¡Ni Una Más! Women Weaving Solidarity Networks Against and Beyond State Violence and Feminicide in Contemporary Mexico (2010-2020)

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¡Ni Una Más! Women Weaving Solidarity Networks Against and Beyond State Violence and Feminicide in Contemporary Mexico (2010-2020)

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath
Department of Social and Policy Sciences
March 2022

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CONVENTIONS

All names of individuals are pseudonyms. Several feminist collective names have not been anonymised. This is only the case where all the activists belonging to the group have given their informed consent or the collective was large enough it did not pose a safety risk.

Direct quotes from activists are written in italics and between single quotation marks followed by their pseudonym, name of their collective, and age of the activist when provided. When substantial, these have been inserted into distinctive text boxes. Where a particular Spanish expression has been used whose original meaning is deemed important, the closest approximate translation is provided in parenthesis. Swearwords have not been censored.

Secondary source citations are written with single quotation marks when in the body of the text, while longer quotes have been separated and indented (not in italics). When quotations are nested (i.e., a quote appears inside another quote), the inside quote is between double quotation marks.

Direct extracts from fieldwork notes are in italics and between single quotation marks. When substantial, these have been inserted into distinctive text boxes. Fieldwork notes are followed by the month and year in brackets as a citation.

All photographs have been taken during fieldwork except when specified otherwise and referenced appropriately. Where relevant, further background information is provided. If the photograph contains Spanish writing, a translation of the message is supplied in a text box by its side. Some pictures have been blurred to preserve anonymity.
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<tr>
<th>ACRONYM</th>
<th>ORIGINAL</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>AVGM</td>
<td>Alerta de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres</td>
<td>Gender Violence Alert Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIDHG</td>
<td>Colectivo de Investigación Interdisciplinar en Derechos Humanos y Género</td>
<td>Collective on Human Rights and Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAIE</td>
<td>Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador</td>
<td>Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAVIM</td>
<td>Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Contra las Mujeres</td>
<td>National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONEVAL</td>
<td>El Consejo Nacional de Evaluacion de la Política de Desarrollo</td>
<td>Social National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEWAV</td>
<td>Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DTOs</td>
<td>Drug Trafficking Organisations</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ENDIREH</td>
<td>Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares</td>
<td>National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESNPSS</td>
<td>Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública</td>
<td>Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EZLN</td>
<td>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación</td>
<td>Nacional Zapatista Army of National Liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</td>
<td>General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLAWLFV/</td>
<td>Ley General de Acceso de Las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia</td>
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<td>LGAMVLV</td>
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</tr>
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<td>INEGI</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía National</td>
<td>Institute of Statistics and Geography</td>
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<td>INJUVE</td>
<td>Instituto de la Juventud</td>
<td>Youth Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>INMUJERES</td>
<td>Instituto de Mujeres</td>
<td>Women’s Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCW</td>
<td>Justice Center for Women</td>
<td>Justice Center for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LFOPPE</td>
<td>Ley Federal de Organizaciones Políticas y Procesos Electorales</td>
<td>Federal Law on Political Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORENA</td>
<td>Movimiento Regeneración Nacional</td>
<td>National Regeneration Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MST</td>
<td>Movimiento dos trabajadores rurales sem terra</td>
<td>Landless Workers’ Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTS</td>
<td>Movimiento de los Trabajadores Socialistas</td>
<td>Socialist Workers Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>The North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHRC</td>
<td>National Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSN</td>
<td>National Shelter Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCGs</td>
<td>Organised Crime Groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Partido Acción Nacional</td>
<td>National Action Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGJ</td>
<td>Procuraduria General De Justicia</td>
<td>Attorney General's Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
<td>Full Name in Spanish</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>Partido de la Revolución Democrática</td>
<td>Party of the Democratic Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Partido Institucional de la Revolución Mexicana</td>
<td>Institutional Revolutionary Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIO</td>
<td>the Peace Research Institute of Oslo</td>
<td>The Peace Research Institute of Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEGOB</td>
<td>Secretaría de Gobernación</td>
<td>The Ministry of Interior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNSP</td>
<td>Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana</td>
<td>Ministry of National Public Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSC</td>
<td>Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana Metropolitana</td>
<td>The Ministry of Citizen Security</td>
</tr>
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<td>Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana</td>
<td>Metropolitan Autonomous University</td>
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<td>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</td>
<td>National Autonomous University of Mexico</td>
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<td>UNITEC</td>
<td>Universidad Tecnológica de México</td>
<td>Technological University of Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCA</td>
<td>Women’s Collective Action</td>
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ABSTRACT

The world is experiencing an unprecedented surge in violence against women (VAW) and feminicide. This tendency occurs amidst a crisis of civilisation fuelled by violent hegemonies under modernity/coloniality. In this thesis, I explore the nature of these forms of violence and focus on women's collective actions (WCA) to investigate how their prefigurative struggles embody a form of feminised resistance that challenges the violent processes of global capital accumulation and rehearse alternative practices in the present. My empirical research is guided by decolonial, feminist epistemologies and theory to examine how the WCA in Mexico City resists, challenges, and builds alternatives. Using an analytical framework that combines the study of autonomous movements (Dinerstein 2015) and struggles as a decolonising process (Tuhawai-Smith 1999), named the “process of creation of alternatives”, I examine how the WCA in Mexico organises Hope. (1) By negating the present through mobilising, using collective memories as resisting, decolonial praxis. (2) By affirming new relationships through collective healing and affective strategies which embrace horizontality and weave solidarity. (3) Navigating contradictions between collectives; within, against, and beyond the state; as well as communities and outsiders to the collectives, implementing collective and community-driven dialogue and action. And finally, (4) in this praxis, transform the present by producing a surplus or excess that cannot be named with the words that oppress us but require that we transcend the “parameters of legibility” demarcated by the state (Dinerstein 2015) and create an alternative understanding of the struggle itself. My aim is to learn from their disruptions to violent hegemonic logic and develop a co-produced understanding of feminised resistance's potential for radical change. I argue that Women’s Collectives in Mexico City are engaging in a solidary and community-driven counter-collective action that disrupts and exceeds global capitalist hegemonies. The conclusion suggests that by engaging with decolonial feminist epistemologies to analyse VAW and the struggle against this violence, we can open an infinite of possibilities to resist and transform the violent structures that reproduce feminicide.

Keywords: decolonial, feminist, VAW, feminicide, Mexico, women’s movements, prefiguration
To my grandmother, who always resisted.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Find freedom in the context you inherit. Every context is different: discover consequences and change from within, that is the challenge.

- Lee Maracle (2010: 13)

1.1. Preface.

I would like to commence my research by presenting the context I inherited and inhabit and how I have pursued freedom in the same. Why have I written this thesis? Why have I researched this subject? What brought me to the research of violence against women (VAW) and femicide goes far beyond my academic pursuit and career. It is my personal experience. It is my fight as an activist. As a Southern Spaniard, I am not unfamiliar with strict gender roles and stereotypes which I was subjected to from a young age. Nor with the pervasiveness and normalisation of domestic violence, sexual violence, and harassment that many of those I cared for suffered. In the hospitals my parents worked at, my home, the streets, my school, college, and eventually work and offices, none of these spaces were free of violence. The multifaceted injustices that crossed me and the ones which I reproduce and can now recognise as such were nuanced, constant, masked by cultural, economic, racial, discursive, subjective violent systems. This is the context I inherited and which I longed to change. And this thesis is part of that struggle.

I can now recognise that these violent hegemonies while manifesting differently in individual contexts, are part of the synthesis of global capitalist modernity. Under the mantra of wealth accumulation and development, extractive global capitalist economies fuel structural violences culminating in the multi-faceted cultural, political, social, environmental crisis that is sweeping the world. This crisis of civilisation powered by the ongoing onslaught of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2003: 144) cuts deeply through the bodies of women globally (Brugger, 2009). The World Health Organisation reports that 1 in 3 women worldwide experiences some type of violence during their lifetime (physical, psychological, sexual, financial, etc.) (WHO, 2018). VAW and femicide statistics continue to soar through the COVID-19 pandemic as this crisis intensifies (Oxfam, 2021). The new wave of women’s movements that have enveloped the world, such as the ¡Ni Una Más! campaign in Mexico, the Aborto Legal Ya protests and campaigns in Argentina, the indigenous women’s March of the Margaritas in Brazil, and the Me Too movement in the US, to mention but a few, challenge the hegemonies that sustain, perpetuate, and naturalise these violences.

Amid this aforementioned crisis of civilisation, Mexican women are at the forefront of the battle. Levels of VAW and femicide have escalated in the last decade. While easy to blame this crisis as a product of corruption, impunity, bad politics, drug trafficking, social or institutional violence (Lagarde, 2006, 2017; Morris, 2013; Rosen and Zepeda Martinez, 2015), I argue these are all product and current indicators of predictable historical materialism of the reality that can and is being reproduced (albeit still largely hidden/masked) in the "developed" west (Valencia, 2010). In the frontier of “the Global North” and “the Global South”, Mexico is experiencing a deepening relational, subjective, social, economic, political, and environmental crisis that is endemic to the modernity/development fallacy. An alternative to savage capitalist modernity which is
fuelling the crisis of the modern subject (Mora Díaz and Carrasquero Delgado, 2017) is needed. While scholars such as Fisher (2009:2) affirm it is now impossible to imagine a coherent alternative to [Capitalism], new anti-capitalist movements proliferated after the 2008 financial crisis such as the Occupy and the Degrowth Movements in the US, UK, Greece, Spain, and Portugal showcasing the unsustainability of capitalism (Della Porta, 2015, 2020; Monticelli, 2018; Zanoni, 2020). While the new wave of women’s movements holds a multiplicity of political ideologies under their wings, I argue that, without presenting themselves as anti-capitalist, Women’s Collective Action1 (WCA) is building and experimenting with alternatives to the present in the present; including alternatives to capitalist modernity through the building of the production of the commons (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016), anti-capitalist (Zanoni, 2020; Wright, 2010), and postcapitalist community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006). These alternative forms of organising are built under the politics of care and affection that has prevailed across women’s movements. Women who experience the hegemonic violences of capitalist modernity through their body-mind-spirit, through their families and communities. It is this “epistemic advantage” granted by their embodied knowledge of these violences2 that urge them to think of alternatives, as this is the only viable option for their survival. WCA rehearses alternative social, relational, subjective, economic, political, environmental, and cultural possibilities in the present. This is not a philosophical, academic-led armchair discussion but an action born out of the flames of violence and pain.

Therefore, the main aim of my research is to explore alternatives to capitalist modernity through the everyday praxis of women in resistance. By examining the case of Mexico, I explore the contextualised nature of these forms of violences and how women who struggle experience them through their bodies-minds-spirits. I focus on WCA to investigate the diverse forms of feminised resistance that challenge the violent processes of global capital accumulation. I aim to understand and learn from their disruptions to violent hegemonic logics and develop a co-produced understanding of feminised resistance's potential for radical change. I argue that, by engaging with decolonial feminist epistemologies to analyse VAW and the struggle against these violences, we can open an infinite number of possibilities to resist and transform the violent structures that reproduce feminicide. These prefigurative actions at the local level need to be recognised to guide us in our context-specific struggle against violent hegemonies as we weave alternative struggles against capitalist modernity.

1.2. Background and Research Problem

In the past two decades, Mexico has been experiencing increasing levels of femicide violence and VAW. Official statistics show femicide rates have doubled from 2015 to 2021 (ESNPSS, 2021). In 2021 alone, there were 3,712 women murdered, 966 of which were legally categorised as feminicides (ibid). This means, in 2021, 10 women were killed every single day. Due to the souring numbers and increasingly graphic physical violence that is inflicted upon the bodies of Mexican women, scholars have long attempted to decipher the causal roots of VAW and femicide in Mexico. This literature, however, has largely focussed on Ciudad Juárez3, Chihuahua (Segato 2016, 2010; Wright, 2011; Fregoso, 2003; Monárez, 2010). While Juárez continues to be the region with the highest

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1 I will be employing Maxine Molyneux’s term ‘Women’s collective action’ (WCA) (Molyneux 2001), which brings together the great diversity of women’s movements. See section 4.1. for greater detail.

2 Following Cabnal (2019), I contend the singular notion of violence as a homogenous, simplistic category. Choosing instead to employ the plural violences to encompass the multiplicity of natures and contexts of the violences experienced through women’s bodies.

3 Ciudad Juárez lies on the Río Grande River, south of El Paso, Texas.
rates of feminicide in Mexico (ESNPSS, 2021), the specificities of the gender, class, ethnicity, etc. dynamics of this border town continue to be translated as causal factors of feminicide in Mexico at large (Romero, 2019). This has resulted in theories that no longer ring true to the realities of those women who live outside of the context of Juárez. For instance, public feminicides are largely linked to violent crimes involving Maquiladora workers and drug trafficking networks (see more in chapter 2). Undoubtedly, there are Maquilas across the Mexican region as well as drug violence. However, in contrast to Ciudad Juárez, the feminicides that manifest in other states such as the State of Mexico are largely private or domestic feminicides (ESNPSS, 2021). In the last few years, several academics have engaged in a re-examination of feminicide in Mexico as well as its conceptual limitations through an engagement with intersectional and decolonial critiques (see Jiménez-Estrada, et al. 2020; Alcocer Perulero, 2020; De Marinis, 2020; Figueroa Romero and De Marinis, 2020; García-del Moral, 2018). For instance, Figueroa Romero and De Marinis (2020) and Romero (2019)’s work highlight how violence against indigenous women is rarely categorised as feminicide as the causal roots are found to be conflicts around the defence of territories as opposed to “purely” gender-driven. I choose to contribute to this novel body of literature by underpinning and offering some critical “solutions” to the current shortcomings of feminicide as an analytical framework.

How women who resist perceive and shape their struggle against this violence also differs greatly (Romero, 2019). However, when engaging with the literature on women who struggle in Mexico, from here on Women’s Collective Action (WCA), historical accounts on the richness of the movements have been washed away, many focussing largely on the history of hegemonic privileged feminisms (Lau, 2020; Torres Falcón, 2019; Revilla Blanco, 2019; Espinosa Damián, 2015; García and Valdivieso, 2006), with brief mentions to the WCA led by women from popular sectors (Serret, 2000; Bartra, 1999; Luna, 1993). This epistemic historical gap has been noted by several academics (Muñoz-Saavedra, 2019; Millán, 2019). In contemporary literature, growing attempts have been made to look at the resistance headed by community feminisms or feminismos comunitarios 4(see Starr, 2017; Wright, 2010; Swanger, 2007; Fregoso 2003, 2006; Pérez García, 2005); indigenous women (see Jiménez-Estrada et al., 2020; Millán, 2019; Kuokkanen 2015; Marcos, 2005; Serret, 2000); and urban grassroots resistances (see Poma and Gravante, 2017). However, this literature is still in its infancy. While some scholars have recently recounted the growing popularity of the feminist movement in Mexico, specifically Mexico City, these are mainly focussed on more privileged and institutional spaces such as the university (Álvarez, 2020; Cerva Cerna 2020a; Torres Falcón, 2019) and cyberactivism (Cerva Cerna, 2020b, Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Laudano and Kratje, 2018), failing to engage with the histories and actions of subaltern women resisting in their communities. Similarly, these scholars have chosen to focus the discussion on political impacts (Matos and Paradis, 2013; Vargas Valente, 2008) and institutional “enemies” of the movement (Cerva Cerna, 2020a), paying little or no attention to the internal contradictions and negotiations within the WCA in Mexico.

While I engage with the case of Mexico City specifically, these problematics are also present in hegemonic Western feminist literature that continually fails to engage with the

4 Throughout this thesis, I employ the term community or comunidad as understood by community feminist epistemologies. When speaking of community, I do evoke standarised up-down development projects that hope to “impact” the community, but comunidad as it is understood in Hispanic cultures. It is not just rural or indigenous communities, but all communities in the urban context as well. Ranging from religious to sports communities. It is a form of social organisation, of living life that superposes individualist, atomising capitalist logics (Paredes, 2010).
ways of resisting of women outside the pre-conceived “feminist collective imaginary” (I explore this further in section 2.3). In Western feminist literature, liberal feminist epistemologies continue to understand VAW and feminicide as abstract, homogenous violence that affects all women equally under oppressive patriarchal societies. While intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989, 1994/2005; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1984, 2000a) and post-structural (Butler, 2006/1990) feminist understandings of VAW break away from this tradition, they continue to place gender and patriarchy at the centre of the discussion, falling once again into universalised, ahistorical illusions of women’s subordination under patriarchy. I argue that these holes in the literature create an onto-epistemological gap that can only be addressed by engaging with decolonial feminist epistemologies and methodologies, which place special attention on the mind-body-spirit and personal/collective/territorial resistances. Decolonial feminism shines light onto those histories that have been historically rendered invisible, understanding the ontology of gender as a colonial, oppressive notion that pays little attention to the context-specific dynamics that women navigate. It is when we overcome the fetishisation of gender and patriarchy and observe it as part of the modernity/coloniality fallacy that we can uncover and reimagine our bodies outside the violent logic of capitalist modernity.

1.3. Defining Concepts: VAW and Feminicide

Some of the terms used in this thesis have multiple meanings in academia and different meanings in the Spanish and English languages. Therefore, it is important to outline the key concepts that will be employed throughout this thesis and clarify my use of them at this stage.

1.3.1. Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Women (VAW) are terms often used interchangeably or in correlation to one another. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, for instance, defines VAW as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’ (UN DEWAV, 1993). The term, therefore, was initially formulated to address violence affecting women and girls and perpetrated by men because of their gender. This includes crimes such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and so-called “honour killings”. While gendered violence is often understood in relation to VAW, its conceptualisation continues to evolve. Some contested redefinitions include understanding GBV as gendered and sexualised violence against any person, male, female, or gender non-conforming, perpetrated by those who seek to assert and reproduce gender roles and hierarchies (Benjamin and Murchison, 2004). In terms of policy implications, however, the redefinition of this term has led to overly simplistic strategies such as simply adding men, boys, and gender non-conforming individuals to current policy aimed at tackling VAW (Baird, 2021; Deshpande, 2019). This is problematic as it does not analyse the particularities of the drivers and dynamics that reproduced violence against men, boys, and gender non-conforming people. Moreover, decolonial and intersectional feminist academics have long argued against the universalisation and homogenisation of women through theories and standardised policies that look to tackle VAW uniquely through a gender perspective (Mack and Na'puti, 2019; Romero, 2019; Mack and Na'puti, 2019; Romero, 2019;)

5 Fetishisation is here understood as mystification.
6 The division of these terms are blurred in the Spanish language as GBV becomes the preferred terminology to refer to VAW.
Ureña, 2019; De Marinis, 2020; Icaza, 2017). These theories and policies fail to acknowledge the intersecting matrices of class, race, sexuality, etc. in historic and context-specific conditions that make women particularly vulnerable to violence.

It is my argument that VAW encompasses violences in the plural including all structural violences that affect women along the axis of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability, but also contextual, territorial, political, historical, and environmental violences. As underpinned by Figueroa Romero and De Marinis (2020: 9), feminicide and VAW ‘must be inscribed in an expanded map of relationships that concatenate and interconnect in various temporalities and scales of affectation’. Adopting a critical outlook to the conceptualisation, I, therefore, take on the terminology of VAW when referring to the multiplicity of violences affecting women and girls in the context of Mexico looking to avoid gender-driven simplifications.

1.3.2. Femicide/Feminicide
Similar to the failure to understand the systemic and intersecting nuances of VAW, I find the original conceptualisation of femicide rather limiting as an analytical framework. The term femicide was first coined in academia by radical feminists Diana Russell and Jill Radford in ‘Femicide: The politics of Women killing’ (1992). Offering a transhistorical recounting of VAW and femicide, Russel and Radford (1992) examine a range of time periods including the witch trials and slavery, as well as look into specific types of femicide such as infanticide and lesbicide, concluding their analysis with the claim that ‘femicide is as old as patriarchy itself” (p. xi). Under the argument that women constitute a “sex class” (García-del Moral, 2018), they explore these diverse forms of violence from widely different contexts and histories under a gender lens. Their analysis leads to dichotomisations of gender binaries (male/female) as well as a moralising discourse that trap women and men in victim/perpetrator narratives. For instance, in part 5 a subtitle reads 'The case of the Yorkshire Ripper: Mad, Bad, Beast or Male?’” (p. 233). The term femicide is ultimately defined as ‘the misogynist killing of women by men’ (Radford, 1992). Russell later revisits this definition and reframes it as ‘the killing of females by males because they are female’ (Russell & Harmes, 2002: 13-14). I argue these conceptualisations which place gender-based motivations at the centre of femicide, fall into an essencialisation of the historical particularities of these distinctive and concrete forms of (multiple) patriarchies under the illusion of a universal, ahistorical patriarchy and reduce these to the category of gendered violence (although claiming an intersectional analysis). In 1998, when Latin American scholar Marcela Lagarde first brought this term into the feminist debate of VAW in Latin America, she made the distinction between femicide and feminicide.

In Spanish, while the literal translation of Radford and Russell’s conceptualisation is “femicidio”, Lagarde argues the term is too close to the word “homicide” and this may cause some scholars to limit the term or redefine it as the “homicide of females”. Instead, Lagarde decided to translate femicide as feminicidio:

‘[Feminicide] is, for the most part, a violence exercised by men against women, but not only by men, by men placed in social, sexual, legal, economic, political, ideological and all kinds of supremacy, over women in conditions of inequality, of subordination, exploitation, or oppression, and particularly of social exclusion’ (Lagarde 2006: 221).
While still placing gender at the centre of its understanding, Lagarde’s distinction of the terms adds complexity and depth acknowledging feminicide as a form of systemic violence, characterised by male domination and legitimised by the de-valourising, hostile, and degrading social perception of women (Lagarde, 1996). It infiltrates both the public and the private spheres and is deeply rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequality (Lagarde 2010; 2006). This way, feminicide not only reflects how women are oppressed by their gender but also synthesises other forms of violence including sexism, classism, racism, etc. In her attempts to explain the systemic and institutional actors which reproduce VAW in Mexico, Lagarde adopts a structural focus on the understanding of feminicide, arguably furthering Russell’s definition. Lagarde (2006) highlights the institutional violence which leads to impunity, arguing that, if there was not rampant impunity in Mexico, the reality of feminicide and VAW would be different. In Mexico, as in much of the world, when examining sexual violence and gender discrimination, impunity becomes another key factor in the reproduction of feminicide. Arguably, however, both feminicide and feminicide situate the origin of this violence from a gender power dynamic. The problematisation of defining VAW and feminicide through a definitive, universal gender lens will be explored in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Throughout this thesis, however, the term feminicide will be used instead of that of femicide. The reasons behind this are twofold. Firstly, using the term feminicide allows an intersectional analytical framework through which to examine VAW and the killing of women in Mexico. As Fregoso and Bejanaro argue (2010: 3), feminicide ‘interrupts essentialist notions of female identity that equate gender and biological sex and looks instead to the gendered nature of practices and behaviors, along with the performance of gender norms’. Therefore, feminicide allow for an examination of the power dynamics and violence that intersect under gender, including sexuality, race, and class structures (the limitations of this are discussed in section 2.3). Secondly, beyond discursive disparities, Latin American feminist scholars have arguably added to its conceptual complexity. By reappropriating and expanding feminicide’s conceptualisation, Latin American scholars break away from the colonial narrative of Latin America ‘as a field of study, rather than a place where theory is produced’ (Mignolo, 2000: 193), as they build together ‘a cartography of feminicide’ (Fregoso and Bejanaro, 2010: 4). Therefore, recognising this growing field of study and the imperative to establish and nurture a dialogue between scholars from the Global North and South, I have chosen in this thesis to contribute and develop the concept of feminicide as a Western woman and student at a Western university.

1.4. Research Aims, Questions, and Objectives
In this thesis, I aim to produce a critical interpretation of the causal roots of VAW and feminicide. By examining the case of Mexico, I go beyond gender-centric explanations and analyse these violence from the life experiences of women who suffer it through their bodies and resist collectively. To do so, I answer the following questions:

1. How do we understand the growing crisis of VAW and feminicide in Mexico?
2. How does decolonial feminism allow us to look beyond gender-centric structuralist explanations of VAW and feminicide?
3. How do women interpret the multiplicities of violences they experience through their bodies from the personal and collective to a systemic reality?

Russel (2012) rejects Lagarde’s redefinition, arguing the climate of impunity and State oppression is context-specific to Mexico and therefore, the concept is not extrapolatable to a global theory.
4. How do Women’s Collective Action resist these violent processes and what are the journeys of struggle towards autonomy they go through in this resistance?

5. Finally, how do affective solidarity networks and pedagogical community-driven strategies engage in the (re)imagining and (re)building of these violent realities?

With these questions, I engage in a research journey that seeks to:

1. Broaden feminist literature on VAW and feminicide through a theoretical and empirical interpretation of the multiplicity of co-constituent factors that reproduce these violences under the matrix of modernity/coloniality.

2. Produce an empirically informed analytical framework to analyse processes of resistance that engage in prefigurative action, and which current social movement theory fails to encompass within traditional research methodologies.

3. Widen current feminist and social movement literature by engaging with the new wave of WCA, their contradictions, epistemologies, and praxes that are reconfiguring violent hegemonic capitalist logics and putting forward concrete alternatives in the present.

Thus, I anticipate three main contributions

1. Theoretical: (i) to the body of literature on decolonial feminist epistemologies and feminist theory by furthering the analysis of the cultural, social, economic, and political factors that reproduce and perpetuate VAW and feminicide; (ii) to social movement studies, by advancing alternative epistemologies for a better understanding of women’s movements prefigurative potential, as well as the literature on the politics of emotions in social movements by engaging with a body-mind-spirit critical analysis of emotion.

2. Empirical: through the case study of Mexico City, I will contribute to (i) feminist literature on VAW and feminicide; (ii) social movement studies, and (iii) decolonial literature.

3. Methodological: (i) by advancing an analytical framework to understand and partially grasp social movements’ prefigurative potential; and (ii) to the literature on decolonial methodologies by offering further practical tools as to how to adapt methods to the co-creation of epistemologies and knowledge through the “art of conversation”.

1.5. Thesis Overview
In Chapter 2, I examine the complexities of analysing VAW and feminicide through hegemonic feminist theorisations that limit our understanding of the same as gender-based and patriarchy-driven. While these theories have been undoubtedly crucial to our understanding of VAW and feminicide, I argue this violence must be examined under the “coloniality of gender” (Lugones, 2007, 2010) which places patriarchy as one of the co-constituent logics that reproduce the modernity/coloniality matrix and, in turn, the violent structures that fuel VAW and feminicide. I face this theoretical quandary, full of complexities by applying this framework to the case of Mexico which has been experiencing a surge of VAW and feminicides for the last decade. Informed by literature on feminicide in Mexico as well as decolonial feminist critiques of this literature, I highlight the overarching structures that continue to reproduce this violence and the need to engage, not only with a macro-analysis of these structures but with how these violences criss-cross the bodies of the women living and resisting in Mexico.
In Chapter 3, I present my research approach to understanding prefigurative feminised resistance. I introduce my analytical framework, which I have named *The Process in the Creation of Alternatives*, and the literature on prefigurative politics and decolonial feminism. This framework will be used throughout the thesis to analyse the empirically-driven research relating to WCA in Mexico City. I follow this with a reflective account of my methodologies wherein I recount the experiences of navigating fieldwork to “find” my research focus, as well as my role and position as a researcher from “the Global North” in the South and what these imply for this thesis’s framing of WCA. I address these constraints around positionality through the employing of participatory action research (PAR) and decolonial, prefigurative (Motta, 2011) epistemologies in my research design, acknowledging that there are epistemologies and praxis I, as an outsider to the movement and a researcher, do not have access to (Tuhawai-Smith, 1999).

In Chapter 4, informed by the previously underlined research design, I problematise the academic framings that encompass WCA as a singular “feminist front”, highlighting the invisible role of women who struggle outside of the retellings of hegemonic historical feminisms. This epistemic gap is crucial to understanding the limitations of the creation of alternatives to hegemonic capitalist logics, as the institutional feminist struggle continues to be translated and mediated to/by these structures. I present a partial history of WCA in Mexico and Mexico City, offering an incomplete map to try and showcase the richness and plurality of feminised resistances.

In the chapters which follow and equipped with the large body of literature on the subject and my empirical research, I present my framework named the “process of creation of alternatives”, which is build through a combination and furthering Duinerstein’s (2015) Art of Organising Hope and Tuhawai-Smith’s (1999) struggles in the decolonising process. I then apply this framework to the analysis of WCA in Mexico City and the plural ways in which they resist, reimagine, and (re)build anticapitalist, antipatriarchal, anticolonial alternatives in the present.

In Chapter 5, I examine the first mode of struggle towards autonomy in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015): negating the violent reality given. I examine these in the form of short-term direct action which has popularised as a form of protest amongst feminist collectives in the centre of the capital. I highlight monuments intervention as sites of struggle which challenge historic “truths”, underscoring their potential as decolonising praxis as women reclaim their place in history as well as on the streets, in their communities, and homes. In this mobilising, negating action, I also emphasise the need to examine protest through emotion as well as through the body-mind-spirit as a collective/territorial struggle to grasp the full personal and community healing potential of direct action.

In chapter 6, I examined the process of creation of “concrete utopias” in the present through personal, psychological, spiritual, social, and relational healing strategies. In their praxis, the WCA challenges the individualistic, materialistic logics of capitalism, opposing the hegemonic structures that reproduce gender, class, race, etc. violences. I examine strategies including the importance of naming, memory, and remembering as means of resisting and disrupting historical hegemonies. Other strategies include feminist, affective therapies for collective, spiritual, and psychological healing; the *mercaditas feministas* as counterhegemonic strategies against capitalist disembodied economies; and finally, the experimental dialogues facilitated by peripheral community-driven feminisms that look to (re)build fragmented communities through horizontal, open dialogues. I argue
that the drive in the construction of these concrete utopias is the reproduction of dignified life over capital.

In chapter 7, I examine the multiple “contradictions” and negotiations that the WCA mediates in its struggle toward autonomy. I highlight the state’s always luring danger of translation through three main strategies: translation by co-optation, translation by erasure, and translation by repression. I then examine some of the ongoing struggles and negotiations between women from the centre/periphery and collectives that are trans-inclusive/extrusive, and how the collectives mediate and dialogue these differences.

Chapter 8 is experimental as I seek to show some glimpses of the transformational “excess” that slips through the weavings of capitalism and that proves untranslatable within the logic of the state. These are feelings of anticipation, anger, Hope, but also material and concrete weavings of resistances outside of the WCA, a politicisation and conscientisation in their situated contexts that (an)other worlds are possible and that these are contained within multiple temporalities, including the now.

