

The Power of Butterflies: The Legacy of the Mirabal Sisters in an Exhibition by the Mexican Cartoonist Cintia Bolio

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Published: April 11, 2020

ABSTRACT

In the present work we analyse the exhibition *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas (Only Evas: About butterflies)* by the Mexican artist Cintia Bolio. This exhibition was presented from November 14, 2018, to March 3, 2019 at the Museum of Women, which is located in Mexico City, in the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Woman, a date which commemorates the Mirabal sisters, known as 'The Butterflies', who were murdered in the Dominican Republic by the dictatorship of Leonidas Trujillo on November 25, 1960. The exhibition was presented in a context characterised by the growing number of women victims of violence in Mexico. As we are going to see, in the exhibition analysed, Cintia Bolio seeks to publicise the types of violence that exist and why the struggle of the Mirabal sisters led us to reflection on gender violence in our daily life.

Keywords: Mexican comic, Cintia Bolio, feminist comic

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN MEXICO

The #MeToo movement of 2017 spread around the world as a wave of opposition to the sexual assault and harassment that women suffer in their workplaces. Although it started with the stories of Hollywood's women, it soon became clear that many around the world suffer the same type of violence, no matter their country, age, job and race/ethnicity. That slogan was a reference to the namesake organisation that has helped survivors of sexual violence since 2006. #MeToo makes visible the omnipresence of gender inequity among the society; in that way, it rekindled a long-term movement of women that fights against the gender gap that has historically set women aside in public life. In Latin America the #MeToo was used by feminist movements and also by women who suffer (or had suffered) all kinds of gender-based violence. It is important to consider that the hashtags used to report violence against women in Latin America went beyond #MeToo: it is possible to mention the #MiPrimerAcoso (#MyFirstHarrasment), #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneLess) or #VivasNosQueremos (#WeWantUsAlive). This new generation of activism (mostly from urban contexts and with a wide knowledge of technology uses) was effective in making public the situation of women in Latin America (Gomez and Lozano, 2019).

In Mexico, the subordination of women takes place in every aspect of the daily life. The most common is in the house, a situation that leads some scholars to establish a difference between the 'private sphere' (the one in which traditionally the man can be restored from the bustle of work and the public space) and the 'domestic sphere' (that one in which the woman has to serve their husband and children) (Murillo, 1996). But even if women can get a good job and have a high position in a company, they are still subordinated to men: usually, women that have access to the top of the hierarchy are under more pressure because they have to demonstrate, all the time, that they can do the job. Also, their salary is lower, because they cannot receive the incentive compensations that their male colleagues benefit from (car, holiday, bonus, etc.) (Vega Montiel, 2014: 207-208). In a national survey in Mexico, nearly one quarter of the respondents (23%) affirmed that women must ask for permission if they want to work (Galeana Herrera, 2015). Moreover, women's opinion is considered of being less worth than listening to than men's, and in all the cases they must take care of their family, even if the job is full time (García de León, 1994). Finally, other scholars (Molyneux, 2001; Vélez Bautista, 2006) have shed light on the concept of citizenship. They demonstrate that, although the concept seems to be neutral, in its origins it was based on the image of men. Therefore, women were excluded from it. This has several consequences when we focus on the women's

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citizenship, because they are systematically excluded from the protection of the law; in many aspects they do not have rights (especially political rights) and are not seen as a political subject. Therefore, women are economically dependent (on their fathers, husband, but also on the State). Usually, this situation led to a welfare policy that does not change women's subordinated status (Rubio Castro, 1997; de Villota, 1998).

In Mexico, the situation for women is particularly dramatic. They live in what Marcela Lagarde called captivities or 'the political-cultural expression of the women's condition...in the patriarchal world' (2011: 60). This captivity is characterised by the privation of freedom by oppression. Women are captive because their vital autonomy has been taken, as well as their independence, their self-government, the possibilities of decision and their capacity of choice about their life and world (Lagarde, 2011: 61). This oppression can have one unique dimension (the oppression of the housewife in which she is attached to the kitchen, the cleaning, the children's care, etc.), but also can be double (the wife that has two labour journeys: at the workplace and at home) or triple (those who have ethnic ancestry and have two labour journeys and also suffered oppression because of their origins). The latter have suffered with more cruelty the oppression of the Latin American society which is not only classist, but also racist and Eurocentric.

The violence against women can present in different degrees: from the prohibition (explicit or implicit) of getting a job or the pressure to get married, to rape and murderer. And, notoriously, that is the case of the women of Juarez City, in Chihuahua, Mexico. During early 1990, corpses of women who had been tortured and raped began to be found. Most of them were young women (between 15 and 25 years old) who had to drop their studies and worked in *maquilas* (factories in the border between Mexico and USA). Their corpses were usually found stabbed, mutilated and/or raped. Since 1993 there have been more than 1500 femicides in Juarez City (Martínez Prado, 2018). According to the civil society *Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez* (Juarez City Women Table Network), during 2018, there were 89 women murdered, victims of femicide violence (an increase of 22% in the first semester, in relation to 2017).¹

In 2007, the General Law for Women to Access a Life without Violence (LGAMVLV, by its Spanish initials) was launched. The LGAMVLV established a mechanism to eliminate the violence against women: the Gender Violence against Women Alert (AVGM, by its Spanish initials), which allows the state to implement direct actions and reassign resources. At the time we are writing this article, there are 13 states under AVGM² and 9 in process.³ Nevertheless, the oppression of women in Mexico is still dramatic and severe.

In 2017 there were more than 3.000 murders of women in all the country. This represents an increase of 18% in relation to 2016 (2,813 cases) (Jasso and González, 2018), a trend that cannot be stopped by the State, and represents a femicide each 9 hours. This is consistent with the research of geophysicist María Salguero, who worked on the first Mexican Femicide Map, which was recognised by ONU Mujeres (ONU Women) and the Mexican Senate.

