “when faced with situations of intense violence, such as those that arise during war or post-conflict periods, female victims generally tend to use suppression or coping strategies based on avoidance and/or silence” (3). Pockets of violence continued

after 2016, and the low-intensity conflict created an environment where women affected by it feel the need to voice their memories that abound in frustration at the lack of resolution.

Given these observations, it is important to create safe spaces so that women can share their stories. One example is *The Women's Truth* report which gave voice to “more than a thousand mestizas, Afro-descendants and indigenous women who have suffered the horrors of war and have stored these broken memories for years or decades in their bodies and hearts” (Ruta Pacífica 2017, 13). The widely accessible report states:

In the context of other Truth Commissions throughout the world, the report coordinated by the group Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres provides an experience formed from the grassroots and of which the women victims are the main protagonists. It places their voices at the center of the process of building a collective truth narrated by them and that forms part of the recent history of Colombia. The value of this collective memory is not the verification of the horror, but rather that the words wrapped in this horror can find meaning and be shared with the society to which they are directed. (Ruta Pacífica 2017, 13)

The report emphasizes that “recreating the collective memory with previously unseen perspectives is a healing process that contributes to the transformation of the society and lays down a foundation for violent acts not to be repeated” (Ruta Pacífica 2017, 25). *Voces invisibles*, as a virtual safe space, further shows that community support, engagement in the community, and participation in creative processes can provide agency to the women affected by the Colombian conflict. The project has been instrumental to the women's recreation of individual and collective memory, to reconstruct their history, to demonstrate their agency, to reaffirm their identity, and to realize and propagate their relevant role in Colombian history.

From Storytelling to Digital Art

In 2015, “women comprised 20 percent of the government negotiating team and 43 percent of FARC delegates (a level consistent with the percentage of women fighters in the guerrilla group)” (Bigio et al. 2017, par. 5), however, many women still felt disenfranchised. In 2019, the *Voces invisibles* project invited members of the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (women from across Colombia) and from the Zoscua Corporation (from Boyacá) to take part in “co-creation workshops in Bogota,” led by a team of interdisciplinary researchers, “to discuss through storytelling and creative practices, their experiences as victims of the Colombian conflict” (Mencía 2021, 155). An impact coordinator, someone who had already worked with the group Ruta Pacífica de las

Mujeres and the Zoscua Corporation invited women to be part of the project.³ A total of ten women joined, five from Ruta Pacífica and five from Zoscua.⁴

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres is a feminist activist group founded in 1996 as a result of the violence women were facing in rural and urban areas. It comprised women representatives of three hundred organizations who reached out to over ten thousand women in more than eighteen Colombian departments.⁵ Ruta Pacífica embraces women of all ages from different racial, social, and professional backgrounds, as well as those who belong to a variety of nonprofit organizations. It is committed to political action via an antimilitarist, nonviolent, pacifist approach that recognizes peace, justice, freedom, equity, and the acknowledgement of otherness as fundamental principles (Ruta Pacífica 2025).

In contrast, the Zoscua Corporation “is a much smaller, grassroots activist group within Colombia. Founded in 2007, Zoscua represents victims and the families of victims within one specific region of the country—Boyacá, one of the 32 departments of Colombia and located within the mountains of the Eastern Cordillera of the Andes. . . . This organization aims to promote ‘actions of resistance to oblivion, injustice, violence and authoritarianism’ ” (Taylor et al. 2021, 32).⁶ It has, since its founding, “undertaken a number of activist and artistic interventions, including installations and exhibitions, often working in conjunction with other organizations” (Taylor et al. 2021, 34). As a result of a series of workshops *Voces invisibles* became an “amazing collaborative experience of exchange, learning and empowerment with the voices of black, indigenous, and white women of different ethnicities; fighters having the resilience, dignity and strength to stand up every day to create a better, more equitable, fairer world, and with this, a new future for their families and communities” (Mencía 2021, 155).

The creation of *Voces invisibles* involved a series of phases that guided women from hands-on workshops to the digital portion of the project. First, the women vocalized their memories either with the help of personal keepsakes (for example a newspaper article, a bandana, or a mouse). These items helped them tell their stories, which would later be imprinted on various materials, such as paper, walls, or hemp sacks. These memories and words emerging from those hands-on workshops and writing activities would form the basis for the visual and auditory section of the digital project.

³ Mencía, personal communication with author, WhatsApp, August 19, 2025.