Finally, in chapter 9, I conclude by addressing the research questions originally posed at the beginning of this thesis, underscoring my main arguments and implications, as well as some limitations of this research which open several avenues for future research opportunities.
As a grounded argument in my thesis, the world is experiencing an unprecedented surge of Violence Against Women (VAW) and feminicide. In this chapter, using the case of Mexico, I explore the nature of these forms of violence. I do so through a literature review of the feminist interpretations of feminicide but also through the lived experiences of the women I had the opportunity to converse with. By engaging in a thinking-feeling approach to understanding the context of violence they inhabit, their struggle, resistance, and challenge of these logics, I attempt to disrupt, through epistemic disobedience (dos Santos, 2018; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009), our abstract, universal conceptions of the gendered experience. This framework challenges abstract traditional models of theorisation and research by thinking about the concreteness of the historised and subjective realities of those who resist. I engage in an open discussion with myself, the reader, and the activists who took part in the research to question assumptions around the experiences of subaltern women in Mexico City. As such, throughout this chapter, I break away from traditional academic paper structures, analysis, and “findings” and present a dialogue between the perspectives of activists in conjunction with feminist theorisations.

I commence by using statistical data to illustrate the ongoing crisis of VAW and feminicide in Mexico, such data has also been used widely by women’s collectives in Mexico City to showcase the exponential rise of VAW in the last five years. I do, however, expose the limitations of this official data⁹. I follow this with a brief overview of current policy on VAW and feminicide in Mexico to contextualise the politico-legal framework. This is vital to understand the demands of some women’s collectives as well as the government’s resistance to further this. Finally, I engage in a discussion with the feminist literature on the subject, as well as the testimonials and arguments of activists. Through this analysis,

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⁸ Blood of my own, blood of sunrise, blood of a broken moon, blood of silence, of dead rock, of a woman in bed jumping into nothingness. Open to the madness. Poem extracted from Dissident Voices 92017).

⁹ Official data refers to data reported by government bodies including The Social National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System and the Institute of Statistics and Geography; as well as National and regional feminicide observatories.
I produce a multidimensional exploration of the diverse historical sociocultural, political, and economic interdependent key factors in the reproduction of VAW and feminicide in Mexico City and its periphery.

2.1. A Statistic and Legal Analysis of VAW and Feminicide in Mexico: ¡Ni Una Más!

Mexico’s legal framework for VAW and feminicide has been highly influenced by the international laws developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, indicates the explicit need for countries to recapitulate statistics and investigations on VAW to develop preventive and punitive measures effectively. The 1995 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women also condemned all forms of VAW, whether exercised by the State, individuals, the labour market, at home, or in other public spaces. Informed by these two bills, institutional feminists from the 1990s used this international legal framework as precedent for the passing of the General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence (GLAWLFV) in 2007. While this was undoubtedly a fiercely legal battle (García-del Moral, 2019), the homogenisation of policy and mechanisms to tackle VAW and feminicide under a human rights, international development framework led to an invisibilisation of concrete systemic and cultural orders (Mendoza, 2002). As argued by Figueroa and De Marinis (2020:11), ‘wrapped in the international human rights framework, transnational feminism has internationalized Western principles of gender justice that prescribe the modification of patriarchal ideologies of non-Western cultures’.

Mexican women are vulnerable to violence in all spaces, be it the “private” sphere (their homes), or the “public” (work, school, the streets, their communities, etc.). In Mexico, over two-thirds (66.1%) of women aged over 15 reports having experienced at least one incident of violence in their lifetime: 49% have suffered emotional violence; 29% economic or patrimonial violence; 34% have been victims of physical violence and 41.3% of sexual violence (CNDH, 2018a). According to the Women’s Institute (INMUJERES) (2016), 43.9% of women aged over 15 years in a relationship (married, dating or cohabiting) have experienced violence from their partner, with emotional (25.6%) and economic violence such as spending control or blackmail (10%) being most common. In the case of community violence, 38.7% of women have been attacked in the street, market, transport, cinema, church, store, hospital, etc., where the aggressor is a stranger, neighbour, or friend (ibid). According to ENDIREH (2016), 20.2% of all women aged over 15 reports having experienced sexual harassment such as touching, physical attacks.

The origin of the Ni Una Más slogan can be traced back to 1995, coined by an anti-feminicide activist and poet from Ciudad Juárez, Susana Chávez. Her poem ‘ni una muerta mas’ (not one more dead woman) was written as a protest piece and call to fight against the raising feminicide rates in her hometown. In 2011, Susana was murdered at the hands of three underaged teenagers. Her body was found dumped on the street, mutilated. Authorities initial denied the motive behind the murder was related to Susana’s activism, instead claiming that the crime was simply committed by a group of intoxicated teenagers who went out ‘looking for a bit of fun’ which got out of hand. After their arrest, it was discovered that the teenagers belonged to a violent street gang “Los Aztecas” and had gotten in a fight with Susana when she threatened to turn them into the police. In 2013, they were sentenced to 15 years in prison, but were later released in 2016 under the new law on juvenile offenders.
sexual insinuations, or being obligated to watch or perform sexual acts. These statistics demonstrate the pervasive problem of VAW in Mexico.

Figure 1: Percentage of women reporting experiencing violence at some time in their lives (by Mexican State).

While the original bill for the GLWALFV included the proposal for the typification of feminicide, this requisite was removed from the version of the bill that ultimately passed (García-Del Moral and Neumann, 2019). Instead, the law included the concept of “feminicidal violence” as ‘an extreme form of gender-based violence against women product of her human right’s violations either in the public or private spheres, conformed by the aggregate of conducts that lead to misogyny, impunity, social and State tolerance and that can culminate in homicide and other forms of women’s violent death’ (authors’ translation). This gap explains the contrasting definitions of feminicidal violence and the penal type of feminicide in the federal Criminal Code under Article 325. It was not until June 2012, as per the reform to Article 325 of the Federal Criminal Code, that feminicide was typified (García-del Moral and Neumann, 2019). Article 325 establishes that ‘the crime of feminicidio is committed where a person deprives a woman of her life for gender reasons’.

Those “gender reasons” exist when any of the specified circumstances occur, including:

1. If the victim presents signs of sexual violence of any type.
2. If the victim was subjected to shameful or degrading injuries or mutilations, before or after being deprived of life.
3. If there is a history of violence of any type inflicted upon the victim in their family, work, or school by their perpetrator.
4. If there was a romantic, affective or trusting relationship between the perpetrator and the victim.

The Mexican federal penal type of feminicide is one of the few, if not the only one among other similar penal types in Latin America that does not specify that the perpetrator of a feminicide must be a man. A woman was convicted of feminicide, alongside her partner, in the case of the murder of 7-year-old Fátima Aldriguette in February 2020.
5. If there is information that indicates that there were threats linked to the crime, harassment, or injuries inflicted by the perpetrator against the victim.

6. If the victim was held against her will and incommunicado for whatever period of time, before the deprivation of life.

7. If the body of the victim is exposed or displayed in a public place.

Article 325 establishes a forty to sixty years prison sentence and from five hundred to a thousand days fine as penalties. While Article 325 includes provisions to punish public servants that interfere with the administration of justice, there continue to be practical issues that prevent its effective application\(^{11}\). For instance, the code stipulates that the investigation of any violent murder involving a woman must begin with the opening of an investigation folder under the feminicide penal classification. As the ministerial authority advances its investigation, it can be reclassified. However, the reality of investigations is much different, with most female homicides continuing to be categorised as “dolosos” (intentional) homicides from the very start. Which explains why less than a quarter of cases involving the violent murder of a woman are investigated under feminicide protocols between 2015 and 2020 (ESNPSS, 2022. See fig. 3).

As previously stated, female homicide rates in Mexico have been on the rise for the last two decades. In 2007, Mexico’s female homicide rate was 1.9 per 100,000 women (SEGOB, INMUJERES, UN Women, 2017; Lettieri, 2016). This figure doubled in 2016 with a rate of 4.4 per 100,000 women (ibid) (see fig. 3). That year 2,746 women were murdered. In 2020, this number rose to 3,723. That is, in 2020, 10 women were killed every day (Andrade Olvera and Barrios Rodríguez, 2019). According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), only 23% of the 19,408 women murdered in Mexico between 2015 and 2020 were investigated under feminicide protocols (see fig. 3).

Figure 2: Mexico: Evolution of national rates of female deaths under the presumption of homicide (2015-2021).

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\(^{11}\) This original stipulation has more recently been referred as “Ingrid’s Law” as it gained popularity after Ingrid Escamilla’s feminicide in February 2020.
It is crucial to highlight that data collected by authorities in the vast number of investigations as well as when reporting official feminicide statistics through the national or regional feminicide observatories do not include race or ethnicity in their methodology, and often fail to capture the complexities surrounding the murder of women in marginalised and rural spaces (Romero, 2019; Alcocer Perulero, 2020; De Morinis, 2020). For instance, in 2016 only 11 out of the 624 reported feminicide victims were identified as indigenous (NHRC, 2018). This methodological omission results in obscuring the realities of the multiplicities of violence beyond gender that indigenous women navigate (Romero, 2019). There are no formal statistics on feminicides of women of colour and afro descendants (Alcocer Perulero, 2020). Official feminicide statistics also fail to collate feminicides involving trans women, despite Mexico being one of the countries with the highest rates of transfeminicides, with almost 13% of all cases worldwide occurring in Mexico alone (Guerrero and Muñoz, 2018). This failure to capture the diverse realities of VAW and feminicide is symptomatic of a homogenous
understanding of feminicide as gender-driven violence, that renders invisible other
violences imposed through colonial logics (more in section 2.3).

To address the unrelenting rates of feminicide across the country, the GLAWLFV put
forward a primary comprehensive policy: the gender violence alert mechanism (AVGM).
The AVGM is designed to both increase visibility of feminicide and hold politicians and
the government accountable for implementing measures to reduce VAW and feminicide
incidences in the area. This policy allows citizens to report and declare increasing rates
of feminicide in their municipalities which oblige local officials to respond and act, taking
measures designed to end the violence. This is meant to work as a preventive measure as
well as increase awareness about VAW. However, Romero’s (2019) analysis of
feminicide policy, and the AVGM in particular, highlights its failure to truly collaborate
with community and local human rights defenders and instead prioritise official
quantitative data (which reproduce the above-mentioned biases) to declare the alarm.
Most of the measures implemented, if any, when the alert is declared tend to be
superficial, standardised, and of short-term action. The AVGM has thus not proven to
have a significant impact on reducing VAW or feminicide, acting instead as a
“mechanism of simulation” of government efficiency (Varela, 2020).

Some Mexican States like the State of Mexico have declared a red alert in eleven of its
municipalities since 2015. Including peripheral regions that border Mexico City,
informally considered part of its “periphery” e.g., Ecatepec de Morelos, Nezahualcóyotl
or Tlalnepantla de Baz. Yet, the action on the ground promised by the government has
been lacking and the number of feminicides has crept up, with the State of Mexico
carrying the highest feminicide rates nationwide (ESNIPP, 2022; see figure 4). On the
25th of November 2019, and in response to the demands of (a sector of) women’s
collectives, the Government of Mexico City issued the Declaration of Alert for Violence
against Women.

Figure 4. Feminicide numbers by state (January-February 2022)

Data retrieved from Executive Secretariat (2022), Author’s creation
The emphasis on punitive-legal demands from the WCA is highly challenging. As demonstrated, public policies on femicide (and VAW) adopt a reductionist approach to gender on the basis of fixed biology and often fail to grasp the complex and multiple violences that cross women’s bodies. Further to this, while the victim-perpetrator relationship can, in some sense, contribute to giving visibility to those who, due to various factors, are generally "victims" and "perpetrators", it can also contribute to a highly reductive discourse of the “victimiser/predator” – “innocent/victim” which individualises the crime and discounts context. This renders invisible various material and subjective conditions through the construction of homogenising laws and public policies (Flantermesky, 2015). This perspective is dominant in hegemonic feminist discourses and goes beyond the institutional, militant, or radical feminist “surnames”, but instead falls under what Bernstein (2012) calls carceral feminism12. The contradiction of demanding state-led measures to the tackling of VAW and femicide is not lost amongst women’s collectives that oppose the growing popularity of carceral feminisms amongst feminist collectives from the universities and centre of Mexico City. The emancipation of women is seen through these punitive measures and the development policies defined above. ‘Many elements required by the AVGM remain unaddressed, including criminal and judicial steps to improve the investigation of feminicides; provide sufficient attention to the victims; ensure swift processing of perpetrators and the implementation of exemplary punishment’ (Lettieri, 2017). While reproducing a punitive-driven carceral logic, they also aid in the re-imposition of government justice over indigenous contexts and reproduce victimising narratives of indigenous women and women of colour whose agency is taken away. Indigenous cultures are then stigmatised as “patriarchal”, “violent”, and “backward”, delegitimising alternative and community-based forms of local social justice (Figueroa Romero and De Marinis, 2020; Kuokkanen, 2015).

Thus, state policy contains several limitations as well as dangers. In the first place, it offers an oversimplified, ahistorical, contextless conceptualisation of VAW and femicide based on universalised accounts of gender and womanhood. This has direct consequences on the data collected by official channels and observatories which renders invisible the complexities surrounding VAW and femicide. Secondly, policy and punitive focus demand from the WCA result in an imbalance of power tilting it to the state that reaffirms control over the bodies of those who resist, reproducing the same violent logics the WCA is trying to overcome. How can we challenge these violent logics when examining VAW and femicide’s underlying roots? How do we escape binary, biological dysmorphisms and reductionist accounts of women and gender and what does this imply for our construction and understanding of VAW and femicide? Addressing this question and informed by the critical work started by Figueroa Romero and De Marinis (2020), García-del Moral (2016, 2018), and Mack and Na’puti (2019), I argue for the need to engage in a decolonial feminist deconstruction and rebuilding of the conceptualisation of femicide that can address the problematics raised by these authors as well as the ones examined in section 2.3.

2.2. Exploring Decolonial Feminist Epistemologies

Decolonial feminism was first developed by Argentinian scholar Maria Lugones. Inspired by the work of Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmì, Lugones put forward a paradigm which she

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12 Carceral feminism is led by feminist activists who consider VAW and femicide “gender crimes” that must be combated through public policies and legal definitions that increase the control and power of the state. What Bernstein (2010: 55-6) calls the ‘neoliberal sexual violence agenda of feminism’ that moves away from social and female equality through the transformation from a welfare state to a punitive state. Social justice is thus transformed into criminal justice (Bernstein 2010).
denominated the “coloniality of gender” (2010) or the “modern/colonial gender system” (2007). For Lugones (2014), to understand gender discrimination in Latin American societies, gender needs to be examined from the historical dynamics of the coloniality of gender. She adopts a critical intersectional\(^{13}\) approach to analyse the systematic violence that women of colour experience in the contemporary world (Vélez , 2019). Furthering intersectional frameworks, she argues oppressions cannot be segregated into categories but rather all oppressions need to be understood as co-constituents of each other under an overarching logic of modernity/coloniality. The concept of modernity/coloniality matrix (Escobar, 2007) proposed by the decolonial school refers to the semiotic relationship between coloniality and modernity that reproduces violent hegemonic logics including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and heteronormativity. According to scholars from the decolonial school, coloniality is the dark side of modernity (Mendoza, 2016; Ballestrin, 2016). Modernity, they argue, needs to be understood as ‘a rhetoric of salvation to mask coloniality’ (Manning, 2018: 4). Coloniality continues today as the full dependency on the models of being and the models of thinking, making, and interpreting the world devised and imposed by Western, capitalist modernity\(^{14}\). On this basis, Lugones (2010) argues that women (as much as gender and patriarchy) are Western colonial constructs, and racialised women were and still are excluded from it. The logic of coloniality continues to enforce a dichotomous, hierarchical, and heterosexual gender system which was and is alien to many indigenous cultures and pre-colonial civilisations (Lugones 2007).

The consequences of the coloniality of gender, or modern/colonial gender system, are limitless. In feminist theories of VAW and feminicide, gender is no longer the foundational category to understanding sexual domination, but the product of multiple social, economic, and cultural forces ruled by the logic of modernity/coloniality. Lugones’ comprehensive, cross-linking analysis makes apparent the inseparability of certain oppressions. They are co-constitutive under the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). There is no possible separation between these oppressions, one is not secondary to the other. We must, thus, rethink the category of woman and gendered violence in inclusive terms and acknowledge the differences between so-called women along the axes of race, class, sexuality, ability, etc. The State and adjacent institutions must be recognised as colonial actors, complicit in the reproduction of modernity/coloniality and the associated modern/colonial violent logics. ‘The transition from colonization to coloniality in terms of gender centres the complexity of the constitutive relationships of the global capitalist power system’\(^{15}\) (Lugones, 2012 cited in Espinosa Miñoso, 2019: 274, author’s translation). This viewpoint makes visible the structures of social hierarchies that have been historically imposed including racism, gender binaries,

\(^{13}\) Decolonial feminism is grounded on Chicano and black feminists from the 1970s (Crenshaw, 1989, 1994/2005; hooks, 1984, 2000a) and postcolonial feminists but also engages with post structural critical feminists. That is, scholarships that breaks away from dominant epistemologies put forward by white hegemonic feminisms (Espinosa Miñoso, 2014).

\(^{14}\) Quijano (2007) considers the reorganisation of the population in the Americas into racial dualisms an integral process in colonisation. Colonialism created race as means of exploitation and differentiation between the property-owning ruling class of white colonisers and the dispossessed subjugated class of non-white colonised. The freedom of the Europeans was gained at the expense of the oppression of the colonised (Mendoza, 2016). Quijano (2000; 2007) argues that the cultural, religious, economic, and social consequences of modernity, what he calls ‘the coloniality of power’, are still deep-rooted in the lives of Latin-Americans today.

\(^{15}\) In her work, Harding (2017) highlights how in order for colonization to succeed and imposed a global capitalist economy, women’s labour, sexuality and bodies had to be controlled.
patriarchal violence, heteronormativity, class divides, etc., and, as a result, provides a theoretical framework to deconstruct VAW and denaturalise gender.

Beyond a historical or anthropological discussion on whether gender and patriarchy can be considered colonial constructs (see Segato, 2011, 2014; Cumes, 2019; Paredes, 2013), what decolonial feminist authors offer is an interruption of gender’s fetishisation in the study of VAW and feminicide. Contextualising gender under the modernity/coloniality matrix allows for a radical re-evaluation of traditional feminist theory wherein gender and patriarchy are always the starting point, treated as semi-permanent ahistorical structures, that “women” are unable to escape. With their theories, they open the possibility that, in some societies, gender does not exist and, instead, society is ordered and understood beyond the gender paradigm. The coloniality of gender implies some bodies sit outside the colonial category both discursively in the way colonised bodies were treated as non-human, non-gendered but also epistemologically in that, before the imposition of the Western patriarchy, two-spirited, non-sexed bodies existed (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016). Traditional feminist epistemologies ‘fail to capture and understand those bodies who sit at the other side of the colonial difference’ (Icaza, 2019: 38). Thus, theories of feminicide and VAW need to be situated within a geopolitical, geohistorical, geo-epistemic, and body-political context (Icaza, 2019).

Examples of new epistemologies that can help capture the plurality of cultures within individuals are already presented under the decolonial feminist framework by authors such as Coleman (2019) and Chávez & Vázquez (2017). Both, Coleman (2019) and Chávez & Vázquez (2017) engage in epistemological questioning through the conceptualisation of Trans* as a theoretical opening that exceeds the dichotomous Eurocentric category of gender. Trans* becomes a ‘detonator of possibilities rather than a form of reifying a static notion of unchangeable identity or limited to gender alone… trans* is a movement of transgression and transformation beyond the modern/colonial forms of subjectification’ (Chávez & Vázquez, 2017: 41-43). Decolonial feminists call Western feminist scholars to engage in this epistemological questioning, as hegemonic feminisms continue to offer and reproduce analysis of gender from an epistemological privileged positioning that tends towards universalist and essentialist conceptualisations of gender, patriarchy, and womanhood (Espinosa Miñoso, 2019).

By challenging the coloniality/modernity matrix that reproduces gendered practices and hierarchies, Decolonial feminism also challenges Western feminist theories that are under the presumption of a modernising/development mission, and which continue to make demands upon a violent state through the language of power. Here, the white, privileged feminist understanding of rights and social justice are superposed upon the existence and epistemologies of everyone else (Espinosa Miñoso, 2019). This in itself becomes a fallacy, as the same objectives that are sought via this feminist “modern woman” model are reproduced under a system that simultaneously oppresses the racialised, indigenous, working-class female body. As argued by Lozano Lerna (2019: 60, author’s translation)

‘violence against women, specifically feminicides, is a symptom of structural and systemic problems that are not solved if the underlying causes that correspond to the imposition of the hegemonic development model of blood and fire are not addressed, literally’.
As long as mainstream feminist praxis and scholarship are grounded on and guided by their fight against gender oppression under a false premise of “unity of women”, constructed purely through the eyes and epistemologies of a privileged few and under a logic of Western modernity, hegemonic feminism will continue to alienate the working class, racialised, and subaltern women of the world. Western feminisms which influence feminist theory and praxis beyond the West and prevail within feminist discourses in Latin America, continue to dictate what is considered desirable and possible for the emancipation of the modern woman, imposing its epistemologies and ways of viewing the world upon the women who it seeks to “emancipate”, trapping ‘non-Western female beings in a double-bind: either comply with Western – modern, neoliberal, capitalist- understandings of being an emancipated woman or play the role of perpetual victim in need of rescue’ (Giraldo, 2016: 165). This way, it reduces the agency and belittles the traditions and cultures, ways of being, and thinking otherwise which diverge from this imposed construction of desirable womanhood.

In contrast, decolonial feminism calls for a pluriversal understanding of gender constructions, grounded in the subjective experiences of those who embody and position themselves and their territorialities on the other side of the colonial difference. ‘Thinking from the place of vulnerability decenters the dominant thinking from the nowhere of abstraction’ (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016: 70). Decolonial feminist epistemologies challenge abstract Western models of theorisation by thinking about the concreteness of the historical and subjective realities of those who resist. Decolonial feminists call for a coalition movement informed by embodied knowledge and subjective histories in a dialogue that includes the voices of those historically silenced which can pave the way toward change. Throughout the thesis, I engage in an open discussion with myself, the reader, and the activists who took part in the research to question assumptions around the experiences of subaltern women in Mexico City. A context wherein Western feminist logics are booming with the younger generations learning from liberal, radical, and Marxist feminist traditions and which run the risk of (re)imposing modernity/coloniality gender logics in their contexts. By engaging in a thinking-feeling, sentipensante, approach to understanding the context of violence they inhabit, their struggle, resistance, and challenge of these logics, I attempt to disrupt through epistemic disobedience (dos Santos, 2018; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009) our abstract, universal conceptions of “women’s experience”.

### 2.3. A Critique of Feminicide Theorisations through a Decolonial Feminist Lens

Much of the feminist literature that has attempted to explain or understand feminicide violence in Mexico has focused on Ciudad Juárez as its contextual framing (Segato 2016, 2010; Wright, 2011; Fregoso, 2003; Monárrez, 2010; Schmidt Camacho, 2005). Informed by decolonial feminist writers, I am wary of extrapolating these analyses to a cross-national Mexican context onto Mexico City and its periphery. Structural

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16 Much has been written on feminicide, what I refer to here is a theoretical analysis of the concept as well as what are understood as its root causes. Many authors refer to the 2011 Feminicide in Mexico report produced by UN Women, INMUJERES and the LXI Legislation. This report makes use of government collated data to encapsule a nationwide database of some quantifiable factors around the crimes (weapon used, sexual abuse, etc.) without necessarily providing an in-depth or contextual analysis of the same. As per the limitations of this database, there is no hard data on the way feminicide affects women of colour and indigenous women in the report, nor a clarification on whether the municipalities are indigenous territories (Alcocer Perulero, 2020; Romero, 2019).
explanations prove most helpful as a way of framing systemic violences from a macro perspective. However, the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez continue to occur under gender dynamics that are particular and different from those in Estado de Mexico o Chiapas for instance. While under the coloniality/modernity logic, economic, political, racial, sexual power relations were and continue to be deeply gendered, we must also understand that there is no singular view of gender or how it traverses and shapes across different oppressions (Asher, 2017). Scholars such as Fregoso and Monárez have tried breaking away from universalising and homogenous conceptualisations of gender in their analysis of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez by engaging in a geo-historical contextual analysis of the violence. As argued by Fregoso (2003) ‘anti-globalization perspectives provide valuable insight into how Juárez figures as the “local” embodiment of the wave of global neoliberalism (market-based, development) […] and, although there is no doubt that the process of economic globalisation is “out of control”, globalism is a monolithic, top-down analysis that neither captures nor explains the complexity of feminicide’ (Fregoso, 2003: 7-8). On this basis, she engages in an interesting critique of the gender stereotypes and gendered structures in Ciudad Juárez that can be traced back to colonial discourses of northern women wherein Centre/periphery/borderland stigmas prevailed viewing northern border regions as sites of vice and immorality. This stigma was/is reproduced in popular culture in the form of rancheras, corridos, and telenovelas (ibid).

While poststructuralist and historical colonial analyses have the power to break away from essentialist constructions of VAW, they may in turn risk denying the particularity of their experiences and identities. Abstract theories of feminicide continue producing an abstract victim that often englobes victims of feminicide under a homogenous category similar to the passive Third World woman narratives on gender violence, commonly found in development discourses. In these explanations, the indigenous woman, the racialised woman, the working-class woman, and the trans women are grouped in this new category of a passive victims under a patriarchal system with neoliberalism and capitalist violence as its perpetrator. These have led to the stereotypical grouping of feminicides under particularly dominant narratives. For instance, the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez as “Las muertas de Juárez” would denote a memory of racialised, poor maquila workers as a homogenous group. Despite this collective imaginary of the victims, demographic studies such as those conducted by Monárez (2000), showcase that only a few of these feminicides involved a female worker from the Maquila industry in that 15 out of the 162 murdered women between 1993 and 1999 in Juárez were maquiladora workers. Similar narratives can be found when analysing feminicides under the logic of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and narcotrafficking, where popular discourses and police investigations often dismiss the complexity surrounding feminicide by denoting it as a “drug-related” crime (Alcocer Perulero, 2020). Ciudad Juárez itself has become in the political discourse a “stigmatised city” with state governors struggling to distance their towns from comparisons along the lines of VAW and feminicide with the border city (ibid).

As highlighted by Romero (2019: 66)

‘the seminal conceptualisations of feminicide have fuelled feminist struggles against violence in the last twenty years, but imprints are also inherited from it in the social imaginary, such as the typology of victims and epistemological reasonings that

17 Mexican ballad
leave aside realities and dynamics of oppression that escape gender domination’ (author’s translation).

These monolithic portrayals of femicide remove the victims from their context and the specificities of the crime, falling into abstract portrayals of femicide victims as homogenous victims of universal patriarchy or capitalist development (Asher, 2017). These abstract depictions of femicide victims permeate into the collective imaginary of the Mexican public and public policy design, aided by graphic imagery of the victims’ massacred bodies that help to dehumanise them, erasing their experiences and their agency. The victim is lost, invisible, within this power structure that superposes her identity. By failing to acknowledge the differing violent structures that Mexican women navigate and experience through their bodies and which co-exist within the context of Mexican states and regionalities, academic theories on femicide aid in hiding the concrete violences and multiplicity of oppressions indigenous women, working-class women, and trans women experience. Indigenous feminicides are often framed as “murder by culture”, while the femicide of rural women and transfeminicides continue to be overlooked in the literature (Romero, 2019). These misogyny-driven conceptualisation of femicide continues to reproduce a conceptualization of gender as understood by privileged scholars which have clear hierarchical connotations in which racialised, black, trans, indigenous, and working-class women are seen as a subjugated class. As argued by Espinosa Miñoso (2009: 48, author’s translation), while:

‘the feminists of the North have needed the figure of the «third world woman», the feminists (white / mestizo, bourgeois) of the South have needed and have actively worked to build their local Other to be able to integrate into the Creole narratives of production of the Latin American nation-states. Epistemic violence is such that the “third world woman” is doubly trapped by the discursive colonization of Western feminism that builds the monolithic “Other” of Latin America and by the discursive practice of southern feminists, who, establishing a distance with it and, at the same time, maintaining a continuity with the matrix of colonial privilege, constitutes it in the other of the Other’.

In contrast, decolonial feminism places lived experiences, identity, and embodied knowledges at the centre of its analysis offering a framework that reduces precisely this risk of producing an abstract, disembodied, and universalising theory of femicide (Ureña, 2019; Icaza, 2017). Thus, we must analyse VAW and femicide from historical, geographical, and politically situated approaches (De Marinis, 2020). Femicide conceptualisation needs to be furthered by decolonial feminist praxis and theory, wherein knowing, understanding ‘sits in bodies and territories and its local histories’ (Icaza, 2017: 4). We must, therefore, not only look at what the conceptualisation of femicide offers, but also at those oppressions that it is currently hiding through a universalising logic of gender-driven violence (De Marinis, 2020) under a global human rights framework that reproduces coloniality/modernity logics (Mendoza, 2002). We can only do this by engaging with the ways of resisting and embodied knowledges that sit outside the colonial difference (Mignolo, 2002). Resistant subjectivities challenge hegemonic notions of self and society through their pluriversal power (Mack and Na’puti, 2019). The body becomes concrete material evidence of epistemic defiance/disobedience (Romero, 2019). ‘I exist
because I resist’ (*Existo porque resisto*) becomes a chant across the WCA. As argued by Ureña (2019: 1642),

‘Decolonial embodiment offers a global perspective on local injustice that accounts not only for the historical consequences of colonialism and coloniality but also for the very real and embodied suffering of those subjects who bear these wounds. Knowledge derived from the colonial wound has an epistemological value that reaches well beyond the wounded’.

Through the engagement with this embodied knowledge of dissident, radical subjects, we can challenge hegemonic universalised notions of individual subjectivities, as well as (re)imagining and building other ways of relating, doing, living in, and alongside the community. Their individual, contextual struggles must be seen as a real possibility that opens up a multitude of readings of the world and not simply be reduced to a local struggle, doomed to failure or unable to transcend into the global.