Violence against women is systemic: of 32 states, 24 have reported an increase of femicide (an increase of more than 80%). Even the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has several cases in its history. Since 2016 the University has received almost 500 complaints about sexual harassment (by students, security personal and professors). The cases go from verbal harassment and discrimination to sexual abuse, rape and murderer. Nevertheless, the murder is not the only menace.

In Mexico, the harassment in public spaces is higher, especially on public transport (that is why in 2007 the government of Mexico City allocated the first three wagons of a metro car to be used only by women and by children under 12-years-old).⁴ Some institutions (such as ONU Women and Inmujeres), as well as companies, have been doing social advertising to confront this problem, but the harassment has still not disappeared. The campaign *#NoEsDeHombres* (*#It'sNotFromMen*) is a recent example.⁵

Sexual harassment is not the only way in which the patriarchy appears. As we have seen, the oppression of women in Mexico has several dimensions, including the cultural, political, social, sexual, and so on. In 2016, the Family Front, in alliance with catholic institutions, called a protest against the decision of the president Enrique Peña Nieto to legalise marriage between people of the same sex. Another example: after the general elections of 2018, in the state of Chiapas, 35 congresswoman and city councilwomen have been forced to quit, so their male colleagues could assume their position in the Senate. The political violence against women is also express in more

¹ More information about the organization can be find in their web site: <http://www.mesademujeresjuarez.org/>

² Estado de México, Morelos, Michoacán, Chiapas, Nuevo León, Veracruz, Sinaloa, Colima, San Luis Potosí, Guerrero, Quintana Roo, Nayarit and Veracruz.

³ Campeche, Mexico City, Coahuila, Durango, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Puebla, Yucatán and Zacatecas.

⁴ This action was not new. In 1970 there were two wagons for women (although it was only for two lines in working days between 6:00-10:00 am and 17:00-22:00 pm). In 2000 the Mexico City government allocated the two wagons to be used by women and children, permanently, in six lines.

⁵ It can be find a final report of the campaign in the web site of ONU Women in Mexico: <http://mexico.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2018/06/nosedehombres-reporte>

explicit ways: for example, the prohibition to women to assume an elective position, in Oaxaca, under the law of the tradition.

The rural population of the states is the most affected by violence. This is not only because of economic vulnerability, but also because of their social position and the lack of basic services (education, health, food security, drains, etc.). This situation leads on occasion to child marriage, undercover sales of children in exchange for money, animals or land. The age range is usually between 10 and 17 years; in all the cases, women married older men.⁶ According to UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organization (OPS, by its Spanish initials), from a total of 32 million, 7 million Mexican mothers are younger than 16 years; this situation set Mexico as the first country of the OECD in relation to teenage pregnancy.⁷

During 2018, Mexico was called to appear in front of the committee of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).⁸ In their final recommendations, the CEDAW committee stressed the necessity of putting end to all forms of violence against women and encouraged the Mexican State to take stronger action to revert the panorama. Between the more urgent areas that the State must focus its politics on, we can mention: the general context of gender violence; discrimination against women; access to justice; lack of gender equity; sexist stereotypes; damaging practices in hospitals; slavery and prostitution; obstacles to participating in the political arena. Although the states have usually five years to present their progress, the CEDAW committee considered that the context in Mexico is so disadvantageous to women that the country has to show its progress in 2020 (two years after its revision).



Figure 1. The exhibition at Museum of Women. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein

This is the context in which the Museum of Women invites cartoonist Cintia Bolio to exhibit a collection for the International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women. In the next section we discuss the exposition, titled *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas*. This exhibition took place in the main gallery of the Museum between November 14, 2018 and March 3, 2019.

WOMEN AUTHORS AND FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN MEXICAN COMICS

The beginning of the modern Mexican comic coincides with the end of the armed struggle of the Revolution. These series filled the supplement pages of Sunday newspaper such as *El Herald*, *El Democrata* and *El Universal*,

⁶ As the State recognized in its web site: <https://www.gob.mx/sipinna/articulos/nacer-nina-en-mexico-desventaja-automatica-177743?idiom=es>

⁷The full report can be read in the following link: https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ESP-EMBARAZO-ADOLESC-14febrero%20FINAL_5.PDF

⁸ The final recommendations can be read (in English or Spanish) in the following link: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fMEX%2fCO%2f9&Lang=en

where they were published from 1919 until the mid-1930s. During these decades, the comics had great presence in the newspaper stands. In the 1940s, during the 'Golden Age' of Mexican comic books (1940 – 1960), magazines such as *Paquín*, *Pepín* and *Chamaco* published millions of copies a week.

It was in this 'Golden Age' when women ventured into the genre of the comic. Yolanda Vargas Dulché, Elia D'Ezrell and Laura Bolaños started their career as a scriptwriter in the romantic series called *Rutas de Emoción* ('Routes of emotion') published in the 1940s (Aurrecochea and Bartra, 1994: 358). In these first publications the authors consolidated an individual style that would lead them to be fundamental figures of Mexican comic in later decades. Vargas Dulché achieved great success with *Lágrimas, Risas y Amor* ('Tears, Laughter and Love'), while Elia D'Ezrell and Laura Bolaños did the same in *El Libro Semanal* ('The Weekly Book'). Although they were the writers and authors of the stories, it is necessary to say that they did not draw. Therefore, the representation of women in their comics was authored by the men who illustrated their stories

It is also necessary to mention that these women were not the first creators. In the genre of the cartoon, the existence of Ema Best (1895) has been documented. Only one self-portrait of her survives and there is no more biographical data. Another of the pioneers was the painter Carmen Mondragón, known as Nahui Olin (1893-1978) who exhibited four cartoons at the Academy of San Carlos in 1921 (MacMasters, 2000). In addition, there were possibly more creators but their names remain anonymous⁹. As the researcher Mariela Acevedo argues 'the situation of women and their crossing with comics can be seen -in a first approximation- as absent, while they are creative and captive in fables that narrate them' (2012: 2). It is in the 1940s where women achieved some visibility in the world of comics and later they will position themselves as commercially successful authors.