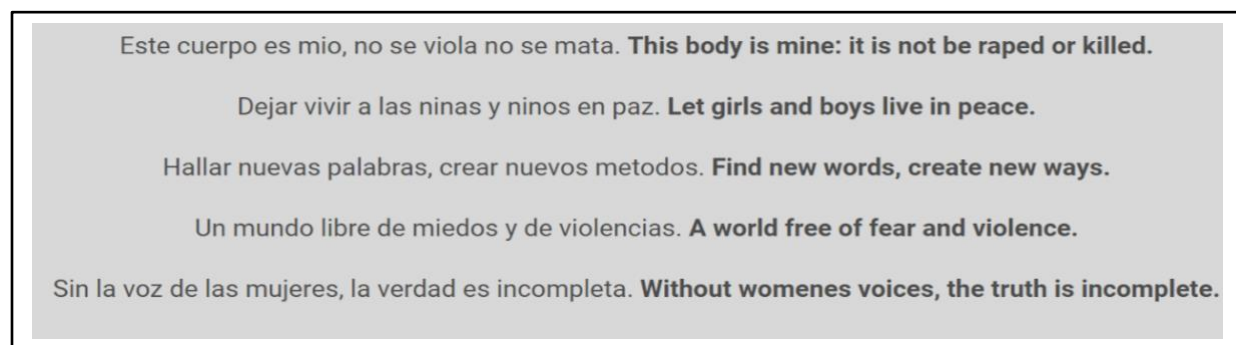
⁴ Taylor, personal communication with author, email, October 28, 2025.

⁵ Departments in Colombia are country subdivisions that are granted a certain degree of autonomy.

⁶ Citing Corporación Zoscua, “Proyecto Muro de la Memoria” (2019, 2), unpublished document from Zoscua archives.

The digital project, then, includes not only the recollections per se but also their documentation via photos, videos, and voice recordings of the participants. The section *Art (E) work*, which is linked [here](#) and will be illustrated later in this essay, brings together many of the media elements mentioned as a three-part creative piece titled “Their Place in Memory,” “Are you Listening?,” and “Constructing Memory,” in which the user can freely explore the “images, sounds and photographs of installations gathered in the co-creative workshops, as well as photographs taken by the women in their demonstrations and political activisms” (Mencía 2019). This interactive piece possibly provides a deeper experience than the isolated elements presented in other sections of the project.

At this point, it is also relevant to highlight the poetic aspect of the digital project that emerged from the tangible works of art created during the workshops. The different pieces are expressions of identity, collective memory, and the desire to become visible to the world. In a message sent by María Mencía to the author of this article, she states that the poetic aspect of *Voces Invisibles* resides in the humanity and reality of its narratives: “all the women’s stories, the stories, the narratives, the telling of these stories that are . . . humane, real. . . , all that is poetics” (Mencía 2025).⁷ She mentions that, for example, in the section “Documentacion de talleres,” the transcriptions of the slogans used by the women during their public protests that later formed part of the digital project, become “like visual poetry with one line after another, after another, after another” (Mencía 2025).⁸



Throughout the workshops the researchers acted as facilitators so that the participating women could take center stage in deciding the type of project they wanted to undertake to express their memories, emotions, and ideas. Taylor et al. inform us that “this method of co-creation was a significant part of the process because it allowed the women to

⁷ “Poetics son todas las historias de las mujeres, las historias, la narrativa, de storytelling de unas historias que son . . . humanas, reales . . . eso es todo poetics” (Mencía, personal communication, WhatsApp, April 8, 2025).

⁸ “como una poesía visual, una línea después de la otra, de la otra, de la otra” (Mencía, personal communication, WhatsApp, April 8, 2025).

become more invested in the study; instead of being passive providers of information to be used by an artist, they took an active role in deciding how they wanted their stories to be told” (2021, 36–37). Such a feeling of engagement and control over their own projects led the participating women to express themselves more freely. Thus, “sharing these first-person stories through collaborative creative projects helped them to heal, increased their self-esteem, made them feel more empowered and that they were taking part in Colombia’s historical memory” (37).