2.4. Framing Feminicide in Mexico Beyond Abstractions of Victimhood

‘Many people say that Ingrid is guilty of her own feminicide because she was with an older man, that she was after his money, but what you don’t see is that Ingrid was a 25-year-old woman who had finished her bachelor’s degree, who had a master’s degree, who had a job. The whole burden of blame has fallen on Ingrid... and nobody is saying anything about the neighbours’ actions either, because the neighbours constantly heard screams, they knew that there was violence. There is even a statement by a street vendor in the area who states that the doorman of the building where Ingrid lived received money for notifying the killer if someone entered the apartment or if Ingrid left. And nobody said anything. Ingrid filed a complaint with the public ministry seven months ago and there was no follow-up. So here we can see that feminicide is structural because people know it and don’t say anything. Society knows it and nothing is done. Institutions know it and do nothing.’ (Ruby, Independent feminist about the Ingrid Escamilla Case – Marcha por Ingrid)

In my literature review, as well as one-to-one conversation with activists and academics, there were four main causal socioeconomic factors that they underpinned as drivers of VAW and feminicide in Mexico City and its periphery. This section explores each of these identified areas not as independent but as interrelated and often exacerbated by one another. Similarly, I attempt, albeit imperfectly, to go beyond a structuralist, abstract understanding of these violences by engaging in conversation with the activists about how these structures have impacted their body-mind-spirit, their community, and society at large. These interpretations and analyses of violence both by academics and activists are
crucial for understanding the WCA strategies, as well as their re-imagining of other worlds as the antithesis to the violent contexts they inhabit.

To re-examine feminicide through and beyond the coloniality of gender under a decolonial feminist framework, I make use of the concept of Gore Capitalism term coined by transfeminist decolonial academic Sayak Valencia (2010). Gore Capitalism is described as

The explicit and unjustified bloodshed (as a price to pay by the third world that adheres to follow the logic of capitalism, increasingly demanding), to the very high percentage of viscera and dismemberment, frequently mixed with organised crime, gender, and the predatory use of bodies, all of this through the most explicit violence as a necro-empowerment tool’ (Valencia, 2010:15)\(^\text{18}\).

I examine the four main causal factors of feminicide in Mexico City and its periphery under the overarching logic of Gore Capitalism. These include increasing wealth inequality and unemployment that have torn the social fabric and fuelled an identity crisis of masculinity; state violence as a mechanism of social control; the thriving and expansion of OCGs; and the normalisation of VAW and feminicide in a patriarchal society, looking specifically at the role of the media.

Most academics, as well as activists, read feminicide across a framework of gendered violence, affirming that feminicides are crimes against women because of their gender condition. That is because they are women. In my analysis, I have struggled to escape these readings, as gendered dynamics (masculinist logics, patriarchal states, machismo culture, etc.) are so clearly present in the testimonies of the activists, as well as part of their daily life. As my underlying argument, I contend these are all manifestations of patriarchy under capitalist modernity that reproduces the coloniality of gender. Each of the interrelated factors underlined here to aid this naturalisation of patriarchal gender dynamics from a western modernity standpoint, including, the division of social reproduction/production, capital accumulation, international crime networks, state violence, etc. which, as part of the modernity/coloniality logic, continue to reproduce and reimpose violent hegemonies upon the bodies of the colonised, this time under the fallacy of a modernising mission.


While some activists explain the rise of feminicides as sexist, patriarchal violence rampant in Mexican culture, many reject the cultural trap premise. If feminicide is to be

\(^{18}\) Valencia’s work is informed by postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe’s conceptualisation of necropolitics described as a complementary idea to Foucault’s biopolitics. Mbembe explores the relation of globalisation, industrialisation and death. The mechanisation of killing through the development of ever more dehumanising and efficient war machines. ‘The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides [...] in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die’ (Mbembe, 2003: 11). The conceptualisation exceeds Foucault’s ‘droit de glaive’ (right to kill). Necropolitics is the State’s right to expose anyone, including its own citizens, to death.
understood as a question of machista culture, arguments around the causes that reproduce this violence can be rendered to a false biologistic dysmorphism. Because someone is a woman and born female, she is condemned to suffer gender violence, to be subordinated by men. Similarly, because men are born male, they are condemned to be violent and reproduce that violence.

‘This colonialist stereotype about violence as inherent to traditions of the Global South – also known by the “death by culture” metaphor […] The “death by culture” metaphor promotes the idea that the subordination of women happens in “other” cultures, or that it is intrinsic to societies of the Global South’ (Fregoso, 2012).

The task of avoiding abstract theorisations of feminicide when looking at the root causes of these violences is not a straightforward endeavor. Often, the same activists regressed to academic-led theorisations and abstractions, trying to make sense of the violences that crossed their bodies from a structural and macro viewpoint: patriarchy, state violence, capitalism, precarious working conditions, immigration, or OCGs (Organised Crime Groups). This was largely the case, for instance, when looking at social and criminal violence that many women had experienced in their communities from a young age.

Activists explained the increase of feminicide and social violence in Mexico City and the peripheries by contextualising it at the global political economy scale, acknowledging that with the rise of neoliberal economic policies in Mexico, with international agreements such as NAFTA, the economic and social inequality breach widened, creating the super-rich and rendering almost 42% of the population under the poverty line (CONEVAL, 2020). In my work with the activists, it became clear that the specificities of the contextual, geographic, and social dynamics around feminicide were mostly highlighted by women from the periphery of the city and State of Mexico. From their perspective and informed by their embodied knowledge of these violences, they emphasised the precarious working conditions, heightened social and community violence and poverty that women from the periphery (often working-class, racialised, and migrant women) faced, which were vastly different from those from the city. They argue the devastating economic effects of the recurrent economic crisis have impacted social bonds within communities. Community members struggle to make ends meet, which have only worsened with time. Simultaneously, the social pressures to provide and consume

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19 While this was true in their way of understanding this violence from a systemic viewpoint. This did not necessarily translate so in their strategies and resistance. While this was the case in their explanations of feminicide, their praxis and ontologies digressed and often fell back into dichotomies of female victim and male perpetrator which supported their gender separatism strategies. This argument is further discussed in section 7.2. when looking at separatism and trans-exclusion.
continue to grow under capitalist, materialist culture. This is similar to Valencia’s (2010) *endriada subject*20.

‘I think it has to do with a social decomposition... Nowadays, people’s living conditions are a lot worse, there are no social roots, there is nothing to make us a community or anything that could allow us to create community. Social bonds are breaking, and I believe that is why femicicide rates keep going up’ (Sofia, Independent feminist, Marcha por Ingrid).

An activist from the periphery of the city, specifically the region of Iztapalapa, recounted that during the pandemic she was hired for a community project funded by the local government. She was to enter the most dangerous areas of the neighbourhood (El Hoyo21) and inform women that they were able to access government aid and support if they were suffering from domestic violence during the lockdown. It was a conflicting, contradictory project that left her feeling her work was doing more harm than good, as many women spoke up when they were approached but she was unable to offer any help except for providing a telephone contact number for the local police station. During this project, which only lasted a few months, she recounts seeing situations that, even as a woman from the periphery, continued to shock her:

‘It is funny how you still believe things that make no sense in the lives of those who experience the worst type of violence. I still expected that no harm could come to me in the light of day. And then one day I saw a group of men doing drugs in the middle of the street and I thought to myself “this can’t be happening; it isn’t even dark!”. I still thought monsters were only out in the night’ (Camila – Femipraxis22).

20 Under neoliberal capitalist economies precarious working conditions co-exist with a hyper-consumerist culture. This contradiction gives birth to the social figure of what Valencia (2010) denominates endriada subjects ‘who seek to install themselves, against those who hold them, as valid subjects, with possibilities of belonging and social ascendancy’ (p. 20). Under Gore Capitalism, this social and economic ascension is only possible through necro-empowerment, participating in the industry of death. Becoming part of the narco-machine becomes a logical, rational choice in an environment of growing socioeconomic insecurity and precariousness.

21 El Hoyo (The hole/pit), is an informal name given to the La Joya neighborhood in Iztapalapa, supposedly the most dangerous place in Mexico City.

22 This is not a direct citation but a quote I wrote out of notes and memory after our conversation took place.
The level of community disintegration was vital in their understanding of feminicide and VAW in the periphery. In a patriarchal society where men’s identity is closely tied to the role of the provider and family head, economic insecurity culminates in a crisis of masculine identity (Olivera and Furio, 2006:106). As men continue to be economically exploited and controlled in a context of widespread unemployment and precarity, they exercise violence as a method of control in the context where they have the most dominance: the household. By understanding the issue of poverty and the exclusion of men as contextual factors for the reproduction of VAW, we can understand the phenomenon as being deep-rooted in a crisis of the modern subject (Mora Díaz and Carrasquero Delgado, 2017) which in itself establishes how communities are built and interact. By doing so, it also becomes clear why and how other men in the community tend to support or remain inactive towards this violence: because they are living through these same socioeconomic processes, this loss of identity. They understand the violence, they live it themselves through their bodies.

In the new world order where women are reclaiming the public space, men’s identity crisis finds this newfound female autonomy threatening their established power, control, and social superiority (Incháustegui Romero, 2014). This is also explored by Monárez (2010) in her work on Ciudad Juarez where she underpins the historical background of gender, social and economic dynamics in the city in relation to the Maquila industry. According to Monárez (2010:63),

‘When female workers […] began to be incorporated into the workforce on a large scale in 1965, the maquiladoras were seen as saviours for they took women out of cabarets. At the same time, women who worked were seen as having dubious reputations because they transgressed public spaces. They became breadwinners, they bought cars, and would go out dancing. Capitalist wages and the purchasing power allowed women to transgress the patriarchal system’.

‘As we gain rights, we become more vulnerable. Some men… have an exacerbated hatred against us […] They don’t want to give up their privileges “how am I going to see you as an equal? How can you be a woman and get paid more?” We have always been seen as submissive, subjected people’ (Gabriela, 58 – Las Constituyentes).

In the peripheries, changes in employment patterns were not accompanied by changes in traditional patriarchal ideologies of gendered roles. The traditional model of a sexual division of labour is destroyed but ‘without changing the collective imaginary that women are dependent on men and that their obligations are in the home’ (Olivera and Furio, 2006:109). Conflicts within the household where male dominance is brought into question lead to a crisis of identity on the male subject. Unemployment, extreme poverty, and social de-evaluation combined with this crisis of masculine identity create a social context in which men adopt a gender identity that is heightened, hypermasculine and toxic. As women go from submissive, silenced citizens in the domestic sphere to reaffirming their autonomy and voice in public spaces, men’s authority is questioned. As a result, violence is used as a control and disciplining tool to put women back in their place, subduing them (Incháustegui Romero, 2014). Women from the periphery often have to travel to work to
the centre (for 2 to 3 hours each way), as these are higher salaries and opportunities. The commute makes them susceptible to violence by strangers as they need to use public transportation and return home from work at late hours, making them ever more vulnerable in a context of heightened community and social violence.

There is a moralising social process occurring alongside this devaluation and that is the dichotomisation of the “good” and the “bad” woman (Monárez, 2010). The women who dare to question, who seek economic independence and autonomy become demonised, the “bad woman”, also named the “public woman” (Wright, 2006). The woman that embodies traditional patriarchal values and “submits” is considered the “good woman”. Bad women become fair targets, in need of relearning traditional family values that put them back in their rightful place. They become cautionary tales to the “good” women. Violence is then exercised against them precisely because they are women or because they are not women in “the right way” (Monárez, 2000; 2004).

Some feminist collectives in Mexico City, mainly university-educated young women informed by socialist theory, tie the phenomenon of feminicide to the social and economic degradation that women themselves are experiencing: the devaluation of women under capitalism. In Mexico, women are not only paid less and are under increasingly precarious working conditions with little to no social security, but they are also in charge of the unpaid, unrecognised social reproduction work which is often hidden (Incháustegui Romero, 2014). Women are cheap labour to the capitalist machine (ibid.). This argument is furthered by academic works from Ciudad Juarez as the maquila industry is examined. For instance, Wright argues how the female worker becomes a form of waste in the making for capitalist production (Wright, 2006). The worker exists only to produce, once she is no longer viable to be part of the machine of production, she becomes irrelevant and is substituted by another female employee. This continuous turnover cycle leads to the devaluation of women as workers, these women become what Wright (2006) calls “disposable” women. This degradation of women’s value is not only at the economic or productive level, but also reproduced at the social level (Monárez, 2010).

‘They can kill us strategically [...] this violence is being reproduced to maintain women’s oppression under a capitalist system, under a patriarchal system. A system where women are set to lose in all aspects of life’ (Renata, 33 – Pan y Rosas).

The concrete violence of capitalist economies was never clearer to me than during the 16th of November protest for Ingrid’s feminicide. While protesters walked through the streets towards the building where Ingrid had been murdered, a woman called out ‘testimonial!’ A harrowing, heartrending story was then told by a middle-aged woman. She was on her way back from work and waved down a taxi. She would have normally gotten a bus but wanted to get home early that day. She explained how the man took her somewhere in the middle of nowhere, raped her, and left her for dead, described how the dirt felt on her mouth and how she had fought to remember the license plate on the vehicle. Activists asked the cameras to record the testimony and told her to give out the number. They cried out ‘you are not alone’. As she finished her story, she quickly left the protest with a simple ‘I need to go, I can’t be late for work’.
Under this dual system of patriarchy and capitalism, women’s social value is denigrated, going from deity to cheap labourers, or worse, worthless objects. To back their arguments about this social degradation and devaluing of women, many activists exemplify how, pre-colonisation, in indigenous cultures, women were considered deities, givers of life. Back then, women were seen as equal, in charge of complementary tasks to men’s labour. Women were just as productive and valuable as men. Monogamy was not imposed and there was a community that worked alongside each other and learned together. With the colonial imposition of capitalism and patriarchy, they argue, the social divide by classes commences. There are no longer clans or communities, there is no collective labour or learning. Instead, there are families. There are individuals. The women become increasingly hidden within the domestic scene while the men become public figures. Some families begin to have more than others and violence becomes the tool of power and domination by the male hand that we know today. While perhaps falling into romanticised simplifications and homogenisations of indigenous histories, epistemologies, and cosmologies, this contentious strategy of remembering Other histories and the negation of imposed capitalist modernity realities prove most valuable in its transformational, revolutionary power (see chapter 6).

The de-evaluation of women’s role in society can thus be tied back to the colliding of two complementary colonial powers: capitalism and patriarchy. Under this entrenched system of patriarchy and capitalism, women’s social value is annulled. This can be cruelly represented in the way victims of femicide’s bodies are often disposed of, left on the street, as if they were a mere waste, naked and mutilated, reflecting the low human value these women are treated with. The assassinated woman becomes a thing – they are less than women. The female body becomes a worthless object (Monárez, 2010). The physical female body at the micro level becomes a mirror of society, of the oppressive structure that affects individuals by class, race, gender, sexuality, etc. devaluing the female, racialised, working-class body (ibid.). Here, the hegemonic colonial, heteronormative, masculinist structure of Mexican society is present both at the micro-level in the targeting of women, but also at the societal and state level represented more cruelly by those feminicides that the state considers “worthy” of investigating and prosecuting, and those who fall outside the margins, the murders of indigenous women, rural women, trans women (García-del Moral, 2018). As argued by Monárez (2010: 65), ‘these bodies represent a new form of gender and economic oppression as part of a reconfiguration of a new capitalist, racist, and gendered modernity’.

‘What feminicide reflects is a society that sees their women as useless objects. You can see that in the way we are treated when
In this section, I have examined the interrelated sociocultural, economic, and geographical factors that reproduce community/private violence against women and feminicides in the context of Mexico City and its periphery. Moralising discourses of “good” and “bad” women function to legitimise and reproduce the coloniality of gender in an increasingly violent economic context. The next section examines these same moralising strategies within state discourses.

2.4.2. State Systemic and Discursive Violence

This section examines systemic and discursive violences embodied by the state in the struggle to end VAW and feminicide, which play a key role in the reproduction of patriarchal and misogynistic logics in the social imaginary. As part of the necropolitics of feminicide, the state normalises VAW and feminicide as methods of social control through discursive, direct, and systemic violence strategies. This is a pressing issue highlighted by the activists I spoke to as the Mexican government and, specifically, the president’s rhetoric continuously fails to address the growing crisis of VAW and feminicide. While feminicide rates have been on the rise for over a decade, before the current administration, it has rapidly escalated in number and nature in the past 3 years. The government, however, continues to refute the growing crisis of violence, actively questioning the legitimacy of the studies and statistics collected and produced by government agencies and civic organisations. For instance, there is evidence compiled by the feminist civil society Equis Justicia as well as Amnesty International and the National Shelter Network, that VAW and feminicide rates saw a sharp rise during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of lockdown on the 23rd of March 2020, domestic violence helpline calls grew by 60% (40,910 calls) (see Ventura Alfaro, 2020). The National Shelter Network reported that their 69 shelters were between 80 and 110% of full capacity nationwide. From the 16th of March until the 30th of April, a total of 403 feminicides were reported. When the data collated by Equis Justicia, Amnesty International, and the National Shelter Network was first published, president Andres Manuel López Obrador discredited the alleged rise in calls to crisis centres, arguing ‘90% of these calls were prank calls’ (Animal Político, 2020) with no evidence to support this claim, repeatedly denying the idea that contingency measures had deadly consequences on women’s lives. These assertions by the president are also preceded by comments such as ‘women’s natural inclination to nurture and take care of their family’ or his repeated romanticisation of the traditional Mexican family.

*His presidential discourse is pathetic, from the XVIII century. Women have to go back to their houses to take care of their*
kids, so they are not raising criminals, because if there are drug addicts on the streets it is the women’s fault. You can see that in public campaigns on drug addiction. It looks as if it was our fault!’ (Ana, Human Rights Lawyer and independent feminist).

Not only is VAW and femicide not a priority for the president in his political agenda, but more worryingly, there is a tendency to blame social violence and criminality on women. When the president says, ‘when women don’t educate their children, they are raising child criminals’, not only is he not acknowledging all other socioeconomic processes that foment social violence, but he is also reinforcing gender stereotypes and victim-blaming narratives upon mothers. While the Mexican government operates with a set of explicit rules as per their populist leftist discourse of gender equality and female empowerment, within their political discourse, there is implicit coloniality of gender that foments violent dynamics of class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.

‘What I see is that while we have a first cabinet that is much more equal, we have these contradictory signals ... We have the first female Secretary of the Interior in the history of Mexico, we have important officials such as the civil service, culture, energy who are women. We have a much more equal congress. So, let's say that on issues of parity it seems that it is working but when it comes to conducting politics and how to see the structure, I think there is where the government is failing because it is just focused on this ideological struggle focussed on left and right and I think feminism goes beyond left and right. The reality is that we are seeing a lot of violence and that people are upset and that the girls have found the courage to go out on the streets because they feel greater support to go to tell that they are suffering sexual violence every day. And it is a reality. It is uncomfortable to say it, it is very uncomfortable to say that you have experienced sexual violence since you are very young. But it is real. And when you are doing this, you are creating these bonds of solidarity. That is where it begins to gain more strength and begins to be a true resistance against public policies that are not being generated’ (Lorena, 30 - FMTought).

Aside from the discursive violence perpetrated by the state, there are institutionalised violences that reproduce femicide and VAW: that of impunity and failure to comply and apply the law. As feminist Mexican academics have long argued, the rampant impunity and political disregard shown by the state when addressing issues related to VAW and femicide is one of the biggest contributors and reproducers of this violence (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010; Lagarde, 2006). Criminal impunity in Mexico is not limited to cases involving domestic violence, sexual harassment, rapes, or femicide. The “black figure”, that is, the percentage of crimes that are not reported to authorities is over 75% of all cases (Amparo Casar, 2015; Carbonell, 2010). Ultimately, only 5% of these reported crimes are investigated and from those only 1.6% of cases are prosecuted (ibid.). Essentially, the impunity rate in Mexico is estimated to be between 90-95% of all cases (Romero, 2019; Cortez-Morales, 2017). However, the patriarchal character and discourse that representatives of the state adopt when dealing with VAW cases are specific to these
crimes. Investigations of feminicide continue to be plagued by police negligence and failure to comply with due process.

This was another urgent and material violence that had crossed the bodies of many of the women I had the opportunity to work with. Many had experienced domestic and sexual violence in their homes, schools, and universities. However, few of them had chosen to prosecute. The continuous political, judicial, and police negligence that cloud investigations into these crimes with victim-blaming narratives, as well as careless practices and investigations that disregard the value of the victim and render the investigation unimportant is symptomatic of a violent, patriarchal state (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010; Lagarde, 2006).

‘There are low incentives to open a report. There are low incentives to follow up on that report. If you do follow up on the report, there are low incentives to take the case to court. Finally, if for some lucky coincidence you manage to put your aggressor in jail, the judge tends to let them out’ (Teresa, Independent feminist, Marea Verde gathering).

‘In my community, a woman came to tell the authorities “my husband hit me” and the man says “tough, he is your husband”. I told him to go live with her husband, to see if he could bear it. I was just a girl ... she endured being beaten, mistreated and then... then when she did seek justice that was sadly the mentality of the gentlemen who administer justice: “surely you deserve it”. Has the State failed? Yes, it has failed’ (Senadora Xochilt Gálvez).

The activists I spoke to who had chosen to prosecute had encountered similar obstacles when dealing with authorities. Those that had attempted to open a report faced police officers who dissuaded them from doing this with comments such as: ‘it’ll be a waste of your time, ‘nothing is going to happen, or ‘it is going to go nowhere. The few that did manage to open a case file were revictimized by authorities, police officers, doctors, and the very judges throughout the process. Again, with questions such as ‘what were you wearing?’, ‘Were you drinking?’, ‘Why did you invite him to your house?’, ‘how do you know you were drugged?’, being commonplace. Many of them dropped the case by this stage to not waste any more emotional energy in a process they believed would end nowhere. One activist who did go through the entire process explained to me that she had been assigned a district attorney. ‘He didn’t even request a toxicology’, she explained to me with angry tears. Her aggressor was found not guilty. There is little trust left in the justice system or the government amongst the feminists I spoke to. When the main social demand from the women’s movement is to live a life free of violence, and this demand is continuously ignored and dismissed, the divide between the government and justice institutions with their citizens widens. This failure to provide justice for the victims alongside the direct violence that the WCA has encountered in the last protests does nothing but fuel feelings of distrust and resentment against the government, as the following quote showcases:
During the march [on the 14th of February] they put 300 police officers to take care of the Palace of Fine Arts... that same day, Fatima disappeared. So, on that day, you have 300 police officers protecting a building rather than looking for a little girl... It is a feeling of impotence because that person who is meant to be protecting you is instead the violent one. You are meant to feel like the police are there to help you, instead, all you are left with is a feeling of distrust and insecurity. We know the police are not our friends...’ (Stephanie, 21 - Independent feminists embroidering by the Fine Arts Palace).

The problem surrounding the expectations and demands from a large percentage of the WCA I worked with is discussed in section 7.1. where I examine the contradictions of remaining an autonomous movement within, against, and beyond a violent state.

2.4.3. The necropolitics of Feminicide: Parallel States and VAW

‘I cannot ignore this Mexican context in which I live. When I was in high school, the war on drugs started. I saw many friends being killed at a party. They [the OCGs] would turn up and start shooting, and that was normal. That level of violence was normal. Those spaces were supposed to be isolated from the violent public spaces because we did not take part in drug trafficking. Well... women were not exempt. It became very normal to rape girls and film it. For me, organised crime cannot be treated in isolation [...] I read the war on drugs as a neoliberal strategy that does not deviate from gender violence. There is a key intersection for me that I lived through in my adolescence. The most inhuman violence has increased because the system in which we live is more dehumanising’ (Lucia, 24 – Acoso en la U).

This section explores the interrelation of growing OCG territorial and economic control, the development of neoliberal economies, and the rise of social violence under the logic of Gore Capitalism (Valencia, 2010). Mexico’s political and economic history has been tied to global capital relations and processes of capital accumulation, to which they are subordinated since its colonisation (Thwaites Rey, 2019). Under Gore Capitalism, death is not only used as a tool for sovereignty but also becomes the most profitable business in existence with violence as its commodity (Valencia, 2010). Death becomes part of the commercial trade. The black market, organ trafficking, human trafficking, kidnapping,
disappearances, feminicides become profit-making businesses. Violence is not just a by-product of capitalism, but its new episteme, as under Gore Capitalism ‘violence has a triple role: as a highly effective marketing tool; as an alternative means of survival; and as a self-affirmation mechanism of masculinity’ (Valencia, 2010: 17). Gore Capitalism is the hidden, uncontrolled dark side of global neoliberal economies. Legal and illegal economies become intertwined, with blurred divisive lines (Segato, 2014a). Valencia follows a line of argument similar to other feminist scholars such as Fregoso, who also employs the conceptualisation of necropolitics in her analysis of feminicide in Mexico, or Segato who reflects on the instrumentalisation of violence as a method of communication by OCGs.

When exploring the rise of necropolitics in Mexico, feminist academics (see Fregoso and Bejanaro, 2010; Segato 2016, 2013; Wright, 2011, 2017) have long argued that wealth inequality, driven by a crisis of neoliberal economies has exacerbated territorial control as well as political infiltration by OCGs, establishing a “second” or “parallel” state in the border city of Ciudad Juarez (Segato, 2013, 2016). Global capitalist economies and unrestricted neoliberalism are seen as the key mechanisms that have permitted the reproduction of feminicide in the region. Wealth inequality has allowed few groups absolute territorial control. Segato (2013; 2010) likens these conditions to “regional totalitarianism”23. It is in these zones where necropolitics is installed. In their work in Ciudad Juárez, Wright (2006, 2011) and Fregoso (2006; 2012) highlight how the city’s militarisation under the pretense of the war on drugs has led to an increase in violence in the region, making it one of the most violent cities in the world. The state becomes complicit with these crimes, most visibly through the continuous violation of human rights by police and military personnel with impunity (Fregoso, 2003; Monárrez, 2010).

This idea of a “parallel” or second criminal state or “territorial regimes” was not necessarily voiced as such by the activists. To them, there was no dividing line of state/OCG territorial control into specific geographical areas, but it was something they navigated daily. For instance, while peripheral feminists would distinguish the urban marginal areas as the most deprived and “stateless” zones, activists from the centre would point out the zones wherein they also experienced high levels of violence and vulnerability at the hands of OCGs. An activist I met by the Forest of Chapultepec explained how the surrounding areas of the forest were highly different territories in and of themselves. There were the richer areas, welcoming of tourists and filled with restaurants, and fifteen minutes down the road, there would be an impoverished neighbourhood. The state was still able to access these zones but not for that OCG rule and power was in question. We walked towards her house through the forest as she narrated some historic background about the area along the way as if she was my tourist guide. Once we arrived at the building where she lived, she continued her tour, this time

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23 A strong characteristic of totalitarian regimes is the confinement, the representation of the totalitarian space as a universe without an external side, encapsulated and self-sufficient. A parallel state that administers the resources, rights, and duties of a legitimate government in decadence, established firmly in the region and keeping strong ties with the ‘First State’ of the country. Regions that remain controlled and manipulated by groups who shape the narratives around acceptable social behaviour. Cf. Santos (2007b), neoliberalism has created a segregated social system into two zones: the wild and the civilised. This system of segregation builds a new hegemonic spacetime that crosses all social, economic, political and cultural relations, as well as subjectivities. Civilised zones are limited, wherein only a small percentage of population is allowed to live while the wild zones cover everything else, where violence, illicit businesses, poverty, and unemployment prevail. These conditions of precarity and continuous violence where life becomes cheap renders groups to live under the line of the humanity (Fanon, 1986).
not so much highlighting indigenous history but rather the violent history she currently lived. Pointing at the building she explained ‘last year, they killed a girl two floors up from where I live. It was her husband’, ‘in the building next to mine a girl was killed only months ago by a gang’. There was a dangerous OCG that controlled that area, she explained, who were not to be “messed with”. The tour became a tour of the macabre.

The militarisation of the war on drugs has not only proven inefficient in controlling narco activity, but it has also led to a state of extreme violence, of human rights violations at the hand of military agents against both criminal and common citizens (Fregoso, 2003; Monárrez, 2010). In the war against drugs, the state is willing to sacrifice a few citizens as collateral damage. In a state of exception, there is a modality of killing that does not distinguish between citizen and enemy (Mbembe, 2003). The government creates a “state of exception” where it is above the law. This intensification of violence by both state actors and OCGs has unfolded ‘through a gendering of space, of violence and of subjectivity’ (Wright, 2011: 709). Hiding behind the mask of democracy, a dirty war is being waged by the government which seeks to control disident populations i.e. indigenous struggles, women’s movements, labour movements, etc. through terror. Populations hold a walking dead status, always at risk of being caught in the crossfire, careful not to trespass the social hegemonic boundaries set by both the OCGs and the first state (Mbembe, 2003). The necropolitical order is the result of superimposed forces, a heterogeneous network of violence that looks to hold and exercise sovereignty: the state militia, parliamentary power, private armies, and OCGs.

‘In response to precariousness, racism, and exclusion in many communities, gender traditionalisms, religious fundamentalisms, and the positive valuation of aggressive and authoritarian masculinity are reinforced. Neoliberalism has given rise to the resurgence of traditionalisms that invoke new forms of submission for women and the maintenance of traditional gender roles that include the control – by men – of bodies, resources, and family decisions.[…] In other words, neoliberalism and market ideologies—in their savage version—reinforce the construction of “toxic masculinity” or that which is expressed as power, dominance, and control over women and the consequent dehumanization and lack of empathy towards them’ (Sagot, 2017: 68-9)

While academics such as Mbembe (2003) argue territorial fragmentation becomes necessary for the success of necropower, I believe this process to be fuelled by an ever more present subjective social, relational fragmentation under Gore Capitalism. As my visits to marginal, peripheral areas were infrequent, I did not experience first-hand “the power of the second state” (Segato, 2013, 2016). However, it was clear OCGs presence

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24 This is a recollection of our conversation reconstructed from fieldwork notes after our meeting.

25 State of exception (Agamben, 2005), also known as state of emergency, is understood as the restructuralisation of state power in times of state ‘crises, where citizenship and individual human rights are diminished. With the suspension of rights, under a regime of state of exemption, the objective of biopolitics becomes ‘naked life’, just existing, as opposed to the bios political subject. Agamben (2005) illustrates this concept through the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.

26 Segato’s exploration of the geopolitics of Ciudad Juarez highlights how the second state has its version of sovereignty, providing socio-economic support to populations in a territory as a method of control but simultaneously gaining community loyalty by creating schools, hospitals, infrastructures.
was disruptive to the social fabric as they naturalised graphic and community violence. Under the new rule of OCGs, another social subjectivity is created. Far from resisting or challenging violent hegemonic logics, which look to disrupt the current processes of neoliberal capitalism, OCGs recreate the same hierarchical logic of the first state. It is a profit-seeking, masculinist industry (Sayak, 2010).