In the 'Golden Age' female figures also appeared as protagonists of a series. In *Adelita y las Guerrillas* ('Adelita and the Guerrillas'), created by José G. Cruz in 1939, the protagonist is a young woman named Adela Negrete who seeks to avenge her brother's death and therefore joins the Revolution. She is financially independent, responsible and educated heroine who wears fitted dresses, an aspect of fashion that defied the moral standards of the time. On the other hand, there is Borola Tacuche, from the series *La Familia Burrón* ('The Burrón Family'), published in 1949 by Gabriel Vargas, a character who is considered 'protofeminist' by the researcher Armando Bartra (2013). Borola refuses to accept the status of 'devoted Mexican mother'; she rebels against prescribed social status and advises women in their neighbourhood to avoid being hit by their husbands.

After the 1960s, the female figure appeared on the covers of magazines like *Águila Solitaria* ('Lonely Eagle'), *Chanoc*, *Kalimán*, or *El Santo*. Here women are drawn with a perfect figure: small waist, blonde and long hair, appearing in bikinis or tiny clothes, and accompanying popular heroes. On the side, there was the so-called 'female' comic, in which the woman was the protagonist of sentimental series such as *Lágrimas, Risas y Amor*, *El Libro Semanal* or *Espejo de la Vida* ('Life Mirror') where these figures appear as childish and dreamers, who await the arrival of the perfect man in their lives, or suffer because of problems in their marriage.

At the end of the 1970s, the magazine *El Libro Vaquero* ('The cowboy book') was published. This comic concerns histories set in an old Mexicanised west where the protagonists are Indians and cowboys. This comic is characterised by showing voluptuous women in the drawings, in scant clothing without being totally nude. This is the same case of the magazines so-called *Sensacionales* ('Sensational') —that were very popular in the 1980s and 1990s— although these, in addition to showing half-naked women, already show sexual situations. But, seeing the success of these publications, other comics appeared that went to the field of pornography, for example, *El Sofá del Placer* ('The Sofa of Pleasure'), *Cama Caliente* ('Hot Bed'), *Colegialas Ardientes* ('Burning Schoolgirls'), *Mercados y Marchantas* ('Markets and Sellers') and *Fantasías Eróticas* ('Erotic Fantasies'). The researcher Ricardo Viguera (2012) points out that these publications followed the aesthetics that triumphed in the 1970s and that *pornofumetti* reflected with authors such as Leone Frollo. The author emphasises that, despite what we might think, 'there is no kind of denigration in women or in the sexual practices that are shown, and in addition, some of these magazines always insist on an idea: women must not be violated' (Viguera, 2012: n.p.). Despite this, it is clear that there is a graphic objectification of women.

As we see in this brief review, the women drawn always have been present in the paper stories. The Argentinian cartoonist Ana Von Reuber (n.d.) said that the spike heels of Barbarella and the waist of the Wonder Woman printed on paper what men wanted to see in women of each era, without neglecting the attentive eye of the readers who searched the strips for the latest fashion craze.

In the field of art in México, during the 1970s, some women artists had begun to address issues such as the place of women in society, beauty stereotypes, non-normative bodies and the classification formulated based on

⁹ There are very few books that talk about female authors as we will expose below. In the book *La caricatura en México* (1954), by Rafael Carrasco Puente, he mentions the work of Ema Best; later in *Un siglo de caricatura en México* (1984), by Eduardo del Río 'Rius', he incorporates other women authors as Palmira Garza. Subsequently, Agustín Sánchez González makes a review of the women authors of comic and cartoon *Diccionario biográfico ilustrado de la caricatura mexicana* (1997) and *Las moneras llegaron ya* (2003).

patriarchal canons which historically has been given to art made by women (Giunta, 2018: 114). The researcher Felipe Gómez said that while international feminist comics were born in the 1970s, which were derived from underground comics, it was not until the early 1990s that the feminist comic manages to appear in Mexico (2018: 7). He considers that the diversity and appropriation of themes is an aspect that differentiates the 'feminine' comic of the Mexican Golden Age, from the feminist comic:

This feminist comic comes from the tradition of the humorous strip and focuses on reflecting, criticizing and subverting the values of patriarchal society to denounce gender as a cultural and social construction. This comic proposes to involve other physical models of humanized and not necessarily sexualized, idealized or deformed women, of various ages and conditions. (Gómez Gutiérrez, 2018: 7)

In this movement of new authors of comics, artist Cecilia Pego gained popularity with the comic *Terrora y Taboo*. Additionally, she published her political cartoons and comics in several newspapers and magazines. Currently, she has left the cartoon to devote herself full time to painting. On the other hand, the artist Cintia Bolio remains active as a creator. It is necessary to point out that these women considered themselves as feminists unlike Yolanda Vargas Dulché, Elia D'Ezrell and Laura Bolaños, who were also important authors of the past decades.

CINTIA BOLIO: A FEMINIST ARTIST

Cintia Bolio has not been the only comic author woman in Mexico, but she is the artist who has sustained a line of feminist content throughout her career. Through her political caricature and comics, the artist has sought to denounce the oppression that women experience within the patriarchal system. As she explained:

I started in 1996 in the magazine *El Chamuco*, in politics cartoons, but I became interested in women's issues. I was in a male-dominated guild. In addition, we, the women, educate us to be submissive, obedient and fulfilled. (Blancas, 2016: n.p.)

