

CONCLUSION: PUTTING DATA SCIENCE IN ITS PLACE

As I have described in this book, femicide data activism, advocacy, and journalism is widespread and growing in the Americas and globally. Its practitioners mobilize alternative data epistemologies and approaches to data science that disrupt many of the hegemonic notions of how data science is done and who it is for. Grassroots data activists center care, memory, healing, and justice. They work collectively, in concert with social movements, networks, and coalitions. Their data circulate in diverse ways and produce a variety of social and political impacts, from supporting families to raising consciousness to reforming policy to mobilizing publics. Generalizing from common practices across activist workflows, and in dialogue with activists themselves about how to name and frame this work, I have described this approach as the practice of a *restorative/transformational data science*. This is a data science that aspires to restore life, living, vitality, rights, and dignity to those families and communities and publics from whom those things were taken. And it is a data science that aims for structural change—shifting the balance of power in the world so that such violence and inequality is no longer possible.

As I have been writing and revising this book, I found myself coming back to specific conversations with various members of the Academic-Community Advisory Board for the book. There are two points in particular that have stayed with me from our dialogues.

First, we have discussed the idea of necropolitics multiple times in this book: this is Achille Mbembe's idea of the unequal distribution of death, the conversations around whose deaths matter, and the contested interpretation of what the widespread violent deaths of women mean. And with a title like *Counting Femicide*, it would be easy to think that you have just finished reading a book about death. And yet, during the review process, as I was in dialogue with Geraldina Guerra Garcés from the

Alianza Feminista para el Mapeo de los Femi(ni)cidios en Ecuador, she encouraged me to emphasize that this work is not about counting the dead. Rather, it is about defending life itself. It is about restoring and reclaiming and preserving life, living, and vitality in the face of colonial and patriarchal violence. This resonates with what activists told us over and over again. As Laura Hernández Pérez from Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (CONAMI) remarked, “Our aspiration is to eradicate the violence. It’s not about prevention nor about handling it. Our dream is to eradicate all of the violences.” This work is about defending the right to life in order to realize a generative vision of a new world order: the remarkably nonradical idea that all women can and should live a life free from violence.

How do we then situate the role of counting and data science in this defense of life? How do we critically (but generatively) reflect on the role that information, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning have to play in restoring vitality and transforming the structural conditions of inequality?

In the last few decades, mainstream Western society has developed a shocking degree of faith in the power of technology to solve problems. In the face of neoliberal austerity, technology appears to be a cost-saving fix. Governments are adopting automated systems to allocate social services, to determine who gets a loan, or to judge who should be imprisoned. Corporations are racing to automate whole industries, offer free services so they can sell off consumer data, and develop technologies that exacerbate gendered and racialized violence (e.g., facial recognition). These efforts are having devastating effects on minoritized populations—expanding corporate and government surveillance, concentrating wealth and power, exacerbating inequality, pillaging the planet, and fortifying mass incarceration.

For those of us who practice data science and data communication, it is important to resist the technosolutionist snake oil from Silicon Valley: data and AI are not going to “solve” matters of social inequality. More data doesn’t readily translate to more action or more justice. On the contrary, the demand for more proof—more data collection, more analysis, more research—is often a terribly effective delay tactic employed by mainstream institutions to avoid taking meaningful action on social justice.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial for us to recognize that data science—even feminist data science or restorative/transformational data science—is not a “solution” and it is not saving anyone or anything anytime soon. Rather, it is something much more humble. Restorative/transformational data science is a specific tactic of knowledge generation and consciousness building deployed amid deeply unjust information ecosystems. Just as neither a documentary film nor a new policy nor an advocacy campaign can “solve” structural inequality, it is silly for us to expect that a database or data

system—even a counterdatabase or counterdata system—might do the same. What we might rather hope for (and tangibly organize for) is that a restorative/transformatory data science project might participate in a collective concert of social action toward structural change.

Thus, the second point that I find myself coming back to over and over again is one that Paola Maldonado Tobar, also from the Alianza in Ecuador, articulated. This, too, was echoed by many other activists across countries and contexts. She told us: “We play a minimal role in this process, which is basically a defense, a fight for rights and for a dignified life for women and for the eradication of violence, but this is collective work, networked work, work that it has to continue expanding upwards, downwards, towards all the edges that we can give it.”

Maldonado Tobar is wise. She helps us see the multiplicity of meanings in our efforts. The Alianza’s work producing femicide data in Ecuador is both minimal and centrally important. It is a community defense—a way to refuse violence and work toward its eradication. But she positions their work relationally—within the many collectives and networks that work on the same issue but who may use different methods and serve different communities. All of that work is necessary. And all of the work that each of us does is necessary; individually insufficient, and yet increasingly powerful in aggregate. This is certainly true of the Latin American feminist movements, whose popular strength across the continent is a model for what can be accomplished by collective political action.

Thus, as I come to the end of my writing process, I realize that this has not been a book about counting. And this has also not been a book about death. It has, in fact, been a love letter to the data activists, data journalists, nonprofits, political collectives, and academics that work to defend life in small, networked, relational, transnational, grassroots, informatic ways across the Americas. Their work models an approach to data science that foregrounds life, living, vitality, rights, and dignity, along with an insistence on structural change. *Counting Femicide* has narrated the behind-the-scenes labor of this data activism: the workflow process of resolving, researching, recording, and refusing and using data. We have seen how the Data Against Femicide team undertook participatory technology development to support such a restorative/transformatory approach to data science. And the book concluded with a toolkit designed to draw out and build on lessons from this tremendous labor so that others may undertake restorative/transformatory data science in other domains. My hope, through these contributions, is to enable and inspire more of us to enact a vision and a practice of a *humble* data science that plays a small—yet powerful—part in the larger constellation of efforts to restore and transform the world.

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Counting Femicide

Data Feminism in Action

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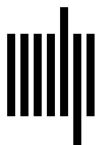
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