The gendered dimension of necropolitics is crucial as ‘misogyny and hyper-sexism are frequented in an authoritarian state that fails to better the living conditions of their victims’ (Fregoso, 2006: 216). The new necropolitical order creates a new subject in its hierarchical human categorisation which it considers “less valuable”, disposable subjects: the poor working-class woman, the indigenous woman, the trans woman, women from the peripheries. In their protests, this is materialised with the ongoing sexual violence of vulnerable women at the hands of the police, with protest slogans such as ‘Me cuidan mis amigas, no la policía’ (My girlfriends take care of me, not the police). Since 2007, with Calderón’s war against drugs, there has been a clear rise in feminicide in the public sphere (Equis Justicia, 2020). Geographical analysis has demonstrated how states with the highest number of OCGs infiltration and territorial control also have the highest number of feminicide gender-based violence, such as Baja California, Sonora, Aguascalientes, Querétaro, Ciudad de México, Estado de México, Jalisco, Chihuahua y Nuevo León (Estévez, 2017). As women are increasingly retaking the streets, going to work, and partaking in social, public activities, they are also more vulnerable and exposed to the social violence that occurs in these contexts.

“If you are in a place where there is an ongoing war and they shoot at a restaurant or wherever you are, of course, you are going to be killed. It is crucial to make visible how [...] violence affects women and men differently, yes, but also how they can be similar’ (Paula, Independent Feminist – 30).

A toxic masculinist narrative justifies the violence as means of sovereignty control and power, while the “feminine” is excluded in the public space, economics, and politics of war. Under this patriarchal order, feminicides play a double role. On the one hand, there is the previously examined notion of the “public” or “bad” woman who challenges the traditional family and seeks economic and personal autonomy. Under these morilising discourse, VAW and feminicides are justified in these instances as cautionary tales to those who break from pre-established gender roles and a sense of community inspired by nationalist, masculinist narratives built under the violent hegemonies of capital and reproduced by both the state and OCGs. By killing women who transgress the patriarchal system, who enter the public space in search of economic autonomy, they are performing ‘a kind of urban cleansing’ (Wright, 2011: 713). This logic has reproduced victimising institutionalising their illegal business. The besieged towns are cut off from the world, with OCGs gaining sovereign control through terror (Segato, 2016).
narratives that justify and normalise feminicides in the community. ‘The unbridled misogynistic practices of military regimes illuminate the intersection of political repression and patriarchal culture as mutually constituting forces. By strengthening male-dominated institutions and intensifying misogynistic ideology terrorist state reinforced violent patriarchy that normalised VAW’ (Fregoso, 2010: 13-14).

On the other hand, feminicides are utilised as a political strategy, used to tear communities apart or, disturbingly, bring them together. ‘The language of feminicide uses the signifying female body to indicate the position of what can be sacrificed for the sake of a greater good, a collective good, such as the constitution of a mafia fraternity’ (Segato, 2013: 34). In this drug war, women’s bodies become battlefields. Rapes and feminicides are used as tools to break communities apart, as women’s bodies become synonymous with territorial domains (Segato, 2013). This is a similar notion to the explanations offered by feminist activists who frame the VAW carried out by OCGs across Mexico as “spoils of war”, as a commodity in a war wedge between the State and the OCGs:

‘Since the Calderón government, the incidence of violence due to his f*** war on drugs began to rise ... because in this country we women are spoils of war, which we have always been [...] We are in a state of emergency, the violence in this country is abysmal. And we (women) function as tools to break all social structures. If you disappear, rape, or murder the women of a community, the whole community feels it. So, these organised crime groups, paramilitary groups, and the state is the first thing they do. You find cases of women sexually assaulted by soldiers, in Guerrero, in Oaxaca, why? Because the soldiers know that this is how they break the structure that the narco is building around them. And you see it, you see it in Michoacán, you see it in Guerrero. And there are more and more. We are in a state of emergency’ (Marta, 32 – Fueguitas Intransigentes).

As highlighted throughout, feminicide is not monolithic. It does not impact all women equally (Sagot, 2013). Under a necropolitical war, women become biopolitically disposable, especially working-class women, indigenous women, racialised women, trans women, those who break away from the traditional family unit and challenge the modernity/coloniality order. A “dirty war” propped up against the disposable bodies of the women on the other side of the colonial difference. Under the modernity/coloniality logic, feminicides are crimes that reaffirmed patriarchal, racial, economic,
heteronormative oppressions and ultimately (although not uniquely) reproduce the coloniality of gender.

2.4.4. Normalisation of violence and the Media

Criminal violence has had a social impact beyond the direct violence exercised by criminal groups, by the normalisation of violence in Mexican society. The evolution of organised crime in relation to drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, etc. has been carried out with a particular modus operandi in which violence becomes increasingly more graphic and explicit. The purpose of this overt violence is to express power and generate terror. However, in modern Mexico, it is no longer only criminals that have learned to use violence as a method of power and control (Segato, 2010). As violence becomes increasingly normalised in media outlets and social media platforms, people perceive this graphic violence as the new normal. The media find it profitable to write articles on feminicide as they circulate widely in the community, with people becoming increasingly exposed to these images. Together with this normalisation of violence, there is a parallel process of failed social conscientisation (Freire, 2000/1970). That is the belief that, by making violence visible, society can become aware of the gravity of the problem. Often, however, the shock factor backfires with images of women being tortured, raped, massacred becoming habitual photos on newspapers and news media, and even more so, on social media.

‘I think that the situation of gender violence is a topic in vogue in Mexico now, but its treatment [the way we talk about it] lacks perspective. We all want to talk about it, but we do not have the tools to do so in the most appropriate way for the victim, for everyone. Then all you do is repeat what is happening because it is a topic that worries you, that impacts you’ (Nicole, 28 - Vulvísima).

These pictures eventually become part of a “spectacle” (Segato, 2020). If we contextualize this social phenomenon together with the knowledge that these crimes are seldom prosecuted, we can understand the widespread perception that these crimes can be carried out with impunity. The knowledge that perpetrators are rarely found or punished, that there are no direct consequences of committing a crime no matter how heinous, except perhaps a small article in a tabloid. People are constantly bombarded with the idea that violence is widespread and uncontrollable. In this context, everything is allowed.

‘Before it was like... “I can rape you and then kill you because nothing is going to happen to me. That way you can’t even report the rape”’ (Andrea, 31 - ACTO).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how hegemonic feminisms and policy-driven conceptualisations of feminicide carry several limitations and contain endless dangers on themselves. I problematise their active role in the reproduction of violent modernity/coloniality logics through the imposition of universal, homogenous policies
aimed to tackle VAW and feminicide from a global/western Human Rights framework. This framework reproduces the figure of the Third World Woman or women from the periphery as “poor, uneducated” subjects, oppressed by their cultures (Mohanty, 1988). As stated by Romero (2019: 83) the social imaginary formed by media accounts, academic abstract theories, and policy drafting reproduces a type of feminicide victim that is the ‘poor, urban women who work (in maquilas), and who in the urban context… are linked to drug-trafficking and sex-service activities in tourist areas’ (author’s translation). Aside from reproducing harmful and paternalistic stereotypes of the Other, these theories of feminicide result in the invisibilisation of all those murders that escape this social imaginary. The murders of trans, indigenous, afro descendent women are often excluded from official statistics and theorisations as do not necessarily fit in the specific legal definition or are not purely “gender-driven”. To avoid these homogenising, ahistorical, conceptualisations of the multiplicity of violences that cross Mexican women’s bodies, we must engage with a critical analysis of feminicide through a feminist decolonial lens.

A decolonial feminist framework allows for gender to be viewed as a colonial logic, constituent to other violent structures under the modernity/coloniality matrix. Thus, gender should not be treated as a mandatory starting point and less so as a unifactorial causal factor in the analysis of feminicide, as it constrains the bodies of feminicide victims to those fixed biological dysmorphisms of womanhood. We must move beyond this category to produce concrete theories of knowledge through the embodied experiences of those subjects who resist. Only this way can we understand the complexities surrounding the multiplicity of violences that women who struggle navigate daily. In the following figure, I have attempted to encompass those violent structures that were acknowledged by the women and activists I worked with within Mexico City, as well as the academic literature on the same. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and far from embodied knowledge, I have made this into a comprehensive structural framework of the constituent of violences that cross women’s bodies under the modernity/coloniality matrix, and that reach far beyond the category of woman or gender. These are all drivers of the rampant VAW and feminicide in Mexico, and therefore, we must understand them in their totality as constitutive oppressions when examining this violence. Gender must be examined as another one of these violent logics.

Figure 5. A modernity/coloniality framing of feminicide in Mexico

Source: Author’s creation
The key consequence, if not a direct cause, I have highlighted throughout the chapter is the tear in the social fabric and community bonds that is broken through each of these violent mechanisms of capitalist modernity. As direct contentious and radical praxis against these violences, WCA emphasises the transformative potential of creating community, weaving networks of solidarities and care. We must thus analyse feminicide and VAW from the historical, geopolitical, territorial specificities of the context inhabited by the victims of this violence. Particularly, we must engage with the ways of resisting and embodied knowledges that sit outside the colonial difference. These are all factors that have been acknowledged and theorised by both feminist activists and academics and which, through mantras, social awareness, and community rebuilding are continuing to resist. Women’s collectives in Mexico City negate state violence, exploitative capitalist economies, misogynistic patriarchal structures, and sexual and racial violence, and rehearse instead alternatives to these hegemonic logics in the present through community building.
CHAPTER 3:  
DECOLONISING RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND FEMINISED RESISTANCE

‘There can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization without a decolonizing practice’
- Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012: 100).

In this chapter, I aim to present my thesis’s overarching approach to understanding women’s resistance against violent hegemonies that reproduce Violence Against Women (VAW) and feminicide and in this struggle how they prefigure alternatives in the present. My approach (in Spanish, abordaje) is informed by a decolonising praxis at all stages of the research journey, including epistemologically and methodologically. That is, it does not only impact the design of my methodology or methods application, but it underscores, guides, and features in every aspect and at every stage of my research, including my analysis of the existing literature. The decolonial approach is not a theory, it is praxis, embodied theory and so cannot be contained or limited to research methods. I commence this chapter by briefly recapitulating my research’s main aim and objectives (see the introduction for full account), and the approach that becomes vital in the accomplishment of these: prefigurative, decolonial feminist epistemologies. I follow this by offering an overview of my research methods, analysis, and reflexivity on ethical research practices and my positionality as a researcher from the Global North conducting research in the Global South.

3.1. Research Aim and Objectives

To bridge previous chapters, throughout my thesis I argue that the new global wave of Women’s Collective Action (WCA) rehearses alternative social, relational, subjective, economic, political, environmental, and cultural possibilities in the present as a response and born out of urgent necessity under a system that continues to threaten women’s safety and survival. In their resistance and struggle in and against the violent processes of global capital accumulation, WCA is building alternative worlds through personal and collective body-mind-spirit healing in order to weave solidarities and create community as revolutionary transformative praxis. To showcase the particularity of the struggles against VAW and feminicide, my thesis studies the case of Mexico. In the last five years, Mexico has experienced both, a surge in VAW and feminicide rates and a counter struggle in the form of a women’s movement that has massified across the nation. In the first section of this thesis, I have produced a critical interpretation of the causal roots of VAW and feminicide in Mexico through a decolonial feminist lens. Exceeding patriarchy-driven, structuralist explanations and gender-centric motivations and analysis of these violences, I contend the need to avoid theoretical abstractions of feminicide that erase context and victim’s individuality. We must instead engage with the concrete life experiences of women who suffer these violences through their bodies and resist collectively.

In the second section of this thesis, I aim to recognise and learn from the diverse combative strategies that oppose violent hegemonic logics, seeking to develop a co-produced understanding of feminised resistance’s potential for radical change. As I have previously argued, it is vital to engage with the concrete actions and experiences led by subaltern women as their embodied knowledges contains an “epistemic privilege” to critically address and build beyond the multiplicity of violent hegemonies perpetrated by
the current colonial/modern matrix. The question I pose here is *How does WCA resist these violent processes and what are their journeys of struggle towards a dignified life?* If I am to explore this question, I must ask myself how do I participate in this journey alongside them and come to understand their prefigurative praxis and successfully illustrate the transformative power their epistemologies and praxis contain? If I am to take part and witness prefigurative change embodied by the WCA, my methodologies and research cannot be a constraint to the objective, limiting parameters of traditional research methodologies. I cannot have already pre-supposed what the shape of their resistance will take. I must, therefore, shape my research through flexible, ever-changing, and always self-critical approaches. My research practice and knowledge production must also be decolonial, prefigurative in nature. In the following section, I introduce the epistemologies that have guided my research as well as the analytical framework I employ to “capture” the transformative power contained in the plural experiences, epistemologies, and actions present in the WCA from Mexico City and its periphery.

### 3.2. Prefigurative, Decolonial Feminist Methodologies: Analysing Women in Action

In my research, I maintain that the contemporary WCA in Mexico must be analysed from the language of autonomy (Cerva Cerna 2020b) and examined from a decolonial, feminist lens. To do so, I use the language of prefiguration as part of my analytical framework (Gordon, 2018; Yates, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Epstein, 1991). Prefigurative politics addresses questions about radical social change beyond the given socio-economic structure. The concept of prefiguration makes it possible to envision a transformed society ‘based on concrete actions rather than abstract principles’ (Cornish et al., 2016: 115). I understand all those actions, emotions, knowledges, epistemologies, and new ways of doing, living, and relating embodied by the WCA in Mexico City as part of the new wave of Hope movements (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012). That is, ‘movements that search for a new way of life, which is more conducive to creating an environment where human beings can live in dignity’ (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012: 589). *Nuestra lucha es por la vida* (our fight is for life) read a number of banners during the women’s marches.

In my analysis, I engage with the body of literature that frames “new” social movements as prefigurative. I place parallels here between Hope movements and Monticelli’s (2018) prefigurative movement which ‘embody their ultimate goals and their vision of a future society through their ongoing social practices, social relations, decision-making philosophy, and culture’ (p. 509). I argue prefigurative praxis is integral to the processes of organising Hope (Dinerstein, 2015), the actions of the WCA are *driven by* Hope and thus I choose to define them as Hope movements as opposed to simply prefigurative.

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27 Social movement literature often identifies the birth of ‘new social movements’ during the late 1980s, early 1990s in Latin-America. The irruption of the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem terra (MST) in Brazil, the CONAIE in Ecuador, los cocaleros in Bolivia and many more dominated the political landscape in Latin America in the 1990s (Stahler-Sholk et al., 2007, 2014). These ‘new’ Latin-American social movements were not class-based but rather community-based (Veltmeyer, 2017), what Escobar (2004) denominates ‘placed-based’ or territorial struggles. That is, communities’ struggle to reclaim access to the ‘commons’ as well as struggle against the environmental impact and endangerment of their livelihoods product of extractive capitalist economies. Their main objective was not the development of policy or some political goal but rather affecting cultural and social structures by challenging and (re)imagining pre-imposed capitalist values and beliefs (Earl, 2004).
Some authors such as Escobar (2004); Motta (2014); and Icaza and Vázquez (2013); have argued that contemporary social movement theory has failed to comprehend the nature and impact of these autonomous mobilisations as they do not capture their transformative political and epistemological potential. While social movement and critical theory scholars have historically framed collective action in relation to their impact on policymaking and law, as well as the seizure of state power and representation as the main ways to incite social change (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015/2006; Meyer, 2003), there is a growing scholarship that centres around the movements’ transformative power outside the realm of the state and institutions. That is, outside of the hegemonic socio-economic and political structure of Western nation-states. Scholars like Holloway (2002); Escobar (1992); and Motta (2009) consider these new social movements evidence a need to reject state-centric mobilisations, and instead engage with everyday resistance strategies outside the logic of the state and its institutions. We can, and should, move beyond ‘the state illusion that understands revolution as the winning of state power and the transformation of society through the state’ (Holloway, 2002: 157), as it is through this struggle that autonomous movements ‘can create “cracks” in the capitalist system’ (Goodwin, 2020: 226). The present hegemonic socioeconomic structures reproduced under the modernity/coloniality logic (patriarchy, capitalism, racism, heteronormativity, Western development, etc.) must, therefore, be understood as only one of many possibilities.

Often, engaging with utopian literature is cast aside, repudiating it as impractical or at times “nostalgic” as a romantic washing of the past which are taken as examples of revolution (Lin et al., 2016) (see chapter 6 for an in-depth discussion). However, and following the example of numerous scholars, I contend that it is precisely the everyday struggle “from below” that makes possible the creation of alternative worlds against the grain of hegemonic systems (Motta, 2014; Holloway, 2002; Lugones, 2003). In this resistance, subaltern women ‘are at the forefront of the creation of a multiplicity of female political subjectivities’ (Motta and Seppälä, 2016: 6). The multiplicity of thoughts within the WCA creates an informed, rich dialogue that acknowledges the diversity of oppression experienced by the individuals that engage in this conversation (Motta, 2016). This dialogue does not aim to create a unique theory of knowledge but rather embraces the existence of multiple epistemologies. We must pay special attention to the diversity within autonomous struggles and how this difference is negotiated as well as the social and historical conditions in which this struggle takes place to grasp their potential for radical change (Goodwin, 2020).

To fully grasp WCA’s potential for radical social change, we must understand their movements from the logic of Hope and prefiguration where the building of (an)other worlds towards a dignified life drives action. However, there are dangers in assuming that WCA and other Hope autonomous movements can occur outside of the context of the State or capital, as: ‘the concrete practices of autonomy by social movements are embedded in socioeconomic and political contexts and as such involve a contested relationship in and against the state, the market and hegemonic discourses on development’ (Dinerstein, 2010: 356). While (in its majority) the WCA in Mexico embraces autonomy from political parties and the state, many of their demands in their struggle towards a dignified life continue to be negotiated with (albeit simultaneously against) the state. The struggle for autonomy is ‘a contradictory process which takes place within the social relations of capital and is full of setbacks and disappointments’ (Goodwin, 2020: 230). While the state demarcates that which “exists” and “does not exist” within the law, this does not mean that all those practices and epistemologies that
have been proven (un)translatable (Vázquez, 2009, 2011) within the logics of the state and capital cease to exist (Dinerstein, 2015). To understand the non-linear journey of autonomous resistance, I make use of Dinerstein’s (2015) four modes of autonomy in the key of Hope and Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) decolonial methodology strategies for my analysis of the WCA in Mexico.

Following Dinerstein (2015), I understand WCA’s prefigurative epistemologies and praxis as a process of learning Hope, with autonomy being the organisational tool of this process. Autonomy must be understood in this context as “the art of organising Hope”. That is, ‘of creating and shaping a reality that is Not yet but can become and is anticipated by the movements’ collective actions’ (Dinerstein, 2015: 2). To understand the social movements’ trajectory of struggle towards these alternative worlds, we must examine the non-linear, complex journey through four modes of autonomy in the key of Hope: negating, creating, contradicting, and exceeding (see fig. 4).

Figure 6. Autonomy in the Key of Hope.

![Diagram of Autonomy in the Key of Hope](Source: Dinerstein, 2015: 61.)

The first mode of autonomy, negating, is only possible if we understand the world as unfinished, as open. Only when WCA understands reality as moving, can it negate this reality. Challenging reality can only be done by understanding the present as only one of the multiple possibilities of the real. This negative praxis expressed in the protest, that is, the opposition, the antagonism, the disagreement with the present situation, is crucial and necessary, since, without criticising what is given, the new cannot emerge. Current research methodologies and epistemologies in the social movement literature tend to normalise the capitalist state, inadvertently limiting the potential for impact and change of the movements. We need to ‘throw a brick in the window of normality and destabilize the mystification and naturalisation of capitalist social relations’ (Motta and Nilsen, 2011: 180-181). Struggles for social justice must be understood as struggles for political “visibility” (Vázquez, 2009). WCA must reclaim a cognitive justice that allows subaltern views and knowledge to become visible in the dominant narrative. At the centre of thinking beyond modernity/coloniality lies the ability to imagine both “other worlds” and “worlds otherwise” (Escobar, 2004). These alternative realities should not be viewed as abstracts, idealist utopias but as realities that are “Not-Yet”. Or as argued by Dinerstein
In the creating mode of autonomy, *concrete* utopias 29 are built in the present. Once we say no, the utopian function of Hope allows us to potentially experience a better life, even when we don't know how or when. Concrete utopias are not abstract utopias as ‘abstracts utopias perform as collective imaginations that will be realised in the future, when the expected conditions arise’ (Dinerstein (2015: 65-66). Contrary to abstract utopias, concrete utopias do not require “the perfect circumstances”, they are collective praxis in the *now*. They are knowledge. Concrete utopias challenge the demarcation of imposed capitalist reality and, instead transcends this towards the real in a space that is Not-Yet (Dinerstein, 2015). Autonomy engages with all open possibilities rather than simply probability, as argued by Zournazi (2002: 245), ‘if we follow probability there is no Hope, just a calculated anticipation authorised by the world as it is’. Rather than viewing the transcendence of capitalism, patriarchy, and coloniality as unrealistic, we must view it as a real possibility because it is already real in the form of the movements’ everyday resistances. Concrete utopias are praxis guided by Hope (Dinerstein, 2015).

In the struggle towards autonomy, the WCA faces contradiction as autonomy is mediated by capital through its “guardian”, the modern state. Revolutionary autonomous praxis is always in danger of being translated into the reality demarcated by the modernity/coloniality matrix. This struggle does not take place outside of the state and capital but inside, against, and beyond. This mode contains the possibility of disappointment and “failures” of the movement’s goals as the state integrates the struggle towards autonomy within the realms of legibility. In this struggle, hope is never certain (Dinerstein, 2015). The concrete utopia always runs the risk of being integrated into the logic of capital, the State, and the new forms of coloniality of power. This struggle contains the predicament between rebellion and integration, between oppression and self-determination. Thus, containing both the potential for frustration/disappointment or the Not-Yet.

Finally, the last mode of autonomy is excess. That is all those elements of the narratives offered by the subjectivities, emotions, feelings, weavings, etc. of the WCA that prove (un)translatable within the logic of the state. Why and what remains outside the reach of state, legal, economic, social translations? This question brings us back to the concept of the Not-Yet. In this area, ways of being, relating, and acting politically are developed, capable of demarcating an alternative reality to contend with the imposed reality of capitalist modernity. Redefining social struggles as epistemic struggles can aid the comprehension of social struggles, not only from the analysis of economic or political

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28 Santos (2014:31) offers a similar critical account of Bloch’s Not-Yet and distinguishes three moments of possibility: want (the Not, in Dinerstein’s theory negation), tendency (process in the realm of the Not Yet), and latency (in the realm of the Nothing and the All, ‘for latency can end up either in frustration or Hope’). Santos’s theory has been used here to illuminate some questions on the process of organising Hope. However, as there is a lack of engagement with the negotiation process which is vital for social movements and that battle between frustration and Hope, Dinerstein is chosen here as a more appropriate and complete framework of analysis.

29 We must distinguish here between concrete utopias and real utopias. Real utopias as understood by Wright (2010, 2013) are founded on what seems feasible within the confines of capitalist reality. For Wright (2013), alternatives should be evaluated in terms of their desirability, their visibility, and their achievability. Arguably, Wright’s conception of the real is self-limiting to the Reality imposed by the coloniality/modernity matrix.
systems of domination brought by the neoliberal organisation but also as generators of new knowledges, broader and more complex than the academic realm can currently attempt to frame with traditional epistemic tools (Icaza and Vázquez, 2013). By redefining social struggles as epistemic struggles, we can ‘move towards making visible the plurality of alternatives through which social life is organised and experienced’ (Icaza and Vázquez, 2013: 3). For Dinerstein (2015) this is demonstrated, for instance, through temporality. Capitalist linear temporalities (past-present-future) are negated in indigenous struggles, while other ontologies are put forward as alternatives. Ones that understand time as cyclical, as spirals where the future is a memory and past memories are today’s struggle. The epistemic violence of modernity ‘renders invisible everything that does not fit in the parameters of legibility of its epistemic territoriality’ (Vázquez, 2011: 36). For the WCA, to transcend the parameters of legibility of the state’s demarcation (Vázquez, 2009, 2011), means to venture beyond and contest hegemonic patriarchal colonial logics, including the coloniality of gender. They must reclaim all those epistemologies made invisible by the boundaries of coloniality/modernity hegemonic logics and go beyond this imposed reality.

When speaking of the plurality of knowledges present within WCA, Dinerstein’s focus on the autonomy-state-capital nexus is a somewhat limiting framework (Goodwin, 2020), and may lead to the problematic assumption that characterises the WCA as a homogenous and unified front. We must pay special attention to the diversity within autonomous struggles and how this difference is negotiated, as well as the social and historical conditions in which this struggle takes place. It is for this reason that I engage with Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) decolonial methodologies, which complements Dinerstein’s modes of autonomy by paying special attention to the internal processes that occur within the movements and the need to understand this imposed reality along the axis of the coloniality/modernity matrix. It also allows for an analysis of struggle as embodied personal/territorial, mind-body-spirit resistances as Smith (1999) challenges abstract, removed academic understandings of indigenous decolonial projects and instead places the utmost importance on their individuality. I highlight in my own analysis the need to understand embodied emotions and feelings as part of personal/collective oneto-epistemic praxis that opposes and exceeds the demarcations of the imposed reality under capitalist modernity. In this framework, decolonising becomes a key prefigurative, transformative praxis in the WCA’s struggle toward a dignified life.

By engaging with Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) indigenous research agenda, I do not presume to appropriate the indigenous tactics, epistemologies, knowledges, or traditions embodied within indigenous communities in my analysis of the WCA, nor is it an ‘invitation to go forth and consume the other […] erasing indigeneity and with it the fractured locus of the colonial difference’ (Mack and Na’puti, 2019: 351). Instead, I highlight the need of the contemporary WCA’s to exceed the imposed reality reproduced through the logics of modernity/coloniality and which I argue limits the WCA’s transformative potential towards the construction of other more just worlds. I would also like to visibilise, however, that indigenous epistemologies and ways of resisting have permeated and informed many WCA collectives I had the opportunity to work with from both Mexico City’s centre and periphery (see chapters 5 and 6). Yet, far from co-opting these methods as cookie-cutter, fits-all exercises, they have helped them inform and shape their resistance, leading to a collective questioning of the reality imposed by the logic of modernity/coloniality.
Thus, while Dinerstein allows for structural analysis of the relationship between the WCA and the state, its resistance, and negotiations, Tuhiwai-Smith expands on the diversity of organisational strategies, their nature, and journey, and the contradictions within and between the different indigenous projects in their struggle towards self-determination. Thus, going from the abstract to the concrete, and vice versa. I argue many of these strategies are complementary to Dinerstein’s modes of autonomy. Instead of autonomy, Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) places self-determination at the centre of the indigenous struggle, this means that autonomy is not in itself the end-goal but rather one of the possibilities within self-determination. Like Dinerstein, Tuhiwai-Smith highlights those new indigenous self-determining worlds are within the “not-yet” and so concrete action and efforts towards this self-determination remain unclear. They may be completely autonomous from governments or may struggle and sit alongside the nation-states. Self-determination, like autonomy, goes beyond the political struggle and instead becomes a goal of social justice for indigenous people to live with dignity and without violence. Tuhiwai-Smith’s four directions of the indigenous research agenda resemble Dinerstein’s four modes of autonomy, however, they shed light on the diversity of ways in which these processes take place and the strategies that can be formed in the pursuit of self-determination (see fig. 5)

Figure 7. The Indigenous Research Agenda.

Source: Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 117.

To achieve self-determination, indigenous epistemologies and praxis engage in the processes of transformation, decolonisation, healing, and mobilisation as people. These are not clear ends or goals in themselves but rather part of the struggle towards self-determination, which occurs at times simultaneously and often without a clear order. They ‘connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global’ (Tuhiwai- Smith, 1999: 116). Alongside the four directions, Tuhiwai-Smith identifies four major tides: survival, recovery, development, and finally, self-determination. Similarly, these are not sequential states of being but rather dependent on the needs and priorities of an indigenous community. Like Dinerstein, these directions and tides interweave, yet their relationship to each other is dynamic rather than linear and developmental rather than foundational. The contradictory and fluid nature of this process
will be better represented when examining the different strategies adopted by the WCA. I thus, combine these two frameworks into what I have called the Process in the Creation of Alternatives (see fig. 6), in my analysis, to uncover the ways in which the WCA resists, re-imagines, and re-builds (an)other worlds in the present.

Figure 8. The Process in the Creation of Alternatives

3.3. Research Methods and Analysis

3.3.1. How to research ‘women in movement’?

To address the question How do Women in Action resist these violent processes and what are their journeys of struggle towards autonomy? If I aim to work alongside the WCA who, as I contend, engage in prefigurative praxis, I must also adopt a methodology that is prefigurative and post-representational/decolonial (Motta, 2016).

The journey of decolonising research epistemologies begins by questioning what is considered knowledge, how it is attained, under what circumstances, by whom, and for which purpose (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). With the concept of modernity/coloniality, Escobar (2007) demonstrates that the domination and capitalist exploitation of racialised others are constitutive of modernity, which, to thrive, necessitates the fallacy of Western hegemony as universal knowledge. ‘Race defined what counted as history and knowledge and condemned the colonised to live as peoples without history, without the rights of man and without human rights’ (Mendoza, 2016: 113). Indigenous practices and traditions were invalidated and many were lost. The only rightful epistemology became the European objective rationality (Walsh, 2007). ‘The myth of disembodied knowledge - the myth that we approach true knowledge only through objective minds and critical eyes - became necessary to sustain the myth of Western knowledge as universal’ (Shepherd, 2021: 309). The mind-body cartesian dualist model created dichotomised social, cultural, and epistemological hierarchies. Reason vs. emotion, evidence vs experience, mind vs.

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30 Special thanks to Franco Augusto for this graphic.
body, nature vs. culture, white vs. non-white, European vs other, male vs. female, tradition vs modernity. Modernity resulted in the homogenisation of knowledge by the white male European, imposing and dominating narratives of knowledge and rejecting and ultimately rendering invisible any alternative epistemologies (Walsh, 2016, 2007). Knowledge obtained through “objective” methods became “cold” and impersonal (Guerrero Arias, 2012). The academy has historically played a significant role in the homogenisation of knowledge under scientific frameworks, deciding what was considered “true” or “valuable” knowledge in the (re) production of the cognitive empire that governs modern societies (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, 2022; Santos, 2007a; 2016), what Lander (2000) calls the coloniality of knowledge. Aware of this, I place my research under scrutiny as I fight my own presumptions of what research and knowledge look like. To challenge this ongoing colonial imposition of epistemic violence, I must engage in a re-analysis of current theories of knowledge, breaking down epistemic hierarchies and historical exclusions of alternative knowledges and practices.  