***Voces invisibles* and Intermediality**

Voces invisibles is part of a larger research investigation on memory, victims, and representation that is interdisciplinary in nature, which is significant because “interdisciplinarity commonly refers to the joining forces by two or more academic fields of knowledge. . . . The motivation for interdisciplinary emerges from a specific problem in need of solution or a significant development in society” (Raento 2020, 352). Intermediality, on the other hand, refers not to the collaboration between fields of study but to the integration of different media in a project. Intermediality has been defined by Irina Rajewsky as a designation of “those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, and which thereby can be differentiated from *intramedial* phenomena as well as from *transmedial* phenomena (i.e., the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of media)” (2005, 46). Tanderup Linkis adopts this definition and elaborates: “the prefix *inter* ‘between’ signifies that intermedial literature is literature that moves, metaphorically speaking, ‘between media’ ” (2019, 10). She borrows from Rajewsky the concept of intermediality as a “critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products” and reads the works as “reflection of a general situation where literature moves increasingly between media, converging with other media and art forms and where intermediality becomes the norm rather than the exception” (62).

In *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano* interdisciplinarity and intermediality converge and supplement each other to lead the participants to express their ideas and reflect on them via a variety of media. “The Memory, Victims and Representation of the Colombian Conflict” project of which *Voces invisibles* is a part brought together an interdisciplinary team from Modern Languages, Media Arts, Computer Sciences, and Human Rights who contributed their expertise to the project by providing guidance as well as discussions with participants in the workshops and in the digital production. Mencía’s project focused “on incentivizing new means of awareness with regard to the self-representation of women victims of the Colombian conflict through different art practices” (Mencía 2019).

It is through this sort of intermediality that *Voces invisibles* acts to preserve individual and collective memory. Media expert José van Dijck states that “media and memories . . . are not separate entities—the first enhancing, corrupting, extending, replacing the second—but media invariably and inherently shape our personal memories, warranting the term ‘mediation’ ” (2007, 16). In *Voces invisibles* the scaffolding of events leading from the hands-on workshops to the digital product led to a heartfelt and vivid portrayal of memories, emotions, and hopes. In *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, van Dijck asserts that “mediated memories are the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others” (21). It is through the mediated memories reflected in *Voces invisibles* that participants reaffirm their identity and sense of dignity and project their voices to society.

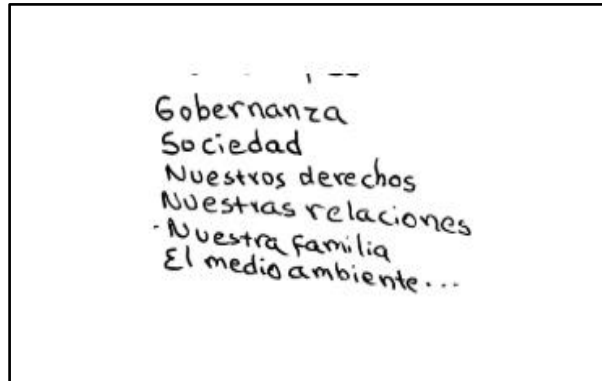
Intermediality: A Tool to Create Agency in the Digital Age

One of the questions leading this essay is this: In what ways has the intermediality of the project generated agency among the victims and filled a vacuum in a society that has not fully embraced the need to hear the women’s voices on the armed conflict?

Mencia’s creative practice-based project is unique. It is different from any other form of cultural production since it moves from the material production of an artifact that allows participants to reflect on their own memories to a stage of digital production where what was done and said during the workshops is captured in a multimedia environment. And this is accessible to anyone with access to the internet, thus reaching a wider audience than probably any other type of archive analog or cultural production such as a mural. The individual contributions that emerged from the workshops resulted in inclusive testimonies that embraced all the women in the project.

After sharing their testimonies with the group, “the women were invited to reflect on the reasons that led them to participate in the Zoscua and Ruta Pacífica organizations; their opinion about the victims of the armed conflict and their representation in the media; and vindication of their rights, activist participation in the creation of historical memory, and ways to move forward creating a more just, equitable society, and, above, all promoting peace” (*Voces Invisibles, Documentación de talleres, Memoria/Memory*).⁹ These reflections later became part of the interactive digital art known today as *Mujeres Voces Invisibles*, thus allowing the participants’ messages to reach a wider audience in different places and times. The illustration below provides a glimpse of the subjects expressed by the participants during the workshops and in the digital art.

⁹The citation refers to its location in the digital work *Voces invisibles* on the project website.