This artist was born in Mexico City in 1969 and has 23 years of comic art experience. Bolio is the author of the series such as *Huesos* (Bones) since 2008, *Puras Evas* ('Only Evas') since 2011, and *Album de Familia*, ('Family Album') since 2012. Her work has appeared in newspapers such as *La Jornada* and *Milenio* and she has published anthologies such as *La Irreverente Sonrisa* ('The Irreverent Smile'), in addition to exhibiting in different countries. She is also the representative for Latin America the founder of the international movement *Cartooning for Peace- Dessins pour la Paix* convened by the United Nations (UN). In 2017, she won the International Prize for Human Rights and Journalism 'Tlaltecuhli', awarded by ComuARTE. In Mexico, the National Autonomous University of Mexico has invited her to give workshops in faculties, preparatory schools and different institutions, where the prevention of gender violence is addressed through comics.

A TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION

Before talking about this exhibition, it is necessary to talk about the place. The Museum of Women opened near the centre of Mexico City on March 8, 2011, in the context of International Women's Day. According to its founder, Patricia Galeana, the aim of the museum is the dissemination of a new culture of equity and respect for the Human Rights of Women. She has said in several interviews that the cartoon is a magnificent means of communication with the general public (Montes Vázquez, 2019).

It is important to note that almost since its foundation, the museum has relied on the work of Cintia Bolio to provide information to the public on women's rights and the elimination of violence. In collaboration with the artist, the Museum invited Cintia to give a cartoon workshop at the Santa Martha Acatitla prison. In this way, 14 prisoners told their life story. Other examples of this work are the two special comics made in collaboration with the Museum of Women and the Federation of Mexican Women (FEMU): in 2014 it published *Puras Evas: Cómo ser dueña de tu cuerpo sin ser criminalizada en el intento* ('Only Evas: How to own your body without being criminalised in the attempt') and in 2015, *Puras Evas: Los 10 machamientos. Cultura patriarcal y obstrucción del acceso de las mujeres a la justicia* ('Only Evas: The 10 counterclaims. Patriarchal culture and obstruction of women's access to justice'). In addition, in the museum, Bolio has presented different thematic and individual exhibitions, among them *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas*, which I will discuss.

The pieces that open the exhibition *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas* are the three portraits of the Mirabal sisters. Cintia Bolio took as a reference the photographs of these women at an early age, which are the most widespread, and which served as a model for the engraving that illustrates the 200 pesos bill of the Dominican Republic.



Figure 2. On the left: Bolio C. (2018) Cartoon portraits of Mirabal sisters and a representation of the Justice [Drawing]. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein. On the right: detail of the 200 pesos bill of Dominican Republic, with Mirabal sisters. Photo credit: The Central Bank of the Dominican Republic.

Above the portraits is a picture of the statue of Justice, also known as The Lady of Justice, which is a blindfolded woman who carries a scale in one hand and a sword in the other. The scale represents equity and, for this reason, it is in equilibrium at the midpoint. The woman, who wears a white robe and has long hair, also has butterfly wings. In this case, the type of wings resembles those of the famous and symbolic monarch butterflies, which migrate from the north of the American continent (Canada and the United States) to the forests of Mexico. Over the time it takes them to make this journey, four generations of monarch butterflies are born and die. It is not a coincidence that the artist chose this species since the trip made by these butterflies makes them a symbol of resistance and perseverance.

THE MIRABAL SISTERS: THE THREE ‘BUTTERFLIES’

Known as ‘Las Mariposas’, Patria (February 27, 1924 – November 25, 1960), Minerva (March 12, 1927 – November 25, 1960) and María Teresa Mirabal (October 15, 1936 – November 25, 1960) were born in the province of Salcedo, Dominican Republic (today the town is called Hermanas Mirabal). These women belonged to a well-to-do family, had studied university careers and had at the time of their death, almost a decade of political activism against the regime of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. A fourth sister, Bélgica Adela ‘Dede’, had a less active role in political activism against the government and managed to save herself from the fate of her sisters.

On November 25, 1960, members of the secret police intercepted the car in which the Mirabal sisters were travelling. The women were beaten and subsequently hanged. At the time of death, they were between 24 and 36 years old:

It is the beauty of the butterfly that attracts a person to touch its wings, something that ultimately harms the insect. It was the bravery that the Mirabal sisters had mixed with their beauty that hastened their deaths. Their resistance towards a government that was repressive to its citizens was something to be admired. [...] By rejecting traditional gender roles and resisting the oppressing authority, the Mirabals proved to be role models women everywhere (Mendoza, 2017: 54).

Since then, the Mirabal sisters have become a global symbol of women’s struggle. For this reason, every November 25 they are remembered on the International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women, which was declared in 1999 by the UN in honour of Patria, Minerva and María Teresa. This date was proposed during the First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (EFLAC), held in 1981 in Bogotá, Colombia.

The story of the Mirabal sisters was also widely known through the novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1995), by the Dominican Julia Álvarez. The researcher Anna Maria Karczewska has described how the novel gives access to Dominican history and memory, creates a voice for victims of terror, and lets them be heard on their own terms (2017: 29). Álvarez’s novel also was adapted for a film, directed by Mariano Barroso (2001) and a play theatre.

If the Mirabal sisters lived, how and why would they fight today? They would probably extend their struggle to combat violence against women. Gender violence presents alarming numbers in Latin America, a region where more than nine women are killed every day by sexist violence. It is the most violent area in the world for them

outside of a context of war, as revealed by the UN in 2018 (Reina, 2018). These figures reveal that there is much to be done, and we must never forget the fight of the ‘butterflies’.