As argued by Mack and Na’puti (2019: 355), employing decolonial feminist epistemologies requires ‘embracing plurality at the colonial difference and accepting inaccessibility and incomprehensibility as we work toward decolonisation’. I recognise that there are limits that a researcher cannot and should not try to cross (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). As an outsider to the Latin American feminist movement, I cannot pretend to hold the same ontological understanding of the world as a Mexican activist and instead position myself as an ally, with a completely different set of skills and position in the research. As a white, European Ph.D. researcher, it became abundantly clear that I was placed in a privileged position when conversing with the activists (In section 2.5, I engage at length in a discussion around this challenge). Employing prefigurative decolonial epistemologies to the research design and approach necessitates an acknowledgment and challenge of these power dynamics, wherein I must avoid, by all means, treating research participants as “objects of study” (Motta 2016). When engaging with the strategies embodied by the WCA, I put their expertise in the first line of inquiry to guide my analysis of WCA as well as decolonial feminist literature.

The need to actively listen to and learn from the embodied knowledge of radical subjects’ epistemologies and praxis is what led me to consider the conversation as the most appropriate participatory action method. Thus, I decided to employ prefigurative, decolonial methods in the form of alternative, reflective conversations which place subaltern women’s experiences, feelings, and emotions as critical sources of knowledge that play a crucial role in the building of communities and weavings of solidarity towards alternative societies (Cadaval Narezo, 2022; Motta, 2016; Walsh, 2013). Lived experiences need to be understood as embodied knowledges including cognitive and intellectual thinking but also emotional, relational, corporeal actions and feelings that configure the ways of knowing, learning, being, and relating to the world around us (Ortíz Ocaña et al. 2018). The conversation as a qualitative approach is not only a method. It is

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31 Santos (2007a) has also termed this colonial epistemic violence as an “epistemicide” In his theorization on the sociology of absences, Santos (2004) points out at the monocultures that exist under colonial rationality and that render everything that falls outside of this paradigm ‘non-existent’. These include the monocultures of knowledge and rigour under scientific objectivity; linear time that encompasses notions of modernity, progress, etc.; classification and naturalization of differences including those by race and gender; the monoculture of the universal and the global; and finally, the criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency which is applied both to human labour and nature alike. The sociology of absences replaces these monocultures into ecologies of knowledge, of temporalities, of recognition, of trans-scales and of productivity.

‘Alternative conversation is not a technique (instead of being a path that leads us to knowledge, it is already a place of knowledge, a decolonial action/footprints). In the alternative conversation, comprehensive conceptual configurations are forged, the wisdoms – “other” knowledge - that we all configure, not only the decolonial mediator but also the other actors of the decolonizing process. With this action, you want to generate interaction with those who talk, that is, there are no impositions, only a matter of agreement is proposed, and how the interlocutor approaches it is respected’.

I approached the activists intending to create a long-term relationship so such a conversation would be able to take place. I would not pretend that all the informal conversations I had were horizontal or did not in some way fall back into researcher/participant dichotomies, but as time went on and I grew closer to several activists I can say with as much certainty as possible that we were building towards this alternative conversation. I acknowledge this praxis as imperfect and inconsistent and at times contradictory (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, 2022), which depicts the ever-present ‘complex realities and intricate power relations in the production of knowledge’ (Cadaval Narezo, 2022: 140). However, I also recognise its partial successes. At times, our dialogue exceeded the traditional understanding of the spoken word, and instead, it was praxis, such was the case when we were cooking together or cleaning the space we had shared. The smell of the food we had cooked for each other was the conversation, the smiles while washing up were full of caring and affection for each other. Caring became an essential epistemology in the practice of alternative conversation (Cadaval Narezo, 2022). Their laughing at me when trying spicy sweets or me cooking in their kitchen Spanish food became a form of intercultural dialogue. I fought my instincts to own the conversation and started appreciating the value of silence (Ortíz Ocaña et al., 2018) and active listening (Motta, 2016). In this relationship, I did not intend to become the other but rather establish a dialogue that allowed for critical and diverse epistemologies to co-exist through both agreements and, sometimes, disagreements (Ortíz Ocaña et al. 2018). Through this embodied, relational experience, I learned about the world around me, living in common and experiencing what Ahmed (2017) has previously called “a feminist life”.

Thus, my research is underlined by the understanding of knowledges as relational. That is, we learn in relation to one another. It became apparent that if I were to embody a prefigurative methodology in my thesis, my research objectives, aims and questions could not remain static. Instead, I shaped my research around the concerns, demands, and strategies of their pluriversal knowledges and praxis (Walsh, 2007). My research became fluid, imprinted, and guided by the activists (Cadaval Narezo, 2022). For instance, while I initially expected to focus my thesis on the co-construction of policy between the women’s movement and the State, it emerged early in my research that the relationship between activists and the state was at best tenuous and at its worst non-existent and often violent. The context that I was exploring did not allow for a prefigurative co-construction of policy design and implementation with the ever- looming danger of a de-radicalised translation of the movements’ demands through the languages of power (see section 7.1.). Furthermore, this would have led to a unification and homogenisation of the WCA as one that does not reflect the true plural nature of their actions and epistemologies. Thus, I
changed my research focus to the ongoing WCA resistance against violent hegemonies, including the state as an oppressive system. Their struggle exceeds the capitalist, patriarchal, colonial logic of capitalist modernity, and builds new worlds within, against, and beyond the present. Contemporary WCA in Mexico City places the highest importance on the place from where they struggle, their community, and its local histories which they are trying to recover (see more on histories and memory in chapters 5 and 6). By recognising the epistemic force of local histories (Escobar, 2004), I can engage with the collective and embodied knowledges that are being built by the political praxis of subaltern groups. These knowledges formed through resistance, challenge traditional research methodologies that shape epistemic hierarchies between researcher/participant that delimits the roles of those who are considered “thinkers” and those who are the “research object”.

3.3.2. Finding the Research Focus

When first shaping my literature review around the history of the feminised resistance in Mexico, I encountered a large epistemic gap in historical accounts. I reached out to Ana Lau, a historian academic from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (In Spanish, UNAM) to enquire about the largely invisible roles of subaltern women within these histories. She agreed that there was an onto-epistemological and presential gap as there are no extensive reports of the same. ‘You would need to go back to newspapers and recreate these histories’ she explained. While a novel pursuit, this task is much too complex for the limited historical summary I present here (see sections 4.3, 4.4.). I choose, instead, to engage with the alternative histories of subaltern women, which are (still) largely rendered invisible in the larger social imaginary of contemporary women’s resistance in Mexico. This is, of course, a very limited attempt as I have narrowed this down to the case study of Mexico City and some surrounding areas, as well as lacking long-term empirically driven accounts of the same (focussing merely on the last 5 years). However, with this task in mind, I hope to shine some light on the need to engage with those histories as part of the plural and extensive ways Mexican women resist that do not necessarily fall under pre-established boundaries of feminist thinking or doing, but which nevertheless are part of the same struggle towards a dignified life, free of violence. This task begins in the following section and continues throughout the rest of the thesis, paying special attention to those feelings of alienation and resentment externalised by peripheral and subaltern activists I had the opportunity to work with.

My thesis is informed and empirically based in Mexico City which included three visits to the capital and surrounding areas in March 2019, February to April 2020, and August to September 2021. My interest in Mexico as the field of research arose during my master’s degree after completing a dissertation on the contending relationship between gender quota-based political strategies and the development of gender-sensitive policy. During this research, I had the opportunity of conducting a series of interviews with congresswomen from the Mexican and British Governments to compare their perspectives and individual experiences. The staggering rise of feminicide rates and the

33 I chose the case of Mexico due to their gender-quota laws that result in the Mexican congress holding one of the largest percentages of female representation in their chambers (as of 2021, 50%). Comparatively, in the UK government, only the labour party uses gender quotas with a 35% of female representation overall. At the time of my dissertation (2016) these were 48% and 29% respectively.
apparent rapid development of gender-sensitive policies in Mexico appeared to be a significant disconnect and so I completed my master’s with several unanswered questions. Thus, my research interest was, at the beginning of my research journey, investigating this disconnect and looking at ways in which the gap could be shortened through co-construction, prefigurative strategies of policy. This was still the case after my exploratory fieldwork in March 2019, where I was seeking to understand the size and strength of the WCA. At the time of my short visit, I was unable to collect data\textsuperscript{34} and so I attended the international women’s day march in 2019 as an onlooker. The march was generally peaceful, with a large presence of militant collectives in the ranks. Thus, this trip did not significantly impact my research focus.

My second trip, from February to April 2020, and my third trip from August to September 2021, were very different. My initial goal was similar to my first trip: to understand the different dynamics, epistemologies, and praxis embodied by the surging WCA in the city. However, far from the semi-homogenous peaceful movement I had seen in my initial travel, the WCA had been gaining tremendous momentum. My arrival in Mexico City coincided with one of the most brutal murders which were largely publicised by the yellow press: the femicide of Ingrid Escamilla. After the news came out, I remember being scared for the first time since my arrival of going out on the street after dark, installing Waze on my phone so I could track where the Uber driver was taking me, texting my girlfriends after I had gotten home so as not to worry them. I attended two marches for Ingrid (see section 4.1.), one in the centre and one in the periphery. The march in the centre shook me and all the schemes I had about my research. Protesters were breaking lampposts, setting things on fire, carrying tasers and hammers. The panic of this sudden (to my inexperienced eyes) change of pace made me get in contact with my supervisors. I have offered in text boxes first-hand recollection after the attendance on the 14\textsuperscript{th} of February march as well as a shortened version of an email to my supervisors. These two pieces of writing became indicative and concrete evidence that I could not continue employing traditional research methodologies if I were to produce a truthful account of the tumultuous nature of the WCA.

\textbf{As you may have heard on the news, feminist groups in Mexico have been real busy!} I have attended 4 marches in the last two weeks and have been able to appreciate the “broken” dialogue between the feminist collectives and AMLO/the government. The first march I attended left me a bit worried as it was mostly formed by what other groups call the “black bloc”, anonymous activists who tend to use graffiti and vandalism to get the attention of the community and government. The relative violence they used as a way to share their message wasn’t what worried me but rather the obvious feminist separatism they seemed to have adopted (Fuera hombres was a common chant on this march). The next marches were a lot less attended in number and were clearly organised by particular feminist collectives and civil societies. In these marches I have been able to talk to a number of members of different groups (Email to supervisors 20\textsuperscript{th} of Feb 2020).

\textsuperscript{34} As exploratory fieldwork, early in my research journey, I did not need to obtain ethics approval. However, this also meant I was unable to collate any data.
It was clear that my idealisation of the movement as some united front was far from reality, and I needed to quickly challenge my condescending expectation of a "certain type of feminist/feminism". Similarly, I debated with myself as to whether I should make use of extracts of conversations with members of collectives and independent activists where the language became more aggressive and, at times, overtly violent. The use of these conversations appeared to be a double-edged sword. If I did not use them, I would be censoring realities and feelings expressed by the women in the movement. I would be cleansing the speeches and emotions expressed within the boundaries that I found fitting for "transformation" or as "valid" academic knowledge. However, if I did share these extracts, I was afraid they would read as moralistic judgments on my part, or the other extreme, as a potential excuse for the criminalisation of the WCA. Ultimately, I decided to present these as a way of demonstrating the power of anger, and its limitations when turned into hate (see section 5.1). Whether this would be more harmful than valuable is up for debate and is a question I continue to pose myself.

As an outsider to the movements, I had to use convenience sampling and snowballing methods to get to know activists and a range of different feminist collectives. As is characteristic of the fourth feminist wave, much of the movements’ organisation occurred through social media (Cerva Cerna, 2020a, 2020b) and so I used several platforms as well as a handful of the activist group’s official websites to establish a connection with a total of 19 feminist activist groups. My condition as an outsider did carry some benefits, as activists found it easier to discuss the internal problematics and contradictions of the WCA, feeling as though they were not being judged or classed as a “bad feminist sister” (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, 2022). I commenced experiencing feelings of frustration by the vastness of the movement and my inability to contain it within a neat outline. During this stage, my research focus became unclear and ever-changing, being
constantly broken down and questioned by different activists’ perspectives and feelings, which shed light on the ongoing power dynamics that plagued the WCA, and which exceeded the gender category. The periphery-center divide, for instance, was first brought to my attention by a feminist activist I met during a seminar in Puebla (Tlaxcala). It was because of this that I was able to reach out to several collectives from the periphery. These collectives expanded my understanding of decolonial feminist praxis, as well as literature, beyond the limited theory I was familiar with at the time. My ideas about the WCA, their potential, the diverse contexts, and forms of violence, continue to be changing. It is this fluidity that truly underlines feminised resistances as WCA rejoices in the plurality of epistemologies that encompasses feminist and women’s struggles and which challenge, from these diverse positions, violent hegemonies. As already argued by Maeckelbergh, (2011: 1) ‘there is no singular goal, adversary, or identity that is shared by all movement actors except at the most abstract level of desiring “(an)other world(s)”’. Activities and ideologies varied greatly between and within the collectives. Their struggle cannot and should not be neatly contained within a limited number of demands. Therefore, my new research question and aim were shaped around this openness.

Before continuing, I must clarify the differentiation that I utilise throughout my thesis, that of centre/periphery. I would like to problematise the idea of “margin” or “periphery” as a specific geographical location in relation to the centre, which has also been termed the “urban periphery”. When I speak of periphery or margin it goes beyond geography, although undoubtedly impacted by territorialities, viewing it instead as “a location of radical openness and possibility” (Motta 2016: 33). Many of the women from the “periphery” I had the opportunity of working with eventually moved to the centre of the capital. Similarly, when visiting the Okupa from the National Commission for Human Rights (In Spanish, Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos or CNDH), it became apparent that the occupation of the premises had been led by women from the periphery (see more in section 8.1). Narradoras Urbanas also highlighted how some areas that were geographically in the centre of the capital, were truly peripheral socio-political spaces, as they were run by OCGs (see chapter 2). When I speak of the periphery, therefore, I am referring to all those epistemologies, praxis, and ways of doing, being, and resisting that continue to sit outside feminist hegemonies, often headed by women from popular areas.

On my trip to Mexico, I worked with women from collectives in the centre and periphery of the capital. In the centre, these included institutional feminist collectives, radical feminists from the UNAM’s student movements, socialist feminist groups, independent radical feminists who did not ascribe to a particular feminist branch, and encapuchadas / black bloc feminists. Popular or periphery women’s movements included the family of feminicide victims’ speakers, the collective indigenous women in Mexico City, autonomous peripheral collectives (Insubordinadas, Femipraxicas, and Vulvísima), and black block feminists originally from the periphery who resided in the Okupa. In my analysis, I utilise the tags of protesters/activists interchangeably, although often will refer to protesters when speaking of them in a protest/march context and activists when speaking of their daily resistance.

Before I had the opportunity to explain my interest, early on in my research, I was challenged by a member of a periphery collective. She argued that my engagement with

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35 Popular here refers to women from popular neighbourhoods. That is, marginal neighbourhoods often located in the urban peripheries product of the housing crisis, and which are often habited by families from socio-economically deprived sectors. Often, these settlements are built informally.
them could not be purely “extractivist”, but needed to be collaborative if I wanted their help. Similar to the research conducted by Mariman (2005: 3, cited in Ortíz Ocaña and Arias López, 2019), to them, the contemporary and booming feminist movement in Mexico was becoming ‘associated with the extraction of information that never comes back to them or that only serves for personal or academic gains that have no real commitments to their struggle’. They did not want another research student, academic, or journalist conducting their interviews and leaving them behind. This is what Tuhuiwai-Smith (1999) identifies in her book Decolonizing Methodologies when she speaks of “research” being a dirty word amongst the Maori people as she explains ‘the word itself, […] stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful’ (Tuhuiwai-Smith, 1999: 1). Women’s collectives from the periphery and centre were relentlessly approached by researchers, journalists, and politicians alike to “extract” their knowledge for their gain. I did not pretend that the research I was doing was not ultimately benefiting me in the form of a Ph.D. degree, nor did I promise that I could conjure up some artificial advantage to their cause and resistance, rather I enquired as to how I could also be of use so that the benefits were two-sided. We commenced by working together on the designing of a workshop on “the art of organising Hope” (Dinerstein, 2015), sadly, this could not take place due to COVID restrictions (more on this in section 3.3.4).

Thus, I took this experience as an example and became increasingly involved in a range of activities put forward by other feminist collectives while conversing and getting to know their work. Rather than utilising a clear research method (interviews, focus groups, ethnography, etc.), I became involved in those methods that were already being employed by the collectives and the communities. As a result, I attended and participated in several lectures, seminars, healing circles, reading discussions, gatherings, protests, “hangouts”, and conversations organised by the collectives (see appendix II for a summary of “official” activities). Sometimes my participation involved short-term help such as poster designs, adhering posters to walls, or cutting stencils. Other times, my involvement was more in-depth work, helping with the planning and collaboration of some collectives’ activities. I did at times become overwhelmed by the number of events that were taking place in the weeks running up to and after the International Women’s Day marches (see text box for field notes). The data that I analyse in this thesis belongs to a set of 30 conversations with members of feminist and women’s collectives as well as independent feminists, which took place during marches, protests, and formal and informal meetings. Each lasted between 30 minutes to 3 hours. The majority of these conversations were tape-recorded, although I do acknowledge the emotional distancing this tool created. To avoid this, at times, I chose not to use my recorder and just take quick notes after our conversation was finished, trying to recount

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36 This workshop took place in Mexico City in May 2022, under the umbrella of the World Social Forum.
as much as possible later in the evening in my fieldwork notebook. I have added explicit notes next to citations that were “reconstructed” in this form.

The three collectives from the urban geographical periphery I had the opportunity to work with, named Vulvísima, Insubordinadas, and Femipraxicas focused most of their activities in the areas with the highest levels of violence and economic and social deprivation, namely in the neighbourhoods of Iztapalapa, Ecatepec, and Netzahualcoyotl (see fig. 7). By engaging in an exploration of subaltern women’s experiences and knowledge, my research uncovered feelings of alienation, exclusion, and marginalisation that women from the periphery of Mexico City experienced within the very same women’s movement that seeks to “liberate them”. However, far from generalising these collective and independent women’s experiences as homogenous, single truths, I put forward these findings as part of a glimpse into those situated and partial knowledges that emerge in women’s narratives and which uncover the multifaceted complex nature of women’s reality (Krauss, 1993) and as part of the ever-critical and deconstructive nature of feminised resistance (Motta and Seppälä, 2016). These conversations were snapshots of the WCA, always changing and adapting, I also acknowledge I was only privy to those conversations and topics I was granted access to by the activists, and of course, these are destined to be fragmented and limited (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, 2022). I treat them as temporary truths that reflect the continuous struggle to escape hegemonic logics within movements of resistance and the need to exceed the imposed reality of capitalist modernity in the search and struggle for a dignified life.

Figure 9. Contextualising research in Mexico City and Beyond.

While I had originally planned to attain written informed consent from the activists (see appendix IV), it became clear that due to the context of state violence and repression that the feminist movement was facing at the time of my fieldwork, most activists did not want to share any confidential information. As a result, I went through my research aims and objectives with them as well as their rights as “participants” at the beginning of our
conversation, obtaining instead verbal informed consent. I underlined the fact that this research project was funded by the ESRC in the UK. Aware of the sensitive subjects that we sometimes encounter, including sexual abuse, harassment, and gender discrimination, I reiterated throughout our conversation their ability to defer participation at any stage. These conversations often took place as a group and so the collective worked as protective bodies when an activist recalled a painful or distressing experience. As such, I ensured all activists that were involved in this project were doing so voluntarily and in an anonymous capacity. About 30% of protesters remained anonymous and those who did share their personal information were guaranteed confidentiality. The only identifiable data that is shared in this thesis is the collectives’ names and this is done only after explicit permission.

When I returned from Mexico, I encrypted, transcribed, and then translated these conversations into English. I initially offered to provide the activists with a transcript of our conversations in case they wanted anything omitted or they wanted to expand on an underexplored topic. However, the return rate of these transcripts was close to null, instead, I offered to provide them with the audio recording. A couple of collectives requested for me to share and translate any articles I wrote on them into Spanish as well as my final thesis. I agreed to this, and this action has also helped me keep in contact with several activists. For my data analysis, I used the software NVIVO for thematic analysis of the conversations’ content. The themes found in the analysis of these conversations guide the structure of this thesis. Afterward, I conducted a second round of analysis within each of these main topics looking for connections through tags including “experiences, emotions, thought” in relation to Dinerstein (2015) and Smith’s (1999) process of creation of alternative modes (See appendix III). After I had a clearer idea of some of the demands, strategies, and challenges that overwhelmed the WCA, I continued to converse with a smaller number of activists while in England who, once again, guided my analysis and challenged some of my “findings”. This was at times a frustrating exchange, especially towards the end of my journey wherein I feared I was falsely recounting some of their ideas as these were derived from testimonials, opinions, feelings, and thoughts that were formulated at a particular time in their lives. As Willemse (2014) warns we must understand perceptions as malleable, situated, and everchanging. Therefore, I had to remind myself that, no matter how challenging, this constant open dialogue was essential (Cadaval Narezo, 2022). On my final trip to Mexico City in August-September 2021, I was able to meet with some of the activists I had grown closer to. They updated me on the turns and twists that the WCA was experiencing during the lockdown, including a much larger presence on social media, the Okupa, the solidarity markets, and other activities like the rodadas that were popularised during the pandemic (see chapter 7).

Recalling similar feelings of insecurity and anxiety to those expressed by Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, (2022), I was in constant fear that my research would become “extractive”, becoming a researcher that ‘goes to “the field” with closed and defined ideas, collects information and goes back to academia to “produce knowledge”, never returning again’ (p. 226). My long-term connections with the activists became a selfish way of reassuring myself that my “fieldwork” was not over once I returned to the UK. I was adamant that our relationship exceeded the realm of my Ph.D., and so I invited several collectives to a number of online seminars and other events outside the academy. We also challenged the researcher-activist-academic paradigm and the traditional meaning and passive role of “participants” by writing a paper together with a member of a collective which is to be open source and displayed on the collective’s website.
(Martínez Gutiérrez and Ventura Alfaro, 2022 - Working paper). I became friends with a number of them. However, I also became wary of feigning that ultimately, my research did indeed lead to a personal material gain, which is a truth I could neither ignore nor hide in my reflections. This became acutely clear with the physical and emotional distancing that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (see section 3.3.4).

3.3.3. Reflexivity and positionality: Where do I stand in my research?

To decolonise yourself and your research, you need to actively understand the limitations of your own experiences, how your position has shaped the research you undertake. I understand the contradiction I pose when I engage in a discussion around “decolonising” methodologies, methods, and research. As argued by Ortíz Ocaña et al. (2018) we must change the colonial epistemologies by confronting, discarding, and creating new notions, rejecting concepts such as research, methodologies, methods, approaches, techniques, etc. that seek to dissect and absorb the Other into its logic. “It is not possible to engage in decolonised research (because) if it is research it can never be decolonial, all research colonises” (Ortíz Ocaña et al. 2018: 151-152, my italics). In my double position as a feminist militant but an outsider to the movement, my contribution can be part of the relational production of knowledge that brings into question some problematics within the WCA in Mexico, but also within the contexts I inhabit, engaging in a critical dialogue as much as with myself as with Western academy. By engaging in intercultural dialogue, that is critical of itself and the colonising locus wherein it takes place, we open possibilities for the fostering of pluriversal worlds, a world that encompasses many worlds (Escobar, 2020). However, I cannot shake the feeling that by not using words like “research”, I may be practicing a form of hidden coloniality (Ortíz Ocaña et al. 2018), as I fail to acknowledge the place of privilege that allowed me to conduct research, no matter how intentionally participatory, cooperative, or collective, in a context that is not my place of struggle (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort, 2022). As argued by Gómez-Hernández (2015: 51, cited in Ortíz Ocaña and Arias López, 2009), ‘coloniality is not something that is outside of us, but it inhabits and is reproduced thanks to many of our institutional and personal practices’. I do not intend to co-opt the decolonial discourse for my benefit, acknowledging the limit of my engagement with the decolonial praxis, especially within the realm of academia.

In my work, I do not seek to echo traditional development research wherein I “speak for the subaltern” (Spivak, 1988), reproducing the epistemic violence that social sciences have historically enabled. When I speak about and analyse the women's collective, I speak from my position as an ally that reflects on the conversations I had with the activists, but also my own changing thoughts, my new experiences, and my embodied knowledge. As a Spaniard, some subjectivities crossed me in the context of Mexico that was new to me. Beyond the evident sociocultural privileges that I held as a white European, there was a keenness from the activists to connect with me through my/our heritage. They would react excitedly when I mentioned I was Spanish or recount how their grandfather or great-grandmother was also Spanish. This had clear colonial implications, but they were nuanced to me in the practice. There was a conflicting love/hate relationship with my Spanish heritage as they recalled the violence of colonialism while simultaneously exoticising my accent and place of birth. A friend activist “warned” me this would happen, between what I can only describe as exasperated laughter. Similarly, the contentious but irreparable linkage of our worlds was evident from struggles headed by dissident subjects. I recall a day when, at an activist’s house, they decided to play punk
music. They explained they mainly listened to Spanish bands (which were unknown to me), describing how in their anarcho-feminist epistemologies, they held the Spanish republic as a great example of possibilities. I engaged in a reflexive process about myself ‘listening and observing the subjective transformations that generated within [me] and others with whom they are sharing this adventure’ (Arroyo and Alvarado, 2016: 146). I would like to share a piece of reflective writing I produced months after my trips to Mexico as a glimpse of this moving subjectivity:

When I think about my earliest memories, I think of America, our Ecuadorian nanny, and the smell of burnt melted caramel that she poured on seashells for our enjoyment. I was always too impatient and tried licking the caramel before it set, burning the tip of my tongue, and stopping myself from truly tasting the delicious treat as my tongue felt numb and raspy. I think of Pepa and her custard with "floating islands", a soft meringue-like cloud that she poured on top of the lemon custard and sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon. I think of Sunday mornings with my dad and siblings and our trips to the churrería to enjoy some porras with dense chocolate. My mum used to tell off my dad for smelling food before bringing it to his mouth. I grew up with the same bad habit. The kitchen makes me think of my grandmother. I keep thinking of her, singing republican songs in the kitchen while peeling the never-ending bag of potatoes for her children. Could my grandfather have ever imagined I would be making corn tortillas (not Spanish potato omelets) in my English kitchen rather than in Seville? He was, as I learned later in life, what others call “a man of his time”, an expression people use when they try to justify sexism and racism by contextualising it. Yes, a man of his time who was a bit too handsy with his secretaries and carers, often young women of colour from Latin America and North Africa. Who opposed the idea of calling Latin America so and insisted on “Hispano-America”. Who was to say that today I would be frantically looking into decolonial epistemologies, befriending women who reclaim the indigenous name of Abya Yala?

Through this reflection, I commenced thinking of the kitchen as a double space of oppression and contention. I also thought of the multiple and nuance hegemonic violences that had crossed my life and which I was oblivious to due to my internalised colonial ignorance. Many of these inspiring stories and reflections were far from being tidily written pieces and in what I can only describe as unintelligible Spanglish. The memories, the smells, the places, the interactions rushed to my mind, almost drowning me. I have struggled to capture the totality of these experiences, but I believe I could never truly make them justice. Neither to the women who embraced my research and were keen to have debates and conversations, who were fountains of every type of knowledge imaginable nor to my own personal emotional-intellectual sentipensante learning.

The question around the "value of my research" beyond the attainment of my Ph.D. plagued my thoughts relentlessly during this last year. Who is my research for and why am I the person to do it? Although guided by peripheral activists, I continue to be the producer of elitist, academic knowledge through my own solitary analysis and knowledge production process. However much I try discussing my findings collectively, it is still my voice that cuts through the middle of quotes and reflections. Although I engage in
feeling\textsuperscript{37}-thinking (In Spanish, sentipensar) praxis, it is still my feeling, my thinking that speaks loudest. As reflected by Canaval Narezo (2022: 156) ‘the reflections are shared and collective, the narrative is mine’. The expression \textit{a thousand miles away} became a physical and emotional truth as to when I was out and about in the UK or walking around the hills of Batheaston. Thinking about my experiences, remembering conversations. My mind would drift to a chat that was particularly heartbreaking, amusing, or merely beautifully simple and a feeling of absence would take over me. I wanted my research to be of some use to the activists, but it is always going to be an unequal relationship, because of the obvious material benefit that awaits on the other side of my work: a degree, a title. As stated by Ortíz Ocaña \textit{et al.} (2018, my underlined), when speaking of alternative dialogues ‘the intercultural dialogue is an affective and reflexive conversation, without assumptions, without expectations, without a priori, without conditions, allowing that “the other” also questions and express their emotions, judgments, and evaluations. It is a respectful and solidary dialogue, with affection, between equals’. As much as I can try to symbolically and practically challenge and denaturalise the idea of the "expert" and destroy the researcher/participant asymmetric relationship (Puentes, 2015), I continue to be an academic in a Western neoliberal university. Navigating this contradiction is a battle guided by decolonial praxis. With this purpose, I engage in a disruption of academic epistemologies through an engagement with thinking-feeling praxis, highlighting the activists’ emotions and experiences, as well as my own, as they change and develop between and within us.

\textit{I cannot explain with words how much I loved today’s gathering. The protest aimed to ask the government to investigate the videos that show the culprit behind the Molotov bombs that were thrown on the International Women’s Day march the previous day. The group was made of the lesbofeminist tamborist collective, the Insendiosas (a very new collective, only a few weeks old), and a number of independent feminists. I had some great conversations with some of them all of which were recorded. What I specifically loved about this is how, once it was finished, they decided to hold a spontaneous picnic by the Monumento a la Revolución. People that brought snacks shared them, we ordered some pizzas and chatted away. Some decided to start painting. That feeling of sorority and union became real for the first time. Not only did I see it, but I could also feel it. A 12-year-old girl and her grandmother stopped by the picnic. The girl wanted a picture with us, I offered to take it so that the grandmother could be in it too, but she shook her head adamant and said “but we are with you”. Estamos con vosotras. I felt a lump in my throat (Fieldwork notes, 9\textsuperscript{th} of March 2020).}

\textsuperscript{37}Thinking-Feeling (Orlando Fals Borda) refers to the thinking and feeling process that interprets our reality through reflection and emotion.
3.3.4. Thinking/Feeling research through the Covid-19 Pandemic

My “fieldwork” had originally been planned for a 3 to 4-month stay in Mexico City, from February to April 2020 with a later visit to the city for a long month stay in November 2020. Two months after my first visit, the pandemic began and so I was urged to return to the UK before international travel was completely banned. To express the frustration, fear, and loss that I experienced at the time when I finally felt my research was shaping and the relationships with the activists were tightening becomes more than just a logistical endeavour as I remember, still with pain, how I felt during that time.