Subjects Expressed by Workshop Participants

Another activity carried out by the participants was inspired by the testimonials of women from Antioquia as documented in the 2013 video *Memoria: Jardín de la esperanza de las mujeres* produced by the Observatorio Audiovisual e Investigativo sobre Procesos Comunitarios y de Resistencia - Área de Comunicaciones - Asociación Campesina de Antioquia and El Retorno Pro. According to Mencía, for *Voces invisibles* the phrase “Nuestro cuerpo se quedó en hilachitas / Our body was left in shreds,” uttered by a woman in the video, “was a starting point as a significant expression of the violence suffered and felt through the body, and they used the sack cloth as a symbol of the body” (Documentación de talleres/Cuerpo/Body, Politic(o) Storytelling – www.voces-invisibles.mariaMencía.com). It could also be read as the first line of an ongoing poem.

The sack cloth activity was meant to empower the participants, since they stamped on it words pertaining to their concerns about gender, violence, events, hopes, and expectations. This activity allowed women to not only make their voices heard but also to gain a feeling of ownership. Once the art piece was finished, the women “frayed the sack cloth covered with messages and put it over themselves to perform powerful variations of embodied group sculptures covered by the frayed sack cloth with messages” (Documentación de talleres/Cuerpo/Body, Politic(o) Storytelling – www.voces-invisibles.mariaMencía.com). These “undercover” performances carried out on the street literally made the invisible visible to segments of society that would normally not bear witness to them. Instead of the disgraced criminal being paraded and derided in public, the public was now having to witness evidence of crimes perpetrated under its watch.



Materiales: Tela deshilachada y mensajes creados con plantillas y tinta china.



Materials: Frayed Cloth and Messages Created with Stencils and Ink

The women's voices were also the focus of another workshop called "Nuestro cuerpo se quedó en hilachas" that captured the intermediality of the whole project. The transition from artifacts to written word and then to voice exemplified the intermedial nature inherent in the twenty-first century propagation of ideas.

Words that emerged from the workshops were later transcribed, shouted through megaphones during demonstrations, and recorded to have a presence in the digital project. The photos below were intentionally blurred to demonstrate that, even though

women have been invisible for some time, their voices cannot be silenced and they will be heard, as demonstrated by their action in public protests and the recordings that exist in the digital project.



Grabacion con megafonos/Recording with megaphones

Recording with Megaphones

Another section of Mencía's digital piece portrays the women's artworks produced in the workshop "Un museo para mi" (A Museum for Me), led by Claire Taylor and Ailsa Peate (Mencía 2023). In this activity, the women were able to express issues related to gender and identity "which (perhaps) cannot be found in museums" (Taylor and Peate 2019). The women curated their own cardboard museums, "using objects with personal meaning and with attachments to personal memories, and at the end of the activity each person was left with their very own Museum for Me" (Taylor and Peate 2019). Below is one of the art pieces created during the workshop:



Museum for Me (An Example)

The following is a sample of the proclamations that can be heard in Mencía's art piece and which exemplifies the poetic nature of the project.

El cuerpo de las mujeres no es botín de guerra. **Womens bodies are not the spoils of war.**

Ni guerra que nos destruya, ni paz que nos oprima. **No war that destroys us; no peace that oppresses us.**

Ni la guerra ni el hambre han destruido nuestra dignidad. **Neither war nor hunger have destroyed our dignity.**

Mis derechos no se negocian. **My rights are not negotiable.**

Mi cuerpo primer territorio de paz. **My body; the first territory of peace.**

Justicia. **Justice.**

To hear some of the proclamations captured in this work click on the following link: [¿Nos escuchan? Are you listening?](#) Note that some of these proclamations are expressed in the “nosotras” (we) form as whereas others reflect a more personal approach in first person singular, “yo” (I). In this section, Mencía showcases not only the women’s voices with their clear position and demands as victims but also a snapshot of the original tangible, cocreated art used by women to express their position in the public demonstrations in which they participated.

“[Su espacio en la memoria](#)” is another section of *Voces invisibles* in which participants expressed their personal and collective memories in an activity titled “Writing on the Wall.” The writings are reminiscent of graffiti left by prisoners in jails, but now these are

memories being liberated from the confines of the individual psyche and presented to the world at large.