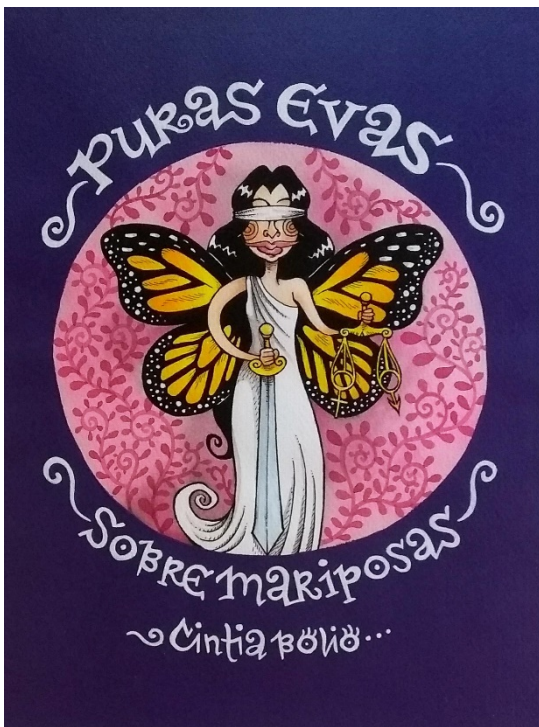


Figure 3. Bolio, C. (2018). *Justicia* [Drawing]. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

In the next part of the article we will analyse the central pieces of the exhibition. Firstly we talk about two comics: *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas* (this comic shares a title with that of the exhibition) and *Rezagos y Rezagos* ('Backwardness and Backwardness'), 2016, and the series that talks about different types of violence. In all the cases we are going to demonstrate how Cintia Bolio managed to explain in a simple, direct way some situations that are conceptually complex (such as femicide, for example). Working with cartoons, Bolio uses a several rhetorical figures (such as metaphor, personification, comparison, and synecdoche, among others). It is not the purpose of this article to describe all the types she used, but to demonstrate how all these resources are used together in order to convey a clear political message. The works will be examined semiotically to identify the forms, themes and concepts in the combination of artistic motifs. In this way, we can see the correlation between form and content, as well as the environment or historical moment that frames them. Due to space constraints, we do not analyse the whole exhibition; instead, we select the images most related to feminist concerns; there remains for future studies further analysis of other illustrations of Cintia Bolio or other women cartoonists in Mexico and Latin America.

The socio-semiotic approach (Verón, 1993) recognises the social dimension of any discourse: it is not possible to understand what is the meaning (the sense) of any discourse if we do not take into account, at the same time, the historical context in which that discourse was produced and received; the historical and contextual dimensions are crucial to understand the meaning of the sign. In *The Art of Describing*, Svetlana Alpers affirmed that art should be understood in relation to a bigger economy of visual representations and uses the widely accepted term of 'visual culture' to underline the cultural elements (1987: 318-319). Reading the images -in this case the vignette- in their context enriches the understanding of the object of study.

We use different methods of analysis: rhetoric, thematic or enunciative. We use referential analysis when we considered that the thematic dimension of the discourse has a special importance in relation to the current context of Mexico. In other cases, we show how the stylistic dimension has meaning by itself, and thus it cannot be considered only as a kind of decoration of the message. Finally, we analyse the different uses of rhetorical figures to explain how Bolio manages to condense a wide variety of information into a single image.

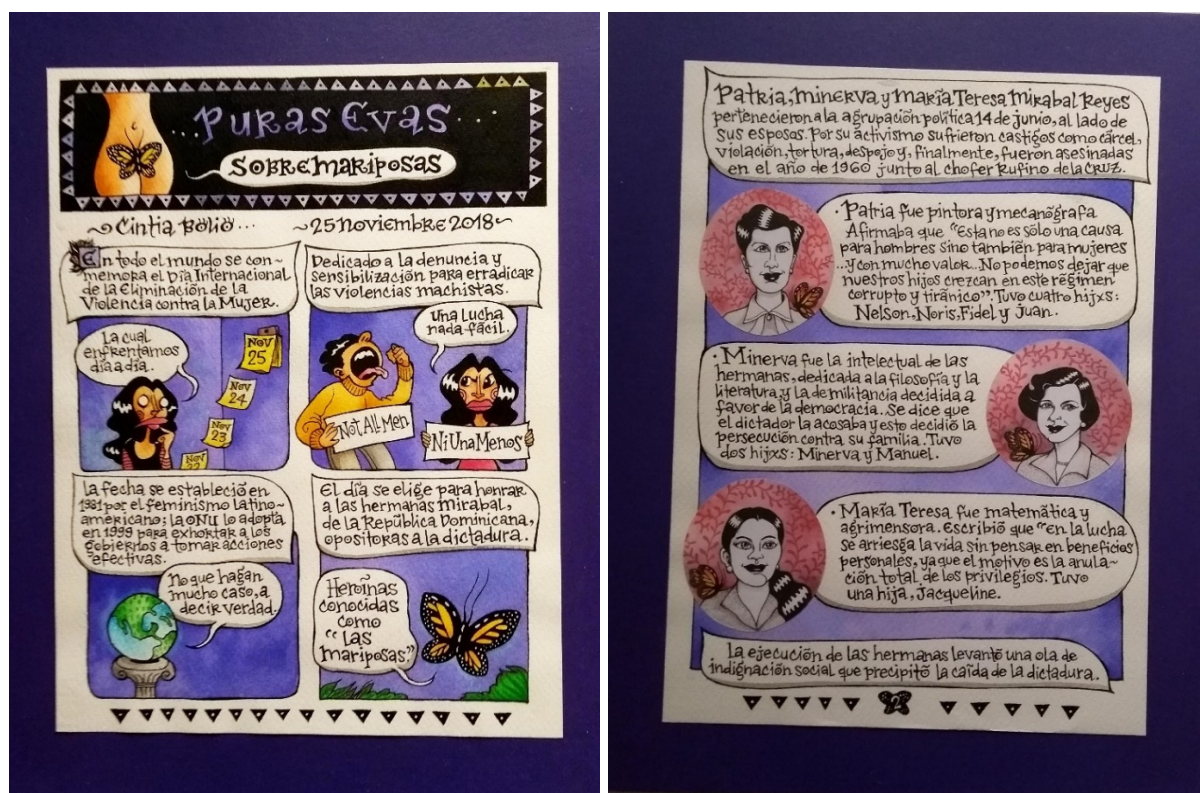
The exhibition, *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas* (shown from November 14, 2018 to March 3, 2019) consisted of 32 artworks; 7 were exhibited in a cabinet and 25 on the wall. Although all the images in the exhibition have a high political content, we selected only 5 works for the corpus of analysis with images that directly address issues such as maternity, abortion, rape and psychological violence that demonstrate awareness of the power structures that exclude women and the recognition of common gender based experiences (Giunta, 2018: 261).