By the 21st of March 2020, I was back in the UK. I saw my fieldwork being halved and abruptly coming to an end. My body/mind went from being a full-time militant activist and researcher in Mexico with all the bustle of the capital streets to suddenly being back in the UK, confined to my home and with just a handful of data to transcribe. I rearranged meetings to take place remotely, although it quickly became apparent that the type of methodology, I was hoping to use was impossible (at least at this moment in time) to take place virtually, and the conversations rapidly transformed into semi-structured interviews. I was no longer able to share my food and laughs in the park with other activists and the stiff researcher/participant dynamics I had been challenging reimposed themselves almost instantly. This was key in my research as I place the utmost importance on the value of “being there” for the collective building of knowledges, including all those embodied knowledges highlighted throughout.

For the following months, I focussed on transcribing and analysing the data I had collated. I kept in touch with several feminists at first, but as the emotional fatigue of living through a pandemic set in, and fear grew (amongst the collectives as well as my own) as case numbers went up, we started losing contact. I managed to only keep in touch with five of them who I now consider close friends. My trip planned for November was postponed, as another lockdown was imposed in the UK until January 2021. Finally, I was able to return to Mexico for a month from August to September 2021. However, as my research and I had been impacted and adapted so had the WCA strategies. I went back to Mexico to find a very different movement, which will be discussed at length in chapters 7 and 8.

A week before my return to the UK, the British government placed Mexico on the “red country list”38. Unable to afford the hefty hotel quarantine charges, I rerouted my flight through Spain where I spent 14 days before my final return. The feelings of frustration and melancholia from the first visit reappeared. In the following reflection, I offer a glimpse into the ever-changing nature of “navigating fieldwork”.

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38 In 2021, the UK government created a policy to address high COVID rates in foreign countries by creating travel green, amber, and red lists. People arriving from countries on the rest list were to stay in hotel accommodation approved by the government which was to be self-funded. These measures were scrapped as of December 2021.
I saw the anti-monumenta gathering on a CDMX traffic Twitter post early in the morning. When I arrived, there was only one woman in her mid-30s. I asked her about the gathering, and she confirmed it was there: that in preparation for international women's day, their collective wanted to clean and repaint the monumenta. I smiled, explaining why I was there but how I was also happy to be of some "service". She didn't think it twice and quickly put me to work. At 8 am I found myself carrying alongside her pieces of scaffolding. When we returned to the space after a few more trips, I was put in charge of retrieving breakfast alongside another activist. By the time we returned people had started gathering around. After having much-needed food and seeing that the scaffolding had been put up, I started chatting with the girls about everything and nothing. I cleaned the monumenta with them and asked on occasion about their respective collectives. At one point, I was asked to pass around a money box to raise money for the monumenta. It felt strange to be in the middle of the street asking people to contribute, bringing back school memories of collections for end-of-term trips. After a while, another two girls were assigned alongside me. One of them smiled at me knowingly, a look that found my and the specific situation somewhat amusing. We commenced talking and ultimately decided to leave the monumenta behind seeing as more women had arrived and went for coffee instead. After a while, and in that same coffee shop, she and her sister agreed for our conversation to be recorded. We spoke of their work, their experiences as women from the periphery, and the frustrations of the disconnection between the centre and periphery collectives. After a while, I turned off the recorder and we continued chatting. Camila was keen to talk about decolonial literature and our conversation turned more academic. We decided to have drinks and chatted down the street. We met with other activists I had arranged to meet and some of her friends on that afternoon and from then on, kept in contact. On my last visit to Mexico City, we met on a couple of occasions, still concerned about COVID infections. In our conversations, she challenged my newly acquired understanding of the mercaditas that had been shaped by other activists. On one occasion, we walked around the street looking for a golden necklace for her mother and suddenly it started pouring down with rain. Torrential rain, as it was last August (hurricane season). We decided to stop by a restaurant by the National Palace and chatted about the impact the pandemic had had on the collective’s activities which were largely on hold. It became very clear we had been ripped off when the bill came. After, we went our separate ways. We continued to talk and text; I would let her know of all my projects and plans to publish articles with their collective's work and our conversations. And then, radio silence. A few weeks into March 2022, I sent her a published article, thanking her for all her work and hoping to see her on my upcoming trip. She replied letting me know she had enjoyed the article and explained that the year had not been kind to her. She had lost her dad due to COVID a few months before and was still trying to put herself together. I felt for her in the distance. Distraught. Thinking of my research as cold and detached.
Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I have introduced my framework named *the Process in the Creation of Alternatives*, inspired by decolonial, feminist epistemologies, and theory and shaped by a combination of Dinerstein’s (2015) *Art of organising Hope* and Tuhawai-Smith’s (1999) decolonial methodologies. This framework will be used in the remaining of the thesis to analyse how the WCA in Mexico City resists, challenges, and builds alternatives to the present. Through this outline, I will examine how the WCA (1) negates the present through mobilising, using collective memories as resisting, decolonial praxis; (2) affirms new relationships through healing, affective strategies embracing horizontality and solidarity; (3) navigate contradictions between collectives; within, against and beyond the state; as well as communities and outsiders to the collectives, implementing collective and community-driven dialogue and action; and finally, (4) in this praxis, transform the present by opening surplus possibilities towards alternatives.

In the second section of this chapter, I have recounted the inconsistent, contradictory, and generally arduous task of employing decolonial feminist epistemologies as a researcher of the Global North in the Global South. With the use of reflective, alternative conversations as my method and epistemology, I endeavoured to establish horizontal, open dialogues with the activists, searching to fight rigid researcher/participant power dynamics that have traditionally been part of academic research. This was in the theory much easier than it resulted in practice. As part of this struggle, wherein I encountered failure and partial successes, I found the need to reflect and note my changing thoughts and emotions throughout, around the WCA but also my own moving ontology and subjectivity. Vulnerability and care became vital strategies to my relationships with the activists which, as part of an emotionally draining process, I was only able to do with five activists who I consider close friends. The rest of the “data” that will be analysed throughout belong to a set of 30 official differing conversations, some of them more in an interview format, some of which are simply conversations over a coffee or meal. Many of my reflections that are present throughout do not necessarily belong to these recorded sets but rather emerge out of a dynamic, relational, and long-term connection with a handful of activists who have challenged my presumptions and my research’s aims and “findings” along the way.
CHAPTER 4:
A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN’S COLLECTIVE ACTION IN MEXICO:
BROAD STROKES OF A COMPLEX STRUGGLE

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.
- Maya Angelou (1978)

In this chapter I present some broad strokes of a much more complex, diverse, and larger picture that I can ever try to (or should) encapsulate within neat schemes concerning the Women’s Collective Action (WCA) in Mexico City. I commence by problematising the idea of feminism or women’s struggle as part of one unified, homogenous, and harmonious singular front, warning of the dangers of hierarchies, invisibility, and exclusion of subaltern struggles that do not fit within the logics of hegemonic feminisms. I follow this with a historical contextualisation of the women’s movements in Mexico, and later, more specifically Mexico City in the last decade. This historical, geopolitical summary functions as an introduction of some of the internal contradictions of the movement as well as mediations by the hand of the state/capital that seeks to translate their contentious struggle into the languages of power. Throughout the chapter, I make use of pictures I took during mass events, to reflect on the moving nature of the WCA.

4.1. Problematising ‘Feminism’ as a Singular, United Front

In this section, I address the ideological heterogeneity within Latin American women and feminist movements that lead to contradictions and negotiations at the inside of the movements, as these frictions are also present and reproduced in the WCA in Mexico. Power imbalances within the WCA, fuelled by the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2000) and the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), need to be addressed to free the movement from its ties to the modernity/coloniality matrix, which, as I argue throughout this thesis, are in contradiction with and an impediment to feminised resistances. To speak of “the feminist movement in Latin America” as a united front with a homogenous history is ‘a fiction that has political potential but perhaps also hides a colonising movement that renders invisible the most diverse experiences, expressions, and realities’ (Wigdor and Artazo, 2017: 197). Offering a synthesised account of the history and tension of women’s movements in Latin America is a near-impossible task, as the diversity of the movements in their geographic, ideologic and political strategies are multiple and diverse (García and Valdivieso, 2006). While some women’s movements identify their struggle under the umbrella of feminism, others reject this label. Within this identification, numerous branches and differentiation of feminisms co-exist (e.g., liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, autonomous, grassroots, etc.). Similarly, while some women’s collectives choose to collaborate with the State and consider their political struggle to be incomplete without systemic changes, others warn of the dangers of State co-optation of the feminist narrative, losing and radicalising the movements’ potential for true social change. I present here a summary of the history of these contradictions, attempting to bridge the better-known historical feminist trajectory with those parallel struggles headed by
autonomous, indigenous, and grassroots women movements, which are often ignored or put aside in the literature as not belonging to the feminist resistance. Rather than a unified movement, WCA can be thought of ‘as a broad and heterogeneous discursive field of action/performance’ (Lau, 2020: 26), which includes movements and groups beyond what has been historically tagged as feminist praxis or theory by academia. For this reason, I will be employing Maxine Molyneux’s term ‘Women’s collective action’ (Molyneux 2001), which brings together the great diversity of women’s movements.

Until the end of the 20th century, the relationship between historical feminists, and indigenous and low-income women was almost inexistente, falling under what Gargallo (2007: 28) terms “colonialist ignorance”. This means that dominant feminist epistemologies ignored or left aside their ties to indigenous histories and racialised identities, “whitening” their struggles (Segato 2013) and following instead the Western feminist hegemonic discourse under the logic of modernity and development. Remembering past, contentious struggles rendered invisible by the coloniality of knowledge and power becomes an essential decolonising task to challenge dominant feminist discourses (Gargallo, 2007). Remembering the forgotten histories becomes a challenge to the status quo. As Wigdor and Artazo suggest:

‘To inquire about Latin American feminist thought has the purpose of contributing to the history of the search for a proper way of naming and knowing who we are as a region. […] to name and narrate their own vision of the world, the Latin American feminist movements have to recognize themselves in their history: a history of resistance to indigenous genocide and slavery, to the violence of colonisation, to the denial of one’s own culture; as well as the inferiorization of their knowledge capacities and compulsive mestizaje’ (Wigdor and Artazo 2017: 194).

The emergence and evolution of the Latin American WCA have been highly influenced by historical processes that have taken place prior to and alongside them. I distinguish three interdependent processes: the modernity/coloniality matrix; authoritarian regimes and dictatorships; and socioeconomic crises product of global capitalism. The feminist struggle of the 1970s, “the second wave”, coincided with the democratic revolutions that were taking place across the region led by low-income urban, indigenous people, and students’ movements. A context marked by the transitions across the region between militarised authoritarian regimes towards democratisation and peace agreements, as well as the development crisis exemplified by the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980s (also known as the lost decade). Thus, these political transitions are tightly connected to the birth of the feminist movements in Latin America, shaping the political strategy they would follow (Lamus Canavate, 2007). In the context of the 1970s, several feminists took it upon themselves to bring women’s demands from the private to the political arena (García and Valdivieso 2006), with “the personal is political” becoming the slogan that characterised this wave. Two main feminist branches gained popularity at this time, the radical separatist branch and those tied to political parties, the militant branch. Their efforts in this political battle led the UN to convene the first World Women’s Conference in 1975.
It was later in the 1980s that academics and activists labeled these struggles as belonging to the “feminist movement”. This denomination fractured the WCA when women from grassroots and autonomous movements rejected the “feminist” label adopted by the urban section of the movement. This fissure is crucial to understanding the diversity of ideologies and political strategies within the WCA and especially when recounting the histories/stories of women and feminist movements across the region as often scholarship fails to present a wide picture of this divergence. The processes of democratisation in the 1980s and the adoption of neoliberal economic structures in the 1990s went alongside an institutionalised feminist narrative of female development informed by Western feminisms (Mendoza, 2008).

By the 1990s, the feminist movements had become deeply intellectualised and institutionalised leading to the development of ‘social policy towards gender equity, women’s gatherings and projects financed by the UN, and the development of microcredit programs for poor women by the World Bank, as well as “official” programs that co-exist with the variety of initiatives of women’s groups in their struggle for autonomy’ (García and Valdivieso, 2006: 43-44). Latin American contemporary hegemonic feminist movements have focussed their struggle on the institutionalisation and inclusion of women’s voices and women’s rights within the political governmental agenda. Amongst their main goals, their focus includes reproductive and sexual rights, with the depenalisation of abortion at the centre; the advancement of policy and law to tackle VAW as a public health and development issue; and finally, female empowerment with the emphasis on equal working rights and economic autonomy as well as political representation and parity, with many countries adopting a gender quota strategy to accomplish this.

Challenging institutional feminism, feminist activist and scholars belonging to the "autonomous” or “grassroots” feminist movement including scholars like Curiel (2015), Mendoza (2008, 2014), and Cusicanqui (2012) warned against the dangers of institutionalising the feminist struggle leading to the State’s translation of the movements within the logics of capital (Dinerstein, 2015). Furthermore, Feminists from the South become accomplices to hegemonic feminisms of the North as they adopt the modernity discourse within their feminist struggle (Espinosa Miñoso, 2009), helping universalise demands under this narrative and ridding subaltern women of their agency to maintain their own privileges within the status quo, re-imposing and leaving unchallenged social divides along the axis of class, race, sexuality, and gender. While engaging with notions of freedom and emancipation, these discourses inevitably reproduce a Eurocentric logic of modernity/coloniality. This is an important fact to highlight as hegemonic feminisms’ dominance of knowledge production has had a great impact on the development of both academic literature and political discourses and in turn, upon the lives of Latin American women. The scholarships developed by indigenous, working-class, and black Latin American women disrupt the privileged feminist narratives that dominate the academy highlighting how “the problems of white bourgeois women, the so-called “desperate housewives” were not and are not representatives of the needs of other women” (see Wigdor and Artazo, 2017 203). Dominant feminist narratives often influenced by Western feminist theory from the liberal and radical branches reproduce women as “vulnerable victims” under a myth of female fragility (Carneiro, 2008), which continues

39 Argentina was the first country in the world to develop a quota law within its legislation in 1991. The Mexican government signed its first law in 1996.
to justify paternalist narratives and political strategies designed by men and privileged middle-class women.

‘Black, indigenous and working-class urban women do not recognise themselves in the feminine fragility myth, as they were never treated as the receivers of this type of protection’ (Wigdor and Artazo, 2017: 203).

We see here much of Lugones (2010) breakdown of those bodies that are worth being considered beautiful, fragile, the white-women bodies, and those destined for hard labour, for violence, the bodies of women of colour whose histories are marked by slavery, precarious labour, and domestic work. So that, ‘when white feminists speak to other women, they do so in terms of educating according to the parameters of their systems of values and needs’ (Bard Wigdor and Artazo, 2017: 205, author’s italics). While I would not dare to imply this is not the case in much of the more institutionalised and intellectualised dominant feminist work, I would argue here, however, that this is slowly changing as feminist movements across Latin America challenge the universalisation of women and patriarchy informed by intersectional and decolonial feminisms, deconstructing the universal woman subject through a critique of racial and ethnic discrimination, class inequality, and imposed heteronormativity (Gargallo, 2007). Their anti-capitalist stance, represented for instance in the Women’s global marches on International Women’s Day, offers a critique of capitalism not only as a system that enforces economic and political exploitation but also as one that reproduces patriarchal and colonial dominations both culturally and symbolically (Lamus Canavate, 2007) (see section 5.2). Feminist economies do not only call for women’s economic autonomy but rather call for the urgent need to develop alternative subjectivities and economies, which place human life and community relations at their centre beyond productivity and wealth accumulation. By shaking the cultural structures imposed by capitalism which keeps women vulnerable and at the margins, (binaries such as public/private, the political/the family, subjective/objective, develop/undeveloped, rich/poor, science/tradition, technology/nature), women in resistance destabilise the core that sustains capitalist logics. This epistemological rebellion is informed and holds indigenous and working-class women’s subjectivities as embodying alternative radical resistances in their day-to-day life.

As a mode of conclusion to this problem, I contend that Latin American feminisms face a double challenge: (1) to recognise their own colonial (self)imposition through narratives of modernisation and development that de valorise indigenous and low-income women and (2) to recognise the value of alternative epistemologies offered by subaltern feminisms (Wigdor and Artazo, 2017).

4.2. Women Making History in Mexico

In my endeavour to offer a synthesise history of the WCA in Mexico, I have questioned the hegemonic narrative reproduced in academia around the “three feminist” waves as linear, “progressive” feminist struggles that appear to envelop most of the Western and much of the Latin American feminist history. As already suggested by Hemmings (2005), reducing women’s historical and translational struggles to these three waves oversimplifies both women’s collective action and feminist thought to these reduced points in history, as well as gives a false account of homogenous thinking across these three waves. From a decolonial viewpoint, this Western-centric reading of feminist
struggles across the globe is always read in connection with, or simply repositioning its trajectory, in accordance with Anglo-American feminist struggles (Hemmings, 2005). These efforts render invisible the diverse epistemologies and ways of resisting that do not fit within the three-wave scheme. In my research of contemporary feminist Mexican history, I have found conflicting accounts in the way academia is already shaping the discourse which does not necessarily correspond with either a linear or “progressing” story (see 4.3). I am, however, unable to escape this imposed trajectory of thought in my recounting of Mexican feminist history, as this was the story that was/is told.

Much of the history of indigenous and grassroots women’s movements have not been extensively documented. Therefore, the history of the WCA in Mexico becomes the history of a Feminist movement led by privileged academics and politicians. I will, therefore, refer to historical feminism as the liberal feminist branch that emerged in the 1960s-70s in the urban areas of Mexico, particularly in the capital, and which was led, and arguably continues to be led, by middle-class feminist academics and of which much has already been written. Gradually, contra-hegemonic research and discourses are emerging situating indigenous and working-class women at their centre (see Muñoz-Saavedra, 2019; Jiménez-Estrada et al., 2020; Millán, 2019; Kuokkanen 2015; Marcos, 2005; Fregoso, 2003). Others are revisiting State constructions of nationalist histories to make visible the crucial role that women in resistance have played in the building of contemporary society. For instance, in the retellings of the Mexican revolution, which has been, until recently, a masculinist narrative of war with men as the protagonists. Although often shunted from history books, the role women played in the 1917 revolution was significant, not only as supportive community members in their roles as wives and mothers taking care of the social reproduction processes but also as political actors as militants and soldiers of the movement as well as spies, nurses, and leaders (Benítez Quintero and Vélez Bautista, 2018).

Some key female revolutionaries include Dolores Jiménez y Muro who helped to write Zapata’s Plan of Ayala40. The first feminist congress (Merida, Yucatan 1916) brought together women to discuss two main concerns: access to education and the right to vote. One of the main developments from the congress was the drafting of the Law on Family Affairs in 1917 by President Carranza which expanded housewives’ rights and husbands’ responsibilities. Hermilla Galindo who was part of the constitutionalist movement, socialist Elvia Carrilo, and communist militant Refugio García were significant figures in the struggle for

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40 The Plan of Ayala, written during the Mexican Revolution, denounced the then President Francisco I. Madero for his perceived betrayal of the revolutionary ideals, calling for and setting out radical land reforms. It was a key document during the revolution as well as a fundamental text for the Zapatistas.
political representation and women’s right to vote, 30 years before the 1953 electoral reform that finally granted Mexican women their full political rights. Other suffragist organisations included Mexican Feminist Council (1919), the Women’s Rights Unique Front (1935) headed by working-class and rural women and formed by 25 different groups, and even the right-wing Synarquist National Union who revendicated traditional gender roles and believed the vote and political participation would give way to doing politics with a “feminine touch” (Torres Falcón, 2019: 206). Some scholars have, however, argued that it was not necessarily the pressure from these grassroots organisations that led to the signing of the 1953 electoral reform but rather a matter of political convenience. As highlighted by Benítez Quintero and Vélez Bautista (2018: 122):

> ‘the presidential candidate [Adolfo Ruiz Cortines] informed that from his perspective women had the right to participate in politics not as a matter of equality of justice, but because from their homes they would help men, they would solve with devotion, work, spiritual and moral strength, problems such as education and social assistance’.

Two main events aid the rising of the second Mexican historical feminist wave: the 1968 student movement in Mexico and the US women’s liberation movement (Serret, 2000). In this decade, feminism was limited to a few small groups from academic and artistic circles in the capital. Urban and middle-class university students came together to discuss women’s inequality in society concerning topics that continued to be key discussions within feminism (Lau, 2020). These include unpaid social reproductive labour, the pay gap, sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, reproductive rights, sexuality, etc. In naming these “individual” oppressions as systemic and common experiences, the feminist movement became political, in search of changing those structures and systems that reproduce women’s subordination and inequality. The social areas under most scrutiny were the home, challenging traditional ideas around family and feminine work; the labour market, looking at women’s precarious working conditions and the pay gap; media, challenging the objectifying narratives around women; the streets/public sphere as an unsafe space; legal discrimination and body autonomy including the enjoyment of sexuality and reproductive rights (Lau, 2020). The increasing inclusion of women in politics and education, as well as the development of cheaper and safer contraceptives, which allowed women to exercise autonomies over their bodies, were some factors that aided the surge of this new wave (ibid).

> ‘A number of technological advances happened at the time, such as when they materialised the pill, transforming for the first time the history of humanity and separating sexual rights from reproductive rights. For the first time, it was absolutely clear that the end of sexuality was not just reproduction. […] I lived that transformation, let me explain it to you in a very reduced example. My mother had 15 children; I am number 13. I had 3, I have two daughters and a son. My oldest daughters have decided not to have children. My eldest is a 24-year-old girl about to finish biology. So, in the space of three generations, another model of being a woman becomes possible. Where her life plan is not defined and depends on the
Some collectives that formed in this decade include Women’s Solidarity Action, the Women’s National Movement, *La Revuelta* Collective, Feminist Struggle, and the Women’s Liberation Movement (Torres Falcón, 2019). They embodied the dominant Western feminist discourses at the time: radical, liberal, and socialist feminisms (Lau, 2020). Inside the movement, there was a reluctance to cooperate with the state, highlighting the dangers of de-radicalisation and co-optation of the movement by state actors and instead choosing to remain autonomous. While there were some attempts to create feminist coalitions and fronts (Lau, 2020), few had significant successes. The first World Women’s Conference was hosted in Mexico City in 1975. Before the conference, the Mexican government made constitutional changes to article 4 which prescribes men’s and women’s equality before the law, but which also ties this equality with the freedoms and protections around family, establishing a legal bond between women’s rights and reproductive rights and responsibilities (Torres Falcón, 2019), simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal, heteronormative logics within the construction of the nation-state. What in the first instance appears to be a won battle towards women’s liberation and emancipation, reinforces hegemonic power dynamics that reproduce women’s subordination. Despite its fragmentation and strategic drawbacks, the second-wave historical feminist movement succeeded in initiating a process of social conscientisation in Mexican society (Serret, 2000).

During the 1970s, popular feminisms started emerging parallel ‘and often in contestation with’ historical feminism (Motta, 2021: 126). In the 1980s, feminism spreads across the country (Espinosa Miñoso, 2009). In 1985, an earthquake shook Mexico City, causing the death of over 5,000 and destroying much of the central area of the capital. This event also uncovered the terrible working conditions women from low-income sectors were subjected to. The addition of women from working-class, rural sectors as well as indigenous women led to the birth of a Mexican WCA that included topics regarding demands around ethnicity and class, during which the term “feminist” became stigmatised, challenging conceptualisations such as “equality” that was the forging force behind the historical feminist movement. Their struggle became centred around their demands for justice against the violence inflicted upon their families, and the ever-growing crisis of social reproduction product of neoliberal restructuring (Motta, 2021). The WCA drifted between the privileged historical feminism and the grassroots feminist branches (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016). In this decade, some feminist groups commenced registering as civic societies to receive economic support from international organisations (Torres Falcón, 2019). This blurred the autonomy lines that previously characterised the historical feminist movement (Lau, 2020). Tensions also mounted as a result of the increasing intellectualisation and institutionalisation of liberal feminist branches that began establishing a dialogue with the state and national/international agencies. Up until that point, state cooperation was seen as almost traitorous. Female legislators commenced working alongside some feminist groups, some of whom had been themselves part of the

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41 Some popular feminist magazines at the time were edited by members of the WLM such as La Revuelta (1976-1978) and fem magazine (1976-2005). Others include La Boletina (1982), La Correa feminista (1992-1007) and debate feminista (1990-2014).

42 Article 4 of the Mexican constitution reads: ‘Man and woman are equal under the law. The law shall protect the organisation and development of the family. Every person has the right to decide, in a free, responsible and informed manner, about the number of children desired and the timing between each of them.’
movements. Towards the end of the decade, the institutionalised feminist movement had opened and established the Women’s Institutes (INMUJERES), as well as fighting for the drafting of a quota law for female participation in government. Agencies such as the Centre for Orientation and Support of Rape Victims (1986) or the Centre for Support Therapies for Women Victims of Rape were established at this time.

Two main events took place in the 1990s which had a great impact on the Mexican WCA, and which broke away from the privileged institutional, intellectualised feminism which dominated at the time: the Zapatista uprising and the growing crisis of feminicides in Juárez.

Violence Against Women (VAW) has always been a key topic of concern within the Mexican WCA from its beginnings, focussing on legislative reforms and access to specialised legal, psychological support and protection for women victims of domestic violence, rape, or sexual harassment (Torres Falcón, 2019; Perea Ozerin, 2017). In 1994, the first official case of feminicide was registered in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (ibid). From then, feminicide rates continued to skyrocket. Academics Julia Monárrez Fragoso and Marcela Lagarde became key figures at the time in the visibilisation of this violence (García-del Moral and Neumann, 2019). In March 1999, black crosses on pink background started appearing throughout Juárez (Fregoso, 2003). The crosses were painted in protest at the hundreds of women who had been abducted, tortured, raped, and then murdered and whose bodies had been left in the middle of the street, a dump, or the desert. Voces sin Eco (Voices without echo), a grassroots group of families of the murdered women, were responsible for these crosses. ‘In painting the crosses in public spaces, Voces sin Eco forged a new public identity for women, claiming public space for them as citizens of the nation’ (Fregoso, 2003: 21). These initial movements of protest and resistance have become a permanent presence in the public spaces of Ciudad Juárez and have transcended it, with several “colectivas” (collectives) embodying this struggle across the country, as a response to the ever-rising levels of economic, political and social violence.

Liberal Mexican feminists during the 1980s and 1990s allied with the left to tackle the growing crisis of VAW and feminicide across the country, giving way to the figure of the feminist femocrats (Lau, 2020; García-del Moral, 2020). Marcela Lagarde became a congresswoman and key actor in the shaping of the legal conceptualisation of feminicide. The femocrats’ struggle, however, is problematic as they framed the ongoing crisis of VAW as the failure of the Mexican state to become a “modern” State (García-del Moral and Naumann, 2019). That is, as an issue of “underdevelopment”. While there are some weak attempts to create a link to women in low-income sectors, these were often from a privileged, vertical position that homogenised women’s demands of class and gender struggled through an institutionalised discourse. The main emphasis was, at the time, the passing and drafting of laws to address female discrimination without a dialogue with these women (García-del Moral, 2020). Institutional feminist branches consolidated this battle against VAW and feminicide in the drafting of two main laws: The General Act on Equality between Women and Men in 2006 and the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence enacted in 2007 (see chapter 2).

43 From here on referred simply as Monárrez to avoid any confusion with Rosa-Linda Fregoso.
44 Voces sin Eco was the first organisation in Juárez to fight against the rise of feminicide and was formed solely by families of victims. It first emerged in 1998 and closed its doors in 2001 (Pérez García, 2005).
45 Female politicians involved in women’s rights or gender-focus policy advocacy often under a ‘feminist agenda’
Following Rodríguez’s (2014) analysis of gender-focus public policy developed in the 1990s, I argue that these framings reproduced by institutional feminists continue to fall under three main fallacies. Firstly, the assumption that women’s emancipation is a causal, linear product of modernisation. Secondly, it follows from conceptualisations of development imposed by international Western-led organisations, such as the female empowerment and development UN indexes that quantify education, illiteracy, labour-market participation, as key development drivers. Finally, these two presumptions lead to the reproduction of the figure of the “poor, uneducated third world woman” in need of being rescued from her own subordinating, under-developed culture. Under these three fallacies, women’s emancipation ‘appears to be inextricably tied to modernisation and Westernisation processes’ (Rodríguez, 2014: 6). I consider this institutional feminist stance as part of what Mohanty (1988) denominates “discursive colonisation” that transcends the academy to infiltrate into political processes, reproducing and imposing Western feminist ideologies upon the bodies of indigenous, racialised, working-class women.

Source: Federación Anarquista (2021)

In direct contrast to these narratives, that same decade, and a year before the 1994 uprising, indigenous Zapatista women elaborated and drafted the Revolutionary Women’s Law⁴⁶ on the 8th of March 1993, published in the Mexican Awakening⁴⁷. The next year, Mexican historical feminists turn their heads to the Zapatista⁴⁸ uprising, with indigenous women becoming important figures in the feminist struggle, inspiring young feminists today. This bond has amplified in the last five years, as indigenous women congregate with feminists from across the country in the Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres que Luchan (International gathering of women who struggle), which took place in 2019 and 2020, both attended by thousands of women. This bond has also materialised in the latest mobilisations of 2021 with the concrete example of the rotonda de las mujeres que luchan (see section 4.3).

In both of these struggles, we can see strategies of community resistance against the violent processes of capitalist modernity, challenging the ever more dehumanising and alienating reality of neoliberal economies, through community building and in turn creating alternative social relations to the present. By 2002, a new coalition of feminist

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⁴⁶ The law consisted of ten articles that outlines how women regardless of their race, creed, colour, or political affiliation were part of the revolutionary struggle. Within this struggle, they have the rights to work and receive a fair wage, to have ownership over their own bodies, to participate in community affairs and hold office, to access to healthcare and education, as well as offering protections against domestic violence and forced marriage.

⁴⁷ Zapatista Online Newsletter

⁴⁸ The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), often referred to as the Zapatistas is a libertarian socialist political and militant group that controls a considerable amount of territory in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico.
activists came together under the campaign “¡Ni Una Más!” The ¡Ni Una Más! campaign not only focuses on raising awareness of these crimes and their victims, but they are also protesting the lack of accountability, the widespread impunity, and political disregard that these crimes present at all levels of government (Wright, 2010). This movement has only grown in the last decade as NGOs, women’s collectives, syndicates, and human rights organisations come together to protest against the continuous government lack of accountability and relentless dismissal of the growing crisis.