Writing on the Wall

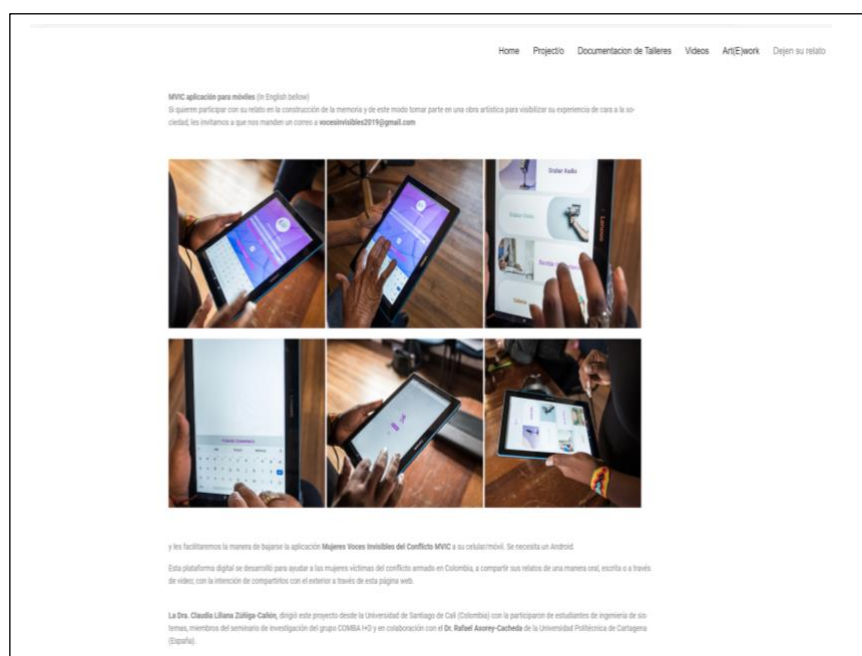
The women's written expressions of their feelings during this hands-on workshop were later re-mediated in the digital project, giving a presence (both temporally and aurally) to the women's voices in a digital and wide-reaching realm. By clicking on the page, the reader / viewer has access to a bilingual Spanish / English transcript of the women's words spoken in their own voices, thus creating an environment for reflection accessible from beyond the Spanish-speaking world. The link [Su espacio en la memoria](#) takes the reader / viewer to the digital work.

From the same page listed above, the reader / viewer can access a section titled "Voices—Constructing Memory," in Spanish, "Relatos—Construyendo memorias." It combines audio recordings of the women's personal testimonies gathered from the workshops with images and keywords in Spanish and English that also stem from the women's narratives. Among the issues presented in this section are political activism, culture, power, displacement, violence, and gender representation. The photos from the workshops are a reminder of the intermediality of the project that took these women from the creation of an actual tangible product to the digitalization of their work, thus emphasizing the relevance of the digital environment to help them express and propagate their voices.

How did the project invite other victims to be part of this historical interactive piece that fosters the building of cultural memory? As a way to share their stories in writing, orally,

or via video during the creative workshops, women were encouraged to use the app MVIC: Mujeres Voces Invisibles del Conflicto. The app was configured with a system that protected their anonymity and confidentiality, thus “providing a space of privacy and security” (Taylor et al. 2021). The stories recorded with the app supplemented the stories generated from the workshops. User registration was by invitation, personal data was never saved, and users were identified by a randomly generated code. At all times, participants were in full control of their own content. Thus, technology provided women with agency to act as active participants of this process of reaffirming their identity. As the image below shows, the link allowed women whose lives were affected by the Colombian armed conflict to add their own memories to the project.¹⁰

Dejen su relato



Leave Your Story

Final Comments

In addition to the relevance of the project for the participants' lives, it is also important to consider the pedagogical potential of the project to propagate its content to a wider audience. *Voces invisibles* falls within the realm of a Digital Humanities Project and, as such, offers a plethora of teaching / learning opportunities for the study of Colombian history and culture in undergraduate Spanish courses or Latin American culture courses in Spanish or English. Though the issues presented by the victims are heartbreaking to

¹⁰ This section of the projects has been discontinued for the time being.

say the least, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano / Invisible Voices: Women Victims of the Colombian Conflict* can make major contributions to educational curricula pertaining to the study of Latin America and the role of women in their search for justice and the reclamation of memory within the framework of the Colombian conflict. Since *Voces invisibles* is mostly bilingual in Spanish and English and can be accessed for free on its website, it is a valuable pedagogical platform for the study of the disenfranchisement of Colombian women's voices, historically and currently.

The intermediality of the project has made it possible for the women who are expressing themselves to do so through multimodal means, simultaneously inviting the reader / viewer of this project to access it via different sound and visual media. The result is a powerful artwork in response to the general silencing of women in the Colombian conflict. Above all, *Voces invisibles: Mujeres víctimas del conflicto colombiano* is an important addendum to textbook histories which cannot present the depth of witness. It is an ongoing act of resistance, literally giving voice to women affected by the years upon years of violence in Colombia.

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