PURAS EVAS: SOBRE MARIPOSAS

The comic strip *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas* gave its name to the exhibition and functions as a link between the historical context of Mirabal sisters and the current situation of women in Latin America. It explains the story of the sisters and argues how the situation apparently has not changed at all. As Jelin (2002) demonstrated, the past is the result of conflicts between actors with different interests. In the case of the strip *Puras Evas: Sobre mariposas*, the past which is represented is the official one: the murderer of Mirabal sisters and the commemoration of that day as the International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women. Nevertheless, there is a second, underlying narrative that critiques the present in relation to that past. It can be understood as an exemplary use of memory, which consists of a model to understand new situations, with new agents (Jelin, 2002: 33). The official past (which recognises the critical situation of women) is linked to the present of women in Latin America, as we shall see.

This comic is composed of four vignettes with a title at the top. The text of the first vignette says that the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is commemorated all around the world; the second one explains that this day is dedicated to report contemporary violence against women; the third one explains that this day was adopted by the feminist movements of Latin America in 1981, and then adopted by United Nations in 1999 with the objective of encouraging governments to take effective action in order to eradicate violence against women; the fourth one remembers that this day was chosen specifically in order to commemorate the murder of the Mirabal sisters by the Dominican Republic dictatorship. Inside the first vignette the female character explains that women suffer daily violence ('we face [violence] each day'). In the second vignette, the woman says that the fight against violence is not easy; at her side, Bolio draws a man shouting and carrying a poster with the slogan 'NotAllMen': it represents a common and regressive reaction of men when the feminist movement reports sexist attitudes or aggression. The third vignette is the most critical: suggesting that the United Nations has adopted the Earth Day, but that it does not really care. Finally, the last vignette is a convergence of the two narratives, as we see next.

The text and the dialogues of the characters (woman, and planet Earth) works like a counterpoint between the historical discourse and the current situation of women. For its part, the fourth vignette is the encounter of these two temporal narratives: the text addresses the importance of Mirabal sisters, and the drawing is of a butterfly which is a symbol of them. The chronology of the narratives function as a flashback: it starts in the present and goes directly to the past, to the origin of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and thus mirrors the present with the past as a way of marking the lack of political progress for women.



(a)

(b)

Figure 4. Bolio, C. (2018). *Puras Evas. Sobre mariposas* [Drawing]. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein

It is important to note the predominance of the violet colour in the strip: violet is the colour that represents feminist movements all around the world, and function as a visual reminder for the reader. Violet is also present in the title *Puras Evas*, the title shows a butterfly located on the genitals of a generic woman. The uses of sexual attributes are common in these types of comics (for example *Clitoris* magazine, edited by Mariela Acevedo in Argentina since 2011), because the sex difference is seen as fundamental to gender binarism (Scott, 1986). The sex attributes function as a synecdoche: the whole person is represented by a part of her (in this case, the genitals). In the comic analysed, the vagina is overcast by a butterfly; this is a metaphor: every woman is a butterfly; therefore, the Mirabal sisters represents all women, no matter their class, age, race or religion. All women are *Evas*.

REZAGOS AND REZAGOS

The second cartoon we have selected, *Rezagos y Rezagos* shows characteristics of women in Latin America which is the unequal situation of rural and urban women, noticeable in countries with Indigenous populations. This inequality is commonly ignored by many of the politicians and decision makers. In this cartoon, Bolio draws two characters: what we can consider an urban or intellectual woman and an Indigenous woman. The first one is an orator. The lectern has the sign of the conference *Beijing+20*, in which the delegates of United Nations gathered to do a review and appraisal of the BPA implementation.¹⁰ The conference took place 20 years after the Beijing Platform for Action and was an important review, at the international level, of the achievements of BPA. In the cartoon, the woman stands at the lectern and proclaims that ‘The XXI Century will honour its name when we can achieve full equality!’ On the other hand, using irony, the woman on the right (dressed as an Indigenous woman) point that ‘For us, getting to the XX Century will be successful’. This Indigenous woman is stereotypical with the exception that she is not represented as a victim, but as someone with agency (Steimberg, 2013). In this case, Bolio chooses to use the stereotype to signal the agentic capacity of Indigenous women.



Figure 5. Bolio, C. (2015) *Rezagos y Rezagos*. [Drawing]. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

¹⁰ The full report can be read in the following link: Ten-year Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held during the forty-ninth session of the CSW, from 28 February to 11 March 2005. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/49sess.htm>

In this cartoon it is possible to find another form of counterpoint. The orator represents the official vision of the United Nations. By her clothes and stance, it is possible to assume that she belongs to the upper classes and has forms of cultural capital; she is also 'higher' in the visual layout of the image. In contrast, the woman at the lower right is dressed like a rural woman, with a traditional skirt, a shawl (with is commonly used to carry their child) and *huaraches* (a kind of Mexican sandals); also, her features are associated with local Indigenous peoples, as well as her skin colour. The situation for women in Latin America is heterogeneous; while some of them are fighting for political rights or have concerns about sexual identity, others have to face problems related to hunger, economical subordination, sexual violence and State violence, among others. Bolio manages to highlight the specific disadvantages that rural and working class Mexican women suffer in comparison with the situation of women from urban and middle-class areas.

TIPOS DE VIOLENCIA MACHISTA

In the series of titled drawings *Tipos de Violencia Machista* ("Types of Macho Violence") that Bolio made specifically for this exhibition, we select four types of violence: 1. violence against reproductive rights; 2. femicide violence; 3. sexual violence; and 4. symbolic violence. These four types of violence were categorised by the General Law for Women to Access a Life without Violence (LGAMVLV);¹¹ therefore, it is possible to assume that the aim of the series is to publish the different ways in which violence is expressed.