“What we have witnessed in the last few years is women’s accumulated suffering against the violence they experience and their disdain towards the harassment, femicide and brutal treatment they receive every day” (Renata, Pan y Rosas).

In this section, I have recapitulated a dense history of the feminised resistance in Mexico following the limited academic literature on the same (see 3.3.2). In the following sections, I recount a more concrete, yet partial, history of the contemporary WCA in Mexico City over the past five years. With this task in mind, I hope to shine some light on the need to engage with subaltern women’s struggles as part of the plural and extensive ways Mexican women resist which do not necessarily fall under pre-established boundaries of feminist thinking or doing, but which nevertheless are part of the same fight, towards a dignified life, free of violence.

4.3. The Contemporary Women’s Collective Action in Mexico City

Current works that have looked to analyse the contemporary WCA in Mexico have placed special emphasis on the year 2019/2020 as “the new boom” of feminism in Mexico, with analysis focussing on Mexico City in particular (Cerva Cerna 2020a, 2020b; Álvarez Enríquez, 2020). Originally, I had also placed my analysis on this year as my attendance at previous marches and what I had read on the movement until that point indicated this was indeed the year where feminist mobilising in the capital was widespread. However, on my last trip to Mexico City, I was confronted by two activists on different occasions who argued the rise of feminism long predates 2019, instead of locating its latest growth in 2016:

The 24A in Mexico was like a turning point for the feminist movement in CDMX and the country in general. Girls from CDMX and the periphery met for months at the metropolitan assembly. On the 24th of April 2016, we were convening a great march starting in Ecatepec and ending in CDMX. First, a caravan in buses as moving in the periphery is dangerous. The idea was to go by bus to the monument of the revolution but they did not let us enter so we took the popular metro. Some arrived by hidalgo metro, others made the transfer. At the monument of the revolution, we met our contingents and a small march began towards the angel of independence. After the angel, we went there to the Zócalo. And there were a lot of us, even more than at the last international women’s day march. Most of us are already close to 40....
Why had we instead then placed 2019/2020 as a distinctive year? I can only presume this is a product of what Hemmings (2005) considers to be feminist literature’s tendencies of creating linear and progressive timelines of feminist mobilising always in reference to the West. In this case, the mobilisations in Mexico were situated parallel to the #metoo movement in the US which elicited a reactive response in Mexico. However, this was far from its first great mobilisation.

At the international level, the recent wave of women’s movements across Latin America and the US have had a significant impact on the development of Mexico’s own WCA. Specifically, movements in Argentina, Chile, and the US. From 2018 until its official legalisation in 2021, Argentina’s green tide (Marea Verde), the women’s movement demanding free and safe abortions and reproductive rights has had an immense impact across Latin American countries. In Mexico, university-educated young women commenced organising collectively under the demand of reproductive rights, seeking agency and autonomy over their bodies. In 2019, women’s mobilisations in the US under the umbrella of the #metoo movement echoed loudly in the consciousness of the Mexican women’s own experiences. With hundreds of thousands of stories of women retelling the violences, they experience daily.

Stories of sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, kidnappings, trafficking, and gender discrimination in all social spheres, “private” (home, family) as well as public (school, work, the streets) (Álvarez Enríquez, 2020). While social media was a crucial platform for this movement’s rise, Mexican students commenced congregating in physical spaces to share their experiences and accuse their abusers in events known as tendederos (clothe line). Similarly, a new feminist anthem created by a Chilean feminist collective, Las tesis, has resonated across both Latin America and the West with performances of Un violador en tu camino (A rapist in your path) taking place across the globe. In Mexico, university students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) organised several events to act out said performance (find the original and translated poem in Appendix VI). The rapid growth of the WCA can therefore be explained, in part, by the increased popularity of feminism within schools, universities, and other educational spaces (Cerva Cerna 2020b). This also explains the fact that the contemporary WCA in Mexico is visibly headed by mostly university-educated young women (18-23) (Álvarez Enríquez, 2020).

While the international WCA has had an impact on the movement, several events were decisive in the booming and shaping of the present WCA in Mexico.

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Miranda was an 18-year-old student from UNAM’s Plantel Oriente College of Sciences and Humanities (CCH). Miranda was seen for the last time on August 20, when she left the school located in Iztapalapa, Mexico City. She did not come back home. Her relatives received a call, where kidnappers demanded a payment of 5 million pesos, to release her, but no economic negotiation was finalised. She was found dead the next day.
Mexico City, especially within university spaces. In 2017, the killings of two UNAM female students, Lesvy Berlin Osorio and Miranda Mendoza Flores led to a coalition of a female student movement with the families of the victims, demanding justice, and policy reforms at the institutional level to address the continuous violence experienced by female students by both other male students and male university staff and professors. Over 70 students and professors were accused of inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment, and rape. Stories of sexual violence in the faculty premises and the subsequent inaction by institutional authorities were far too common amongst the groups I had the opportunity to work with. Mobilisations inside the universities as well as on the streets began gaining traction due to the lack of governmental and institutional response to their demands. These mobilisations escalated in 2019 when feminist collectives from several university faculties and high schools took over campus premises for several months demanding to be heard.

‘In the Philosophy and Humanities faculty, the maximum punishment that is given in case of rape is of one-week suspension. One week. They don’t fire teachers, they don’t do a psychological follow-up on the victim, victims don’t receive any support from the authorities... and so you end up thinking “I better don’t file a complaint because it’s useless”. You feel helpless. The same authorities that are meant to be protecting you, ignore you and support your rapist. There should be a way for a female student to not have to share a classroom with their aggressor’ (Stephanie, 21 - Independent feminist).

The case of Lesvy has been emblematic within the feminist movement to bring to light the corruption and discrimination women endure in the judicial system. Lesvy was a Mexican student killed on the 3rd of May 2017 within the premises of UNAM. The university’s dean denied Lesvy was a student at the university, and instead argued she was trespassing and probably part of some local gang. At first, her death was ruled as a suicide by local authorities, blaming Lesvy for consuming drugs and alcohol. It was only due to her mother’s insistence that the police looked further into her death. Security camera footage from the university showed Lesvy being murdered in a telephone booth at the hands of her boyfriend. On the 10th of April 2018, Lesvy's murder was reclassified as a feminicide under aggravating circumstances. He was condemned to 45 years in prison. Two years after her murder, the government of Mexico City apologised for the failures in the investigation. The UNAM has yet to offer an official apology to the family. Her mother, Araceli Osorio, has become a key figure within the WCA in Mexico.

Source: Toxqui (2019)
It is vital to highlight, however, that the contemporary WCA across Mexico City does not limit itself to the university space. Several mobilisations have taken place in the capital city centre. WCA is reclaiming the public space, from which women have been historically excluded or taught to be wary. The popularly known _marcha de la diamantina_ (the glitter march) was the key event that became the foundation for the WCA’s rebuilding of a new “feminist identity” (Cerva Cerna, 2020a). In mid-August 2019, after two cases of rape of underage girls came to light by law enforcement officers, female protesters gathered at the Secretariat of Citizen Security (SSC) and the Attorney General’s Office (PGJ) of Mexico City to denounce #NoMeCuidanMeViolan (#theydon’tprotectmetheyrapeme). A protester threw pink glitter at Jesús Orta, the capital’s police chief. The hashtag #nomecuidanmeviolan trended on social media platforms and women’s protests involving “direct action” were popularised. The catalyst of this new feminist protest strategy was further illustrated on the 25th of November, on VAW day, as activists painted over emblematic city monuments (see section 5.2.) Photographs and videos of feminist protesters breaking and painting over monuments plagued the news media. A new feminist fervour began to grow in the university spaces with trending hashtags such as #metoo and #yotecreo (#Ibelieveyou). A new feminist figure was born ‘diversified and equally different from previous feminisms, without a specific and unified leadership, with demands focused on gender-based violence, in this case against women, but with derivations and implications in other areas of feminism and the condition of gender inequality, and with a very “particular”, direct and confrontational language’ (Álvarez Enríquez, 2020: 149).

![Gathering and protest before Ingrid Escamilla’s flat where her murder took place (Colonia Vallejo, Gustavo A. Madero, 16th of February 2020)](image)

In 2020, two critical events took place: the marches for the femicide cases of Ingrid Escamilla and Fatima Varinia Quintana Gutiérrez; and the taking of the National Commission of Human Rights in the capital. In February 2020, two weeks after my arrival in Mexico City, one of the most horrendous femicides to happen in the capital took place: the killing of Ingrid Escamilla. On the 9th of February 2020, Ingrid was murdered by her partner in their home. As already explored in section 2.4, this case is representative of the failure, impunity, and devaluation of women in Mexican society, both by the way this murder was investigated by police officers and secondly, by the news media’s
immediate response of sharing and profiting from this violence. The outrage of these events fuelled the WCA to unite in two separate protests. On the 15th of February which took place in the centre of the capital and the 16th, convened by Ingrid’s relatives who gathered around Ingrid’s flat in the outskirt neighbourhood of Gustavo A. Madero. Yesenia Zamudio, the mother of María de Jesús Jaime Zamudio a victim of feminicide, gave a speech to the camera crews from the protest on the 16th, which spread on social media:

‘Stop profiting from our pain. Yes, you see me in black and very radical, and if I burn and break and make a fucking mess of this city, what is your fucking problem? They killed my daughter. I am not a collective, nor do I need a drum, nor do I need a fucking political party to represent me. I represent myself alone and without a microphone. I am a mother whose daughter was killed, I am an empowered and feminist mother. Estoy que me caga la chingada [the translation is very loosely equivalent to I have had enough]. I have every right to burn and break. I'm not going to ask anyone's permission because I'm breaking for my daughter. And the one who wants to break, let her break. The one who wants to burn, let her burn. And the one who doesn't, do not get in our way. Because before they murdered my daughter, they had murdered many, many more. And where were we all? At ease, in our house, crying and embroidering. No longer, gentlemen. It's over. We have broken the silence and we are not going to allow them to make a damn circus out of our pain’.

International Women’s Day 2020 Mexico City

The 2020 International Women’s Day protest on the 8th of March was attended by an estimated 100,000 women in the centre of Mexico City belonging to numerous collectives, independent feminists, working-class women, families of the victims, indigenous women, LGBT+ feminist groups, sex workers, etc. A small stage was set in the Zocalo (The capital’s centre square) where some collectives were reading their manifestos, some groups danced and sang, others broke and burned the barrier that had been put up to protect the palace.

‘For many years feminism was very white, and it started from one side as “we are all equal”, “we all want the same”, “we
think the same” [...] although I do not agree with all ideologies of all diversities, regardless of whether or not you agree, what is good is to begin to consider that feminism is not one. And that we cannot speak for all women’ (Andrea, 31 - ACTO).

International Women’s Day 2020, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl

I also had the opportunity to attend the march congregated in Colonia Neza, the State of Mexico that same morning where the number of feminists that had gathered overwhelmed the, often, much less attended march. The main monument (La Escultura Cabeza de Coyote) where we had gathered had been enveloped by the embroidered stories of victims of femicide, disappearances, and kidnappings. The histories of women shared one space. The march started with an indigenous ritual to honour the victims, the community came together with the families of the victims, and young women dared burn a car wheel in what was generally considered an unsafe space (see section 7.7.2.)

Just when the movement was at its strongest, the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak hit. On 23rd March, the government declared a national lockdown. This led to a rise in domestic violence rates. Women continued organising collectively through social media platforms, creating networks of solidarity to aid those most affected by the pandemic (see Ventura Alfaro, 2020). On the 2nd of September, a group of relatives of victims of sexual abuse and forced disappearance was received at one of the NHRC offices in Mexico City located in the Historic Center. In protest at the lack of response and action from authorities, Marcela Alemán, whose underaged daughter was raped, tied herself to a chair and Silvia Castillo, whose son was murdered, refused to leave. Castillo slept and remained within the premises on the 2nd and 3rd of September. On the 4th, independent feminists from the periphery and the women’s collective “Ni una Menos” Mexico took the premises of the NHRC, indicating they would not leave until the cases were solved. On September 10, they took over a second NHRC headquarters in Ecatepec demanding the resignation of the heads of the Municipal Institute for Women (Grisel Barrientos) and the Justice Center for Women (Sandra Pacheco). The next day, police officers stormed the headquarters in Ecatepec. At least eleven women were arrested. Later in the day, the activists protested the eviction by burning down the offices of the NHRC in the neighbourhood. The offices located in the historic centre were renamed the Centro Okupa, turning the offices into a shelter for women victims of violence, providing accompaniment services, legal advice, food, and lodging. I explore this Okupa in full in section 8.1.
In 2021’s International Women’s Day march, hundreds of thousands of women took to the streets once again. However, the number significantly dwindled from the previous year’s success due to, partly, the deceleration of the movement during the pandemic. I consider the images and actions from this march’s beginning and end to be symbolic of the hurt, pain, and anger that continue to fuel the movement. Independent feminists had gathered the day before the march, to draw on the so-called “peace barrier” the names of the victims of feminicide from the past year. Women gathered around the metal wall on the morning of the march, placing flowers, embroidery, and paintings on the barrier. This was an exercise of despair and Hope for healing, a sharing of grief and anguish at the continued violence. At the end of the march, this anguish had translated to rage with protesters tramping over the wall and setting on fire their creation.

The latest march in 2022 was massively attended with estimates of over 80,000 women coming together to commemorate the day. They followed the usual protest route\(^49\). They

\(^{49}\) From the Monumento a la Revolucion through to the Angel of the independence and Art Museum, finalising in front of the National Palace.
also gathered around a newly founded Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan (the roundabout of women who fight), previously known as the Columbus monument (see section 5.2.2). In this march, protesters were met with intensified police repression and harassment (see section 7.1.3.).

**Conclusion**

As argued throughout this chapter, the WCA in Mexico is far from a homogenous, united front with clear demands and common epistemologies. Aside from their struggle towards a more “dignified” life, free of violence, there is little consensus across collectives (Phillips and Cole, 2009). There is little written to date on the contemporary WCA taking over Mexico with research focusing mainly on the radical feminist student movement, direct action, and the criminalisation of protest (see Álvarez, 2020; Cerva Cerna 2020a; 2020b). This work often focuses on struggles in the capital and centre of the capital. As a way of disrupting these narratives, I call for a need to engage with the work of those collectives from the periphery and subaltern feminisms who work with the community in the rebuilding of new, more just societies. While I believe this action to be crucial to gain new understandings and shape praxis towards the rebuilding of this new society, this is not to take away from the current powerful movement that exists in the capital and across the country. As I argue throughout this thesis, the different political strategies and mobilisations taking place in Mexico City and across states regardless of their feminist “surname” or typology are working in the dismantling of violent hegemonic structures. The women’s movement is present and growing across the country, within different workspaces, schools, and communities. In one way or another, and anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial movement is being fostered amongst diverse groups of women.
Preface to analysis

I understand all those actions, emotions, knowledges, epistemologies, and new ways of doing, living, and relating embodied by the WCA in Mexico City as part of the new wave of Hope movements (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012). I challenge the traditional epistemological analysis of social movement theory by utilising a body-mind-spirit framework (Trinidad Galván, 2016; Lara, 2002) and informed by Ahmed’s (2004) politics of affection to grasp the transformative power of WCA. By analysing emotions as cultural practices rather than psychological states (Ahmed, 2004) – as affects-, we can understand the intricate and at times contradictory reciprocal emotions (Jasper, 2014) on the inside and outside of women’s movements. Although I engage with both the literatures on affection and politics of emotion, I chose the term affect to highlight the relational nature of these feelings – how actions affect one another as well as the individual. ‘Emotion as an analytical concept still bears the specter of a psychological individualism’ (Richard and Rudnyckyj, 2009:59). Similarly, by analysing the movements’ praxis through the body-mind-spirit framework I go beyond the body/mind cartesian dichotomy and instead understand the body as the primary personal/collective ground in the healing, re-imagining, and (re)building process of new relationships of doing, living, and being.

The following chapters (5, 6, 7, 8) are structured to address each of the stages present in my analytical framework, the Process in the Creation of Alternatives, presented in chapter 3. In social movement theory, emotions are key in the analysis of the movements’ evolution including its emergence, maintenance, decline, splitting, and dissolution (Gravante, 2020; Page and Arcy, 2019; Poma and Gravante, 2017; Włodarczyk et al., 2017; Jasper, 2012, 2014; Woods, et al. 2012; Bosco, 2006; Flam, 2005; Holmes, 2004; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta., 2001; Taylor, 1996; Hochschild, 1979, 1975). This has allowed for an in-depth understanding of both inter, as much as intra politics of the movement, by which I mean, whether they gain strength or decline but also the internal tensions and divides that can break a movement. I make use of this extensive body of literature and place it in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015), complementing my analysis and examining them through each mode of the Process of Creation of Alternatives. As previously highlighted, these are not linear, independent stages but often occur simultaneously, out of “order” and in contradiction. I have, however, divided these as distinctly as possible for analytical ease. These stages include negating/mobilising through anger and fear; creating/healing through affection, solidarity, and Hope; facing disappointment and frustrations when engaging with the state and society; and finally, anticipating other realities that have not yet materialised through generational excess and community weavings. Some emotions can be found in two or more modes of autonomy such as anger and empathy as, like the process of autonomy, these emotions cannot be treated as unifactorial. I also go beyond the affections expressed at the interior of the WCA by exploring reactive social emotions of fear and anger in the community as well as feelings of frustration and distrust embodied by the WCA against state actors (see chapter 7).

Ahmed’s work is informed by Hochschild's (1975, 1979) work on the cultural construction of emotion. Hochschild argues emotions are social constructs in that they function according to a specific social context depending on the historical, geopolitical, sociocultural dynamics of the same, and juxtaposes the previous universalisation of emotion as internal biological states.
In this chapter, I explore mobilising strategies through short-term direct action and protest. This is the first stage in the creation of alternatives led by the Women’s Collective Action (WCA) as part of their struggle against violent hegemonies. WCA challenge and resist the present reality of capitalist modernity which is imposed and mediated with the help of the state/nation. In this chapter, I pay special attention to a form of protest that has been popularised within the contemporary WCA: short-term direct action. In this exploration, I contend the need to employ a mind-body-spirit framework in our analysis of direct action, to fully comprehend its corporeal/territorial dimensions. I follow this with an examination of the multifactorial uses of anger. The emotion of anger is of crucial importance in analysing the WCA’s mobilising power as well as prefigurative potential (Ost, 2004). Firstly, I examine the importance of anger in the creation of bonds inside the WCA. Inside the WCA individual fear and anger against daily violence and pain are transformed into collective anger against an unjust system (Jasper, 1998). I explore how this anger can heal and transform the personal and collective body-mind-spirit. However, I also highlight its dangers, as raw anger on its own is not inherently emancipatory and can become corrupted by an immobile hatred. While centre/periphery divides do have an impact on the form of direct action that can take place in the areas (see section 7.2.2.), “short term” direct action has popularised across the nation, beyond Mexico City, and is increasingly widespread in peripheral regions.

5.1. “Short Term” Direct action as a Method of Protest for Reclaiming Spaces

I understand direct action as an amalgam of embodied resistances including graffitiing, civil disobedience, squatting, seizure of government buildings, community projects, etc.

51 The employment of direct action long pre-dates the contemporary WCA in Mexico (Rebon and Pérez, 2012). Before its official definition in academia, direct action has always been embodied by resisting bodies. In the 1920s, direct action was employed by industrial workers in the US and the UK who sought to escape the confines of the capitalist state. Most notably, it ‘officially’ came to be known through the
all of which have a commonality: these actions are prefigurative in nature. As Maeckelbergh (2011: 4) argues ‘practicing Prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present’. Direct action must be prefigurative as (an)other worlds are being built in the present through doing (Epstein, 1991; Franks, 2003). It is an active project of transformation of social relationships and the construction of community through solidarity (Breines, 1989 cited in Yates, 2015). The protester disrupts the status quo, the daily unaltered lives of those around them through their physical personal/collective presence.

Direct action is certainly not new to Mexican social movements, with the EZLN having long embodied this strategy before and after the 1992 uprising. Other movements such as the Ayotzinapa movement and other indigenous territorial struggles have also used direct action in the capital context (Rebon and Pérez, 2012). The main difference here is that now it is women who are at the forefront of this struggle, embodying a form of “aggressive” resistance.

‘We used to be very few and suddenly they [the anarcho- feminists] arrived in a huge pack, and they started breaking everything, setting things on fire. I think this action is very

letters from prison from Dr Martin Luther King Jr. (Kauffman, 2017) in his ‘six steps to non-violent direct action’. To Dr King direct action ‘are actions taken to convince others to work with you in resolving the injustices. Direct action imposes a “creative tension” into the conflict. Direct action is most effective when it illustrates the injustice it seeks to correct’.

32 On the 26th of September 2014, 43 trainee teachers in the State of Guerrero in the rural area of Ayotzinapa were disappeared. Seven people died. Their bodies were never found. Government investigations claim the students were forcibly taken into custody by the police, handed to a local OCG and most likely killed (Wright, 2017). This event brought to light systemic economic, educational, social and racial inequalities that are at the very root of the Mexican political structure. Outranged citizens across Mexico took to the streets, forming social movements against the governments use of violence with impunity.
necessary to make our movement visible. Because we have been working for years, but we have never been listened to. Until now (Independent feminist, 31).

‘I mean, all the damage we do bothers them more than the women who are being murdered. It’s terrible! So yes, what we say is that we are going to stop breaking and burning and destroying when they stop killing us. Meanwhile, let everything burn. We are tired and we will not allow it to continue’ (Black bloc feminist, 25).

As briefly explored in section 4.3, in the last two years, the WCA has increasingly made use of direct action as a method of protest. Under the umbrella of anarcha-feminism and radical feminism, what I term “short term” direct action, has been popularised. Feminists who choose to be involved in short-term direct action through the destruction of property often cover their faces with a mask, wear black clothes and carry with them either spray paint or objects like hammers or tasers. They do not belong to a particular collective, nor do they fall under one ideological umbrella. They are known as the “black bloc” in the marches. This new language of protest has been developed by what Álvarez Enríquez (2020) considers “a new feminist actor”, who does not abide by liberal, institutional feminist logics of negotiation or dialogue with state or political actors, but demands, and violently protests so that there is true “radical” change to legislation and state action. Direct action has become a highly politicised topic of debate, dividing politicians, the media, insiders, and outsiders to the movement. While black bloc feminists do not engage in direct negotiations with the State (Cerva Cerna, 2020), viewing the nation/state as a violent actor which reproduces oppressive structures, their demands continue to be directed at the state, insisting on further punitive measures to address increasing rates of VAW and feminicide. This contradiction does not go unnoticed by the women’s collectives from the periphery:

‘What white feminism is doing now, it seems to me, is co-opting the discourse of radical feminism. For example, in the last marches they use direct action, but the demands continue to be within the state framework. I mean, they are demanding security, they are demanding reforms to the constitution, and it is very weird because then you see compañeras who assume themselves as radical feminists, but with liberal demands. Anarch feminism burning things but with completely different demands, right? The discourse is completely co-opted, but not only the discourse but even the form of protest as well as the action and the demonstrations’ (Carmen, 29 - Insubordinadas).

This inconsistency is further explored in section 7.1 when examining the negotiations of the WCA’s autonomy with the state. In the next sections, I uncover the counterhegemonic power of short-term direct action (Viera and Salas, 2020) in relation to three main notions: by producing a mind-body-spirit individual and community healing; by learning from the transformative power of anger; and finally, by disrupting histories by intervening with monuments. Finally, I explore the countermovement arising in society as a fearful response to this action.
5.2 Reading direct action as body-mind-spirit healing

Throughout the following sections, I highlight the importance of understanding direct action and protest from a mind-body-spirit, corporeal/territorial framework to fully grasp the transformational power of prefigurative short-term direct action and emotions in WCA. Although much has been written on the history of direct action and the place of the body in protest, not much attention has been paid to the embodiment and spatiality of the emotions felt when performing direct action. There is little examination as to how this body-mind-spirit is experienced in action (Woods et al., 2012; Scribano, 2012). Even pioneer of the social movement study of emotions Jasper (2012) highlights this problematic:

‘The nascent subfield of emotions in movements has been constrained by various conceptual confusions that are reflected in the broader social sciences of emotions. The first problem lies in the fact that the traditional -but unsustainable- contrast between emotions and rationality persists in the form of other dualisms such as body and mind, individual and social, or affection and emotion (Massumi. 2002). It is necessary to recognize that feeling and thinking are parallel processes of evaluation and interaction of our worlds’ (Jasper, 2012: 47).

Place, territories, are integral to our experiences, or as Casey puts it ‘there is no place without self and no self without place’ (2004: 525, cited by Woods et al., 2012). It is no coincidence that the WCA decided to protest by the Angel of the independence, the Monumento of the Revolution, or the National Palace. All three important landmarks in the centre which are often occupied by diverse protests. It is also no surprise that much of the internal politics of the WCA in Mexico City are in relation to centre/periphery geographies (see chapter 7). The body-mind-spirit is tied to the contexts which are central to its struggle. Similar to the lack of territorial/body dimensions in the study of direct action, while the literature on body politics has extensively researched bodies, embodiment, and emotions, it has ‘often forgotten the spatial dimension’ (Gollaz Morán, 2022). The place of struggle is marked by and marks the protester’s body-mind-spirit and action.

Authors such as Bosco (2006), through the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo movement in Argentina, and González Hernández (2017), through the social protest of Ayotzinapa, have examined the geopolitics of body/territory by highlighting the symbolic spaces occupied by the protesters, public, popular spaces to embody and make visible the violences they were suffering and struggling against. Granados Sevilla (2019) offers an interesting analysis of protest in Mexico City through an analysis of the body of the protester from a sound-emotional framework. I, therefore, analyse WCA’s prefigurative action and emotions from a mind-body-spirit, corporeal/territorial framework to understand how protesters put their bodies on the line. To do so, I borrow here Aguiluz-Ibargüen’s (2014) conceptualisation of the extended body to understand the body in protest. The extended body is a living being that enjoys sensoriality, emotion, and cognition. It is a subject with the agency to act, to change the social reality it resides in. Through the occupation of spaces, the body in protest participates in the (re)building of alternative worlds in the present, which alongside other bodies, as a collective body, seeks
social transformation. Thus, the individual/social body’s capacity for change lies in action (ibid). This struggle becomes a dual process of negating/affirming. They negate the material reality given, affirming the notion that (an)other worlds where women can live with dignity and without fear are possible. This process of negating the heteropatriarchal, racist capitalist order contains new possibilities. In this chapter, I relay the embodied feelings and affections expressed by black bloc activists who, in their majority, engage in short-term direct action through the destruction of public and private property.

For the WCA activists, claiming/reclaiming the public space is part of their struggle as social subjects. They are reclaiming their valid spaces in the realms of politics, the economy, and society but also the territories and spaces they inhabit and navigate on the daily. The marches and other spaces created by the WCA are physical spaces of resistance, of community building and healing, of questioning, deconstruction, and learning, of connecting. Through this resistance, a new collective political subject is being built. A political subject whose body is marked by discrimination, inequality, and violence but a resisting body.

‘Political resistance involves first and foremost, putting the material body in action to affect the course of society. […] poner el cuerpo means not just to talk think or decide but to be present and involved; to put the whole (embodied) being into action, to be committed to a social cause, and to assume the bodily risks, work, and demands of such commitment’ (Sutton, 2007: 130).

Through the strategy of “poner el cuerpo”, this body in resistance reaffirms itself in the public space and makes it its own, sometimes materially through graffiti, other times symbolically through dance, singing, and performances, disrupting normative notions of female embodiment. The body of the protester becomes part of a collective body that struggles together, becomes tired, thirsty, angry, ecstatic. In Appendix VIII, I offer an in-depth example of my own experiences of “poner el cuerpo” as a researcher during the International Women’s Day March 2020, how physically and emotionally exhausting this action becomes.

‘Feelings, emotions, lived and living experiences of oppression and resistance, even bodily secretions such as adrenaline and sweat, are brought directly to bear upon a political struggle. Theirs is the “hot” struggle of passions, far removed from the tepid bodies and deliberating “Cartesian heads” of institutional politics’ (Peterson, 2001: 69, cited in Sutton, 2007: 139).

It was evident from my numerous encounters and conversations with black bloc feminists that they utilised this method of protest almost as an ecstatic, cathartic practice. A concrete example of this is a black bloc activist recounting the first time she was ever involved in short-term direct action: ‘When I grabbed the hammer and I hit the monument with all my strength, it was like a very strong shock, it made me want to cry’. The fear and anger from their daily experience of violence accumulated in their body and was liberated through this action. Emotions ran high during the protest and the body of the activist shared their material body-mind-spirit to become part of the collective, of the territories they inhabited and resisted in. In this praxis, I argue ‘they centred the struggle for enfleshed sovereignty
over the territories of the body and the body of the land as a praxis of healing liberation’ (Motta, 2021: 125). In the feminist circles, I had the opportunity to attend, it was common to hear that going to the marches to break felt like “going to the therapist”.

‘For me, the march is also a way to reappropriate joy, right? As part of social movements. You are there to get angry, you are there to scream. You are there to burn everything because they are killing women. They are killing your sisters. But you are also there to enjoy yourself among women. To have a good time. To run. To feel the euphoria with your friends’ (Group discussion, Bosque de Chapultepec).

For many, the release of these negative feelings into concrete corporeal actions was a joyful, collective experience. It transformed individual anguish into action full of Hope. In the process, activists re-appropriate the public sphere as well as the discourse and exercise of violence and feelings of anger and fear against the state and society. As argued by Holmes (2004; 214)

‘being angry is not simply a calculated attack but usually felt as a sensation that engulfs body and mind… Angriness challenges social control and negotiating anger is not about a presentation of self but about the sometimes surprising and moving production and resistance of relations of power and respect’.

There is a negotiation or a translation of affection in this practice. It is in the conflict zone that shapes the borders of the collective bodies (Ahmed, 2015) deciding who stays in and who belongs outside of the collective. In other words, ‘the politics of emotion creates social and cultural Others through the generation of affect and constitution of subjectivities’ (Ahmed, 2004 cited in Phipps, 2016: 306). In the International Women’s Day marches, it is common to see activists dancing, embracing, singing, shouting, crying, jumping, performing, running, laughing. Their bodies are spaces of creativity and expression. In this action, protesters build their identities, but also collective subjectivities and the collectives’ edges. These shared feelings create a collective identity fused by emotions of love, sisterhood, and solidarity (Jasper, 2014). In a more immediate sense, through sensuous solidarities (Routledge, 2012), during the marches, a collective body is created:

‘When you go in the black bloc it’s not only you. It is not only your body that you have to take care of, but your body also becomes part of a collective body. If they hit me, they hit every one. If they throw me around, they throw them too. Whatever we do has an impact. If I go and swear at a police officer, that police officer is not only going to go against me, but they are also going to look for the smallest one. Because that’s what they do! Because when feminist parenting groups go, they [the police] go after the little girls because they know they can’t do anything’ (Group discussion, Bosque de Chapultepec).

‘To put the body is to take care of the protester’s kids and the other protesters together. We have used protocols. If we see
that the march is very violent, then we call a contingent publicly. Especially now. We have friends of ours from Jalisco that were arrested alongside their kids. Now they have to pay a fee’ (Crianza Feminista).

In these spaces of protest, protesters make visible the bodies that are erased and rendered into oblivion by the state, the bodies of feminicide victims, but also of resisting women, of women who do not conform, that do not comply. Drawing attention to the women who demand change and, in this demand, offer alternatives to a violent system through affective weavings. In this visibilisation, women engage in a dialogue with the community, seeking their solidarity and understanding, urging them to become part of the struggle, to resew the social fabric that has been torn. The corporeal/territorial struggle allows for a dialogue with the community the women inhabit, in that, by reclaiming the spaces for themselves, they are hoping to ignite a type of common lived experience of violence that arouses empathy and outrage from their community. This is reflected for instance in their chant ‘Señor, señora no sea indiferente. Se mata a las mujeres en la cara de la Gente’ (Sir, madam, don't be indifferent. Women are killed right in front of our [people’s'] faces). This use of direct action and chanting as a community dialogue is also directed at their aggressors. By attacking the spaces where men feel secure, these activists are re-staging their own experiences of violence onto men.

‘It feels good when you go like with the hood and men stare at you with fear. Great, let fear change sides! not because we want to go hurt men but because finally, they understand. It is like “feel the fear that I feel when you walk behind me on the street. Even if you do not intend to do anything to me, this is my reality”. [...] Every day we wake up with a missing person, nine deaths, rapes... it is like... am I going to be the one who doesn’t come home back next? It is demonstrating this violence that we suffer. Until we are no longer afraid to go out and not return to home’ (Guadalupe, 20 - Aquelarre violeta).

We must, therefore, understand the place of the body-mind-spirit in resistance as part of an individual and a collective body that struggles in the same contexts where it faces violence.

This struggle is not without harm or pain. The WCA’s understanding of the collective body during protest does not only hold positive feelings, it also contains dangers. When
the protesters put their bodies on the line or give their bodies to the struggle, they also form part of a larger, vulnerable collective body. Through politics of care, they have to protect other activists in the marches who risk being harmed by police or angry onlookers. The activist exposes their body through direct action, knowing that this can be violated against and abused by authorities, whether that implies pepper spray, kicks, batons, or arrest. They risk bodily harm to defend their rights to live a life without violence. They feel the exhaustion of the march and the pain of police confrontations, all while processing their own emotional and physical agony. The protest becomes a space of contention between two processes in tension: the hegemonic logics of power and resistance against the same (González Hernández, 2017).

To finalise this section, I will only briefly mention the transition from the streets to the home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a massive deceleration of the women’s movements in Mexico which is slowly regaining momentum. Protesters who were used to attending weekly activities led by collectives, as well as the ongoing and frequent marches and protests found themselves having to choose between the ongoing struggle and dealing with personal emotional burdens relating to the pandemic. Their body-mind-spirit was at a crossroads, wanting to continue to aid women who had become ever more vulnerable due to lockdown (Ventura Alfaro, 2019), and facing the realities of caring for their own mental and physical health, as well as their families’. While the pandemic offered a great opportunity for several collectives from the WCA in Mexico to expand their impact and reach weaving and working alongside feminist collectives from Latin America and beyond, it also highlighted the importance of physical presence, beyond Transnational bonding. Embracing, talking, taking over the streets were antidotes against the daily violences they experienced and the anger they had accumulated. I’m unable to offer an in-depth examination of the struggles of the movement through the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this matter opens future research avenues, looking at the power of (re)building the movement during and post-pandemic.

5.3. ¡Ni Una Más! The Importance of Collective Anger

An amalgam of affections collides in the weaving of women’s networks, transforming feelings and beliefs into what is known in classic social movement theory as “emotion cultures” (Taylor, 1996). In my interviews, anger, and fury, as a result of collective outrage (Reger, 2004) and moral shock (Jasper, 1998) concerning the ever-growing crisis of Violence Against Women (VAW) and feminicide in Mexico, were the primary emotions expressed by a majority of the activists who had decided to take part in women’s collective struggle. At the inside of the WCA individual fear against daily violence and pain are transformed into anger against an unjust system:

‘Yes, we are angry and how could we not be. I mean, all the [public] damage we do bothers them more than the women who are murdered. And how terrible is that! So yes, what we say is that we are going to stop breaking and grating and burning and destroying when they stop killing us. As long as we are being killed, we are going to keep destroying. Meanwhile, let everything burn. We are tired of this and we will not allow it to continue’ (Black Bloc Activist, 18).
Raw anger embodied by women has historically been considered a form of gendered emotional deviance (Aadnesgaard, 2020; Reger, 2004; Spelman, 1989; Frye, 1983). Feminine anger ‘challenges the culturally valued passivity assumed as part of feminine demeanour’ (Holmes, 2004: 215). While women are encouraged to feel emotional, anger is not one of those to embody unless it is on behalf of someone else (Frye, 1983). That is, female anger defies patriarchal gender roles and power dynamics. Anger, however, is never uniform but moving. It changes, binds, divides, produces, and is produced by resisting bodies as well as the social relations that are formed through this anger. As expressed by hooks (2000b :10):

‘My awareness of feminist struggle was stimulated by social circumstance. Growing up in a Southern, black, father-dominated, working-class household, I experienced (as did my mother, my sisters, and my brother) varying degrees of patriarchal tyranny and it made me angry—it made us all angry. Anger led me to question the politics of male dominance and enabled me to resist sexist socialization. Frequently, white feminists act as if black women did not know sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiment. They believe they are providing black women with “the” analysis and “the” program for liberation. They do not understand, cannot even imagine, that black women, as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience, just as they develop strategies of resistance (even though they may not resist on a sustained or organized basis)’. 

I understand anger as multifunctional. Anger can be informative, therapeutic, transformative, and work in a range of temporalities. It can be expressed in an instant and it can be the lasting flame that drives a movement (Ost, 2004). Embodied rage and anger are fountains of knowledge to understand the grievances and injustices felt by women who resist. However, moral outrage and anger are not inherently emancipatory (Holmes, 2004; Reger, 2004; Lorde, 1984) but rather ambient, as ‘it is part of a politics of struggle that takes place in/between and through space/time and bodies’ (Holmes, 2004: 211). I identified three potential avenues in which long-lasting anger could transform relations of self and collectives: anger as a transformative emotion that contains Hope; raw anger transformed into hatred; and finally, anger as an emotional burden, the emotional fatigue of anger that evaporates and leads to the resignation of the activist’s action as “insignificant” or “unimpactful”.

For anger to lead to social change, it must move towards collective action. The Mexican feminist movement, which has been heavily influenced by autonomous and indigenous movements including the Zapatista uprising, has seized the language of revolution from these movements into the feminist cause, including la Digna Rabia (Dignified Rage). The potential for social change through this collective anger was not new to the activists:

‘What feminism has shown us is that revolutions are a matter of affection, that is, you will never get up because of what you have never had, you get up because of what they take from you.’
When the anger spreads long enough we will change history, but yesterday and today we are changing ourselves which is also important. When this history-changing process really happens, it's going to be too many furies together. \textit{We will knock all this down and is going to burn in flames}' (Marta, 32 - Fueguitas Intransigentes).

This quote resembles Poma and Gravante’s analysis (2017: 2010) and their assertion that ‘what is needed to resist and respond to state violence is ‘to spread the anger’ (Gaitan, 2014) and overcomes fear collectively’ (Zibechi, 2014). In the marches and during collective's events and activities, testimonies of abuse, sexual violence, and rape were revealed in a cathartic way. Women will stop marching, calling on cameras to focus on the person sharing their story. To make it public, to visibilise the violence. Once they had finished their testimony, activists would begin chanting: ‘no estas sola’. You are not alone. This cry carries complex implications:

‘What happened to you will happen again to someone else if you do nothing. So, for me... you realize that you are not alone. Feminists always have that phrase that accompanies us. We scream it at the protests when someone is giving their testimony and they all begin chanting, “you are not alone”. I don't cry a lot but for me that part... in that part, I cry. I cry with anger, and I cry screaming because that is the feeling that moves me. It makes me angry. Because that phrase has a double meaning. It means you are not alone, because I am with you. I am with you because I experienced the same’ (Lucia, 24 – Acoso en la U).

To explore anger’s transformative power, we must pay attention to its journey. Reger (2004) suggests the process of individual emotions leading to collective action occurs in stages: firstly, finding space in which to respond to moral shocks; secondly, engaging in collective emotion work to create shared identities and feelings; finally, if reciprocal emotions are fostered and everyday life obstacles are overcome, these feelings can be translated into collective action.

The first stages are already occurring within and beyond the WCA. Activities such as protests, “tendederos” (clotheslines where feminists denounce their abusers), reading circles, peace circles, and dialogues are held by numerous feminist collectives from both the centre and periphery of Mexico City. These relate to a process of collective consciousness that forms political subjects within the movement and carries individual emotions into a collective sense of injustice (Reger, 2004). In the process, women weave
networks of solidarity and compassion through what they understand as “radical tenderness”. In this process of resistance, they heal, and through this healing, they can (re)imagine and transform the present. I explore the final stage through reciprocal empathies and the current shortcomings of WCA in chapter 7.

‘Resistance is what heals. I mean, you may even stop the violence, but if there is not a process where communities, women, people assume their resistance process, they will not heal. The resistance heals. And this, Hijole, is very dense because the system will never understand it that way’ (Raquel, 25 - Fueguitas Intransigentes).

While anger is a complex emotion, full of information and potential, it can also be limiting. On its own, raw anger can transform into hatred. I distinguish here between anger and hatred, understanding hatred as a destructive rather than transformative emotion. I follow Lorde’s (1984) argument that anger needs to be put to use towards a goal, towards change. It is crucial to understand the difference between anger and hatred. They are the feelings that separate justice from revenge. While anger is full of information about change and justice, hatred is immobile. When speaking with activists, I often found feelings of anguish being slowly expressed and transformed into a burning hatred against a common enemy:

But the thing is... we need to kidnap the bastards! We need to do something that hurts them because we live in a country of barbarians. We live in a country in which el que no transa no avanza. (He who does not cheat, does not get ahead). And hell... I mean, how are you going to make a man understand that he's crazy that he raped you or that it's a macho society where you can't go out in shorts because they rape you. Well, the only way is for them to feel it. [...] let's make them feel the same. Let's touch their parts to see what they feel. A real kidnapping to them. That is my frustration. We paint a fucking monument, and they don't care. My anger is not against monuments. How did the French end their conquest? Killing the kings (Martina, Group Discussion - Bosque de Chapultepec).

I spoke to several activists who had also recognised these dangers. A few months after my last visit to Mexico an activist friend messaged me: ‘You may be interested in this information regarding what we spoke about on the topic of releasing energy’. Attached
was a link to a news article where it showed how, at the latest march, a group of black bloc activists had attacked with hammers a homeless man who had shouted at them. This anecdote is not a moralistic argument or censorship of valid rage, but rather an example of the concrete contradictions that can be exposed when movements become blinded to the overarching systemic violences and instead target individuals as the main culprits. This problematic can be linked to that carceral feminist thought that seeks justice through punishment. I analyse this problem further in section 7.2.1 when looking at gender separatism.

The final possible avenue is emotional burnout (Woods et al., 2012), this is not purely linked to long-lasting anger, but it arises out of protesters’ continuous frustrations, exhaustion, and disillusionment. I look at disappointment and emotional burnout in chapter 8 when discussing failed negotiations with the government and the continuous risk of the co-optation and translation of the movements’ demands and praxis.

5.4. Disrupting histories through direct action

While not exclusively, the direct action embodied by anarcho-feminist and black bloc feminists from the centre of Mexico City have directed their protest against iconic monuments and historic buildings in the capital. What is their significance? Why do they select these particular pieces of patrimony? Latin American movements have a long history of direct action against monuments that pre-dates the contemporary boom of WCA in Mexico. Monuments hold an almost invisible role in our societies, silent but constant and seemingly immovable (Hevia, 2020; Pérez Ramos and Ramiro Esteban, 2020; Vega, 2016). While largely unnoticeable most of the time, monuments influence the construction of a hegemonic history that infiltrates slowly into the collective imaginary. Their discursive and symbolic role in the reproduction of power cannot be disputed. They are erected in public spaces of importance, often centric, and tell a history that is just as much present as it is past. However, this is a partial history, a history of the victorious that is written by the few for the Others (Hevia, 2020) to control them. ‘The monument aspires to be eternal, it seeks to leave a trace of the present in the future, to remain as a "legacy to future generations", exalting the legitimacy of those who hold power at the present moment’ (Vega, 2016: 215). They tell a story of subordination and oppression. They symbolise the status quo.

Monuments are material and symbolic bodies that represent the concrete pervasiveness of the modernity/coloniality matrix, including that of the coloniality of gender (Vega, 2016). It is of no surprise that the large percentage of victorious figures, soldiers, fighters, and heroes, erected as statues are white men from the upper classes, representing a masculinist authoritative figure that sustains patriarchy as much as racism, classism, and
heteronormativity (Vega, 2016). These men are given the “privilege” of recognition as well as a name and a place in history. The opposite binary is also carved in stone. A beautiful, gentle, always sexualised, and often abstract female body. The bodies of some women (largely white, abled, young, etc.) become nationalist ideals without a name: liberty, independence, justice, etc. The female body constitutes an indispensable element of the machinery that produces the collective identity (Durán and León, 2021; Pérez Ramos and Ramiro Esteban, 2020). These monuments play a key role in the construction of subjectivities, sustaining hegemonic violence in a place that appears to be unreachable, which does not allow for dialogue and cannot be transformed (Hevia, 2020). This history is imposed upon the people, not negotiated.

This privileged space cuts both ways, however, as monuments become material territory for resisting struggles. Their place of privilege allows for greater visibility of the WCA’s grievances. Their direct targeting becomes a social disruption to the status quo. As highlighted by Pérez Ramos and Ramiro Esteban (2020: 62):

‘Like other contemporary commemorative monuments, “El Ángel”, at the time of its inauguration (1910) was imposed with an idea of a nation from a selective past and was defined as a historical monument […] it became an objectified, petrified good, whose conservation and permanence became unquestionable and superior to any other interests and needs of the social order. Among other options, the protest chose the Angel as a target of aggression because it is a relevant asset for all, in a certain way it can be spoken of as a provocation, a daring that violates what was supposed to be untouchable’.

It is through short-term direct action that the WCA can impose its vision upon these structures. Their voice and dissatisfaction are heard through the graffiting, scraping, and tearing down of these monuments. By directing their protest against both public and private property, the targeting of international branded stores, as well as historical monuments, black bloc feminists express their disagreement with hegemonic structures. They attack the material embodiment of patriarchy, colonisation, and capitalism. Their praxis engages with remembering strategies that negate the past/present, affirming (an)other future. Their protest has the power to disrupt the public space and dominant historic nation narratives, as the community begins questioning the true value of these properties, of the impact of these stores on their local economy, of the history of these monuments. A different story is being written in the face of historical figures: history is being re-written by being challenged as an incomplete, patriarchal, and colonialist version of the past, while present history is being captured alongside it, including, this time, women’s resistances.

‘You break that romanticised nationalist construction of a supportive Mexico, a construction of a community created by men, of brotherhood … The monuments are created to represent realities and the reality of now is this. The reality is that they are killing us. They are raping us every day in all the spaces in which we exist. Every day we suffer harassment, every day we suffer violence in our homes. It is an attack on this structure already materialised. Like capitalism with these
foreign stores. You symbolically attack these stores because clearly, we are not destroying capitalism by attacking a store, but it is our way of saying we are fed up. [...] with the monuments, it is also like... they [men] have created this story without us, that we, not part of. We do not feel represented. They have created a history for us without us and with men who have violated us, who have occupied us as a territory. It is attacking all these Mexican symbols of the country. We are attacking the materialised idea of Mexico and the violent system that oppresses us’ (Ximena, 19 - Aquelarre Violeta).

A women’s professional collective I had the opportunity to meet with, Restauradoras con Glitter (see appendix I), was key in the preservation and re-signification of these actions, from “vandalism” to “historic evidence” that need to be documented. A representative example of this ongoing struggle took place last year at the site of the monument to Christopher Columbus in the centre of Mexico City. During the Black Lives Matter movement that took over the globe, antiracist groups from Mexico City made plans to tear down the statue. Two days beforehand, however, government officials removed it from the plinth. As a response to the space, the WCA erected their own anti-monument, a wooden figure of a girl raising her fist, painting the names of feminicide victims across the fence, and renaming it “the roundabout of women who fight”. Within a day, the government had ordered the fence to be re-painted, erasing the names. Women from the city came back in mass to reclaim this space, writing across the fence “they will not erase us”. This action is part of the struggle to re-appropriate public space, remembering the complex and plural histories of women who struggle, and how their individual histories superpose the state-imposed discourse. It is a fight against oblivion, against forgotten and invisible histories (see more in section 7.1.1.).

Source: (Magallón, 2021)

5.5. The limitations of short-term direct action

Guatrari (1996 cited in Routledge, 2012) has warned against arranging activists’ diverse modes of protest into hierarchical and linear configurations and narratives that can easily be co-opted by the dominant languages of power. Aware of the dangers of superposing one form of mobilising over another, what I attempt to do here is to highlight, without moralising, some of the limitations that short-term direct action appears to have in relation
to the attempted public dialogue with the community. I would also argue that, far from necessarily reproducing these moralising narratives, we need to underscore them, as they are already being manipulated in political discourses around the movement. Therefore, I commence by stressing that while direct action can guide and frame the collective circle of who belongs to the movement and who stays out (Ahmed, 2004), these boundaries are not rigid. Borders are shaken in the negotiation zone of these affections. Monuments are symbolic and concrete material proofs of the construction of social nationalist identity (Hevia, 2020). As such, when monuments are the object of direct action, outsider groups to the movement feel their identities are being threatened. As pointed by Pérez Ramos and Ramiro Esteban (2020: 61):

‘deliberate aggression against certain historical monuments causes discomfort: it is perceived as an unacceptable act because it puts into crisis the certainty that historical monuments are immutable and perpetual assets, historical references of an objectified past, whose existence is conditioned to their own material integrity’.

While I can note the therapeutic, symbolic, and performative power that short-term direct action carries, I challenge the notion that this action is inherently successfully transformative when employed on its own. Similar to Reger’s (2004) argument on collective identity as the last stage for emotion to become part of collective action, I contend that the power that short-term direct action has in influencing public perceptions is double-sided. In its use, it creates a countermovement shaped by the moralising narratives of politicians and news media as well as those who feel their individual and collective identities attacked. Direct action has been highly politicised outside of the movement demonising the black bloc, developing the figures of the “good” and the “bad” woman, and the criminalisation of protest (see section 7.1.). Women who break the mold of feminine behaviour are tagged as “bad” women, as they embody emotions often chastised as unwomanly, violent, or aggressive. These emotions threaten the collective patriarchal imaginary of the submissive woman. Interestingly, protesters reclaim this tag in their chants such as ‘somos malas, podemos ser peores’ (we are bad, we could be worse). This anger and challenge of feminised identity through direct action ignites feelings of fear, vulnerability, and even reciprocal anger in groups left “outside” the WCA. As a response, a struggle of subjectivities takes place on the streets. Feelings of dignified rage and hartazgo [weariness] are translated as threatening emotions to the status quo and are manipulated by state actors in their fearmongering counter-strategies against the WCA. Fear is transformed into anger and distrust against the movement. Therefore, this method of protest divides public opinion and people’s perception of the movements alike as is illustrated in the conflicting accounts of the feminists below:

‘Not long ago there was a march in Reforma, an avenue here in Mexico. And it was... it was all chaos. There were vandalisms, there were many things that I attribute to outsiders, not to the movement that we are generating. Not because we cannot do damage, not because it is good or bad to do damage simply because damage, unfortunately, turns our movements in the eyes of society into something negative’ (Janet, 20 - Semillas de Curie).
‘There is a lot of support, support from older women who joined to grab a hammer and destroy, right? And women who came up to us and hugged us and said: “Thank you very much, without you, this would not be the same because they would not even hear us.”’ (Black bloc feminist, 23)

As a social conscientisation strategy, therefore, short-term direct action can become self-limiting as gender stereotypes around femininity are pervasive in Mexican culture.

**Conclusion**

We must understand patriarchal reality as part of the logic of modernity/coloniality that can and should be challenged, and beyond which many alternatives exist that can be materialised in the now. In this chapter, I have examined the first mode towards the creation of alternatives: mobilising as negative praxis against the violent reality imposed by capitalist modernity. The act of negating contains in itself an affirmation: another (more just) world is possible. In this struggle, I have highlighted the numerous challenges and contradictions that are negotiated within the WCA, with and against the state and society within this same negation. I have examined these in the form of short-term direct action, an arguably prefigurative praxis, which has popularised amongst feminist collectives in the centre of the capital (and across other Mexican cities). Particularly, I have highlighted intervention on monuments as sites of collective identity and historic “truths”, as decolonising praxis where women reclaim their place in history as well as on the streets, in their communities, and homes. This action emphasises the personal (body-mind-spirit) and community healing potential of direct action. I, however, raise doubt at the affirmation made by other scholars that short-term direct action is inherently transformational, albeit perhaps always prefigurative. As a result of this direct action, social counter-movements arise attempting to preserve the status quo. In the following chapter, I analyse the benefits of what I name “long term” community direct action as a contrasting strategy to overcome some of these limitations, wherein “outsiders”’ fear is translated into kinship, if not acceptance, through dialogue, as well as other healing strategies enacted by the WCA and feminist collectives.
CHAPTER 6:
BUILDING CONCRETE UTOPIAS: TOWARDS ANTICAPITALIST,
ANTIPATRIARCHAL, ANTICOLONIAL FUTURES.

In that field of possibility,
we have the opportunity to labor for freedom,
To demand ourselves and our comrades,
an openness of mind and heart
That allows us to face reality,
Even as we collectively imagine ways
to move beyond boundaries,
to transgress.

In this chapter, I examine the second stage of autonomous Women’s Collective Action (WCA) towards the construction of alternatives: a synchronised process of building/healing. After the negation of the violent imposed reality of capitalist modernity, the WCA commence building from the open wound of modernity/coloniality, healing the self and their communities in the process. I examine this journey through four strategic praxes embodied by the WCA: the power of remembering dissident struggles as a way of disrupting hegemonic history; restoring the collective body-mind-spirit through naming and the weaving of solidarities; creating and envisioning other possible ways of doing, being, and living through alternative economies (and its challenges); and finally, building through horizontal dialogues with the community. Each of these processes confronts multiple aspects of violent hegemonies under the modernity/coloniality matrix, and its current impersonation in the form of capitalist accumulation. In their strategies, the WCA place a dignified life, a life without violence, without feminicides, at the centre of their praxis. All these strategies are embodied by both women’s collectives from the centre as well as the periphery of the capital. However, peripheral collectives ascribe their practice to one of “community” or “popular” feminism as they try and reach women beyond the feminist struggle.

6.1. Remembering as Decolonising Strategy for Disrupting Histories

Having examined direct action as prefigurative, decolonial mobilising praxis in the previous chapter, I explore this idea further in relation to the process of affirming other possible realities through remembering dissident struggles. The nation-state continues to reproduce the dichotomy of history/memory, wherein memory is seen as a subjective, unreliable narration while history is seen as the true, objective recounting of events (Vergès, 2008). The WCA challenge this dichotomy by engaging in an active process of remembering concrete histories/stories as a way of resisting hegemonic, partial abstractions of history, opening endless possibilities of other realities in the process. In my final visit to Mexico City, I worked alongside a feminist collective called “urban narrators”, whose revolutionary praxis was underlined by the process of “remembering” (her)stories. As argued by an urban narrator activist: ‘patriarchy is also represented by silence, by the oblivion’. Like patriarchy, coloniality is also perceived as ‘the corpse in the closet’ (Vergès, 2008: 49), which shapes the Mexican identity. As underlined in
chapter 3, many collectives used the historical records of matriarchal societies amongst indigenous communities as proof and inspiration that another world is possible.

‘There was no patriarchy in those societies. This is the Hope we have as women, but not a Hope from a religious stance or a utopic stance but rather founded in historic proof. Historical materialism allows us to understand what women went through and how we can envision what we want to build. We need to generate the conditions for the construction of this vision’ (Valeria, 25 - Rosas Rojas).

I identify this as a dual process of negation/affirmation that engages with a rewriting of historic “truths” through “remembering” those histories that have been made invisible by hegemonic narratives around the nation-state, which reproduce an ideal patriarchal, heteronormative, and subjugated citizen (Motta, 2021). Remembering the forgotten histories becomes a challenge to the status quo and those colonial histories the nation-state is built upon. The struggle to recognise these memories becomes a struggle to retell history. Here, we must distinguish between collective and public memory.

Public memory is shared, often through nationalist retellings of history in the form of monuments and museums, that shape this memory (see chapter 5). In contrast, collective memories are often hidden, alternative memories that challenge hegemony (Fabian, 2007). Collective and public memories clash in the citizens’ imaginary, often in competition. ‘Collective memory is resistance to a public memory that maintains oblivion, amnesia, indifference about the sufferings and group struggles’ (Vergès, 2008: 63). This is similar to Benjamin’s division between memory and remembrance in relation to the status quo and collective memories’ transformative/descriptive power: ‘the function of [public] memory is to protect impressions from the past. Remembrance [or collective memories] points to its dismemberment. Memory is conservative. Remembrance is destructive’ (Benjamin, 1999 cited in Cifuentes-Quiñónez, 2018). The process of remembering through retellings of alternatives becomes negating praxis against the hegemonic heteropatriarchal imposed reality under capitalist modernity. However, it is also a creative, contentious process of social and personal healing (spiritual, psychological). By negating the subordinated figure of womanhood that is part of the nationalist narrative, women are taking part in a process of self-determination. They are reclaiming their human value by remembering those forgotten histories of struggle headed by women, people of colour, working-class people, and indigenous communities opposing patriarchal and colonial logics. This memory becomes a starting point from which to destabilise the dominant regulatory processes of the state (Motta, 2010).
‘In reality, these monuments were built to consolidate a historical memory and at the same time to consolidate a political ideology that for many years was functional for the state and the elites. This history taught at primary school and years of education has shaped our memory. And then trying to deconstruct 15 years of education that solidified this idea that monuments represent us as Mexicans, they represent me as a citizen of this country, and we are proud to be in front of that monument. Everything that is happening with these paintings and this transformation of space, somehow, they are re-writing memories. It is a collective symbolism that has been functional for a long time. Many people feel attacked because their memory feels attacked’ (Independent feminist, 26 - healing circle).

This quote highlights the need of analysing memory from a body-mind-spirit perspective, as before becoming collective memory, remembering is embodied knowledge. ‘Memory is always the memory of the body, of the present body, of the absent body, of the mutilated body, of the torn body, the body that is brought by memory to this body of today ... we are bodies, traversed by time, bodies that can only assert themselves as historical bodies’ (Gelacio, 2013: 69). When the individual memory finds its place in the collective narration of what they themselves have felt through their bodies, the lines between individual and collective memory become blurred. Individual/collective memories become a contentious struggle against a violent past, present, and future simultaneously. The embodied experience becomes part of collective resistance against the “objective” public memory of the nation-state. Hegemonic history, in the form of public memory, breaks this connection between embodied memories and the collective and creates a homogenous history that relies on excluding, forgetting, and silencing the resisting bodies. Thus, remembering other histories does not mean romanticising the past or “going back”, but rather it is remembering that painful past that was erased. Often it is the gap in history that speaks loudest of the oppression suffered, as other histories are forgotten and ripped apart. Healing, decolonising, and transforming become crucial strategies when engaging in remembering as a process of community self-determination (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), challenging the “internal colonialism” that is intrinsic to the nation-building process (Bonfil Batalla, 1987).

As Chávez and Vázquez (2017: 41-41) so poetically put it:

‘I want to think about the body as not confined by the temporality of presence, by its materiality. I want to think of the possibility of crossing from the individualized body of presence to the embodiment of the relational and the ancestral... The body awakened to the relational is no longer reduced to its individuality – it becomes porous and capable of compassion, of feeling the suffering of others. It exceeds the surface of representation and becomes a historical site, a site of remembrance. By giving itself as a locus for the recognition of what has been silenced by violence, decolonial performance is a way of inhabiting the colonial difference. It opens the
possibility of temporal relationality, as a form of Hope, a form of healing grounded on the possibility to fight oblivion, to recover the memory of what has been erased’.

To engage in an analysis of memory as collective resistance, we must challenge linear conceptions of temporality. Instead, understanding that this engagement with the past is curtailed to our needs and struggle in the present, which shape our imaginaries of a future. The past is not the past, but rather the past is shaped by the urgencies of today (Benjamin, 2008/1949). Remembering becomes an active process in the struggle against violent hegemonies, when it is “played in the key of Hope” (Dinerstein, 2015). Remembering becomes a prefigurative praxis in the present, as it opens new possibilities against the established order. As argued by Pardo, ‘memory is also future because it contains the truth of what is to come, but it beyond the reach of the foreseeable’ (cited in Gelacio, 2013: 69). Collective memory becomes a tool for Hope, full of transformative potential. Remembering becomes a process of interweaving memories of the social fabric in a journey of community resistance. Individual memories become collective through processes that foster horizontally and inclusion. The idea of ‘healing the memories’, healing the history as it is Narradoras Urbanas’ resolve, is also a process of healing a community that is crossed by a multiplicity of historic violences. This notion is further examined in the following section that brings together processes of community healing, naming, and testimonies as a way of resisting and disrupting hegemonies. Thus, to understand memory as resistance, the process must be seen as an active collective exercise that (re)discovers the past and prefigures in the present alternative ways of doing and being for the common building of alternative worlds. It is this relational affective process that underpins their reimagining and aids in the development of alternative post-capitalist economies (see section 6.3).

6.2. Shaping the Boundaries of the Movement through