The first thing that we notice in this series is the symbolic use of the violet in the frame of the cartoons and as a background (just as in the case of *Puras Evas*). But there is also the use of paper cuttings to represent the legal text of the LGAMVLV. This uses the indexical dimension of the cartoons (Eco, 2016: 268-271; Verón, 1998: 127). The paper cuttings work as a barrier that separates the comic style from the legal text.

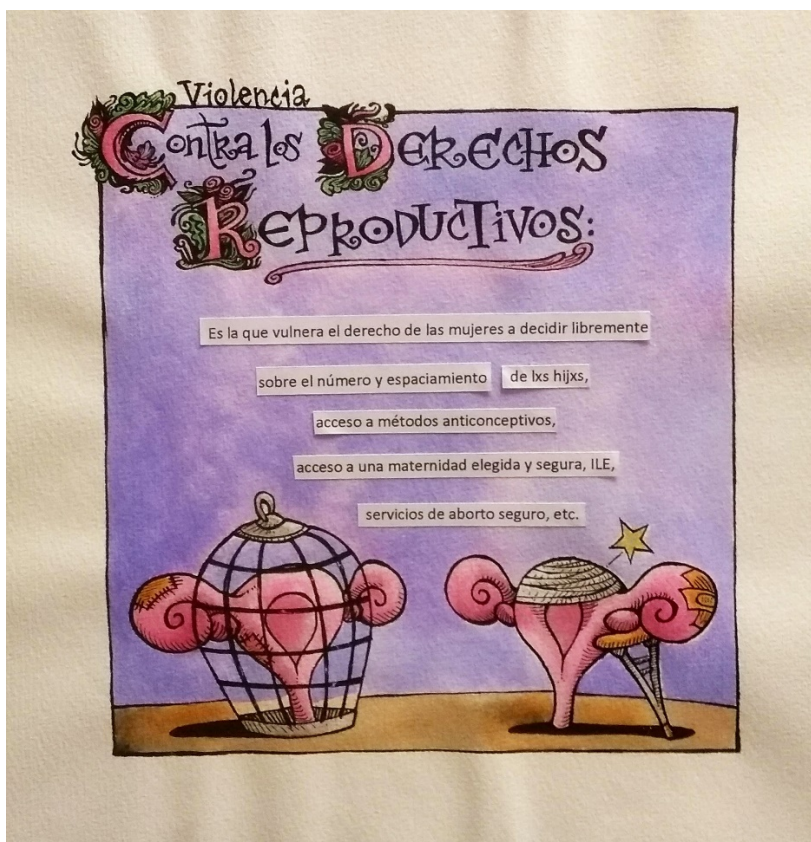


Figure 6. Bolio, C. (2018) *Violencia Contra los Derechos Reproductivos*. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

¹¹ The General Law for Women to Access a Life without Violence (LGAMVLV, by its Spanish initials) was launched in 2007; it established a mechanism to eliminate the violence against women: the Gender Violence against Women Alert (AVGM, by its Spanish initials), which allows the state to implement direct actions and reassign resources.

The work titled *Violencia Contra los Derechos Reproductivos* ('Violence against Reproductive Rights') shows the situation of women in Mexico through the uses of a synecdoche: the ovary represents the woman suffering the situation described by the law. In the text we can read: '[Violence against reproductive rights] violates women's right to decide freely the number of children, their access to contraceptive methods, access to a safety and chosen maternity, legal pregnancy interruption, safety abortion services, etc.'. The pictures represent two different situations: women cannot choose freely about their life (represented by the ovary imprisoned) and those who suffer violence because of their election (represented by the ovary injured).



Figure 7. Bolio, C. (2018) *Violencia Femicida*. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

The second work of the series is *Violencia Femicida* ('Femicide Violence'), which represents one of the cruellest aspects of the Mexican daily life: 'It is a product of human rights violations and can reach homicide and other violent forms of death for women. It is the extreme form of chauvinist violence'. In this drawing, note the absence of colour. This is particularly relevant because Mexico has a very strong visual style in relation to iconic skulls and colourful *catrina* figures.

In this strip, the two skeletons appear humanised. Death says 'my job is very cruel' and appears to feel guilty. Murdering women is not the 'natural job' for Death, but rather of the men who use femicide violence against women. Although Death is commonly represented as the figure who 'takes' life, here it is only as the consequence of men's cruelty to women.

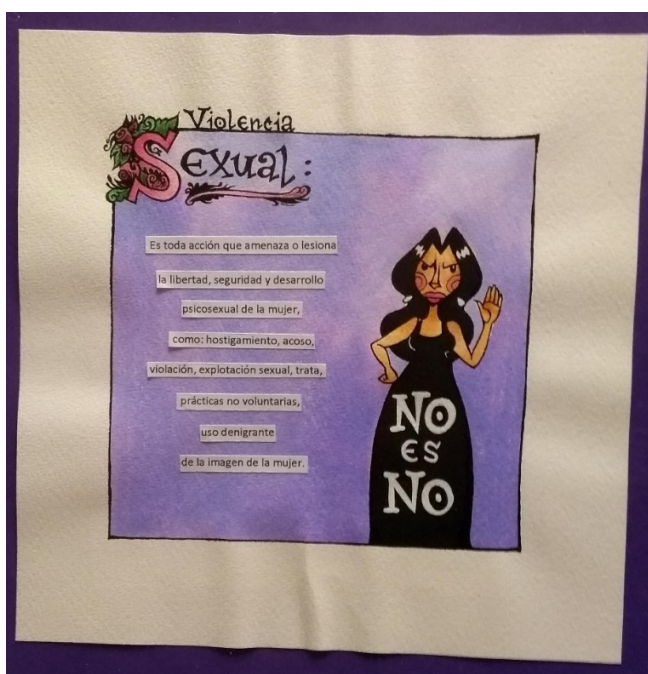


Figure 8. Bolio, C. (2018) *Violencia Sexual*. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

The third work is *Violencia Sexual* (“Sexual violence”) and is, probably, the most explicit of the series. The woman standing at the right, dressing in black, has the slogan ‘*No es no*’ (No means no). She is looking at the spectator and holding her hand high up: this is a simulation of face-to-face visual contact and therefore a challenge to an aggressor. The mimesis of face-to-face visual contact (Verón, 1983) has the property of breaking the narrative diegesis (similar to breaking of the fourth wall, in theatre). Secondly, in this operation it is suggested that the spectator has the role of being the sexual aggressor; therefore, especially in the case of male spectators, it will question directly his attitudes and way of being.

In the text, sexual violence is defined as ‘every action that threatens or damages the freedom, safety and psychosexual development of women, such as: harassment, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, forced activities, degrading of woman’s image’. This is especially important because, as we have seen, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation is kind of generalised violence that most women in Mexico have to face in their daily life.

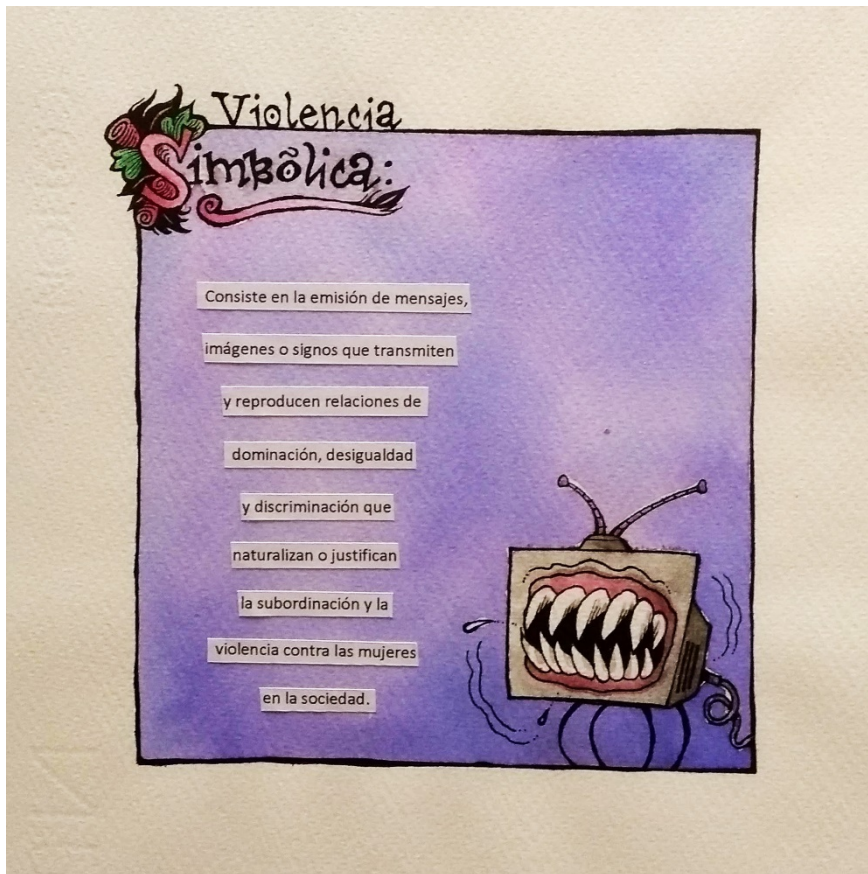


Figure 9. Bolio, C. (2018) *Violencia Simbólica*. Photo credit: Laura Nallely Hernández Nieto and Iván Rubinstein.

The last work of the series that we analyse is *Violencia Simbólica* (“Symbolic Violence”). This kind of representational violence is defined in the text as ‘messages, images or signs that transmit and reproduce relations of domination, inequality, and discrimination, and naturalise or justify the subordination of and violence against women’. The drawing of the television presents a classic figure: a threatening device that represents a menace to women. Its sharp fangs and saliva make it look like a kind of barking beast, even perhaps a *vagina dentata*. This alludes specifically to the Mexican media context in which the television, magazines and radio spread injurious stereotypical images of women, mostly hyper-sexualised.

CONCLUSION

The work of Cintia Bolio is direct and does not use a complex language: she can make complex themes easy to understand to the broader public. In the comic *Puras Evas*, Bolio exposed the link between the past and the present of women in Mexico through the uses of two narratives that set up a temporal dialogue between them: the official discourse and the political position of the enunciator (Cintia Bolio). In *Rezagos y Rezagos*, she uses the stereotype to emphasise the critical situation that rural Indigenous women suffer when compared to urban women. And last, in the series *Tipos de Violencia Machista*, she uses the rhetorical figure of the metaphor and the mimesis of face-to-

face visual contact leads the viewer to understanding the different kinds of chauvinistic violence; each type has an image that represents it in a simple and direct way, so it can be understood by the broader public.

The exhibition makes clear and direct links between the history of Mirabal sisters with the current situation of women in Mexico. Among her cartoons, Bolio seeks to publicise the types of violence that continue to exist and why the struggle of the Mirabal sisters leads us to reflection on gender violence in our daily life. This is especially important for women of Latin America, who suffer daily from extensive instances of gender-based harassment and violence. We can also say that it is the first time in Mexico that a museum has used comics as a main tool to disseminate such information amongst the population. A possible reason is that the Museum of Women is looking to attract a younger audience through exhibitions that have graphic narrative. But what was the impact of the exhibition? And what was the target? These are questions that remain for a future prospective analysis. With this first study we also intend to contribute to the visibility of women within the history of the comic.

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Citation: Hernández Nieto, L. N. and Rubinstein, I. F. (2020). The Power of Butterflies: The Legacy of the Mirabal Sisters in an Exhibition by the Mexican Cartoonist Cintia Bolio. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 4(1), 03. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/7907>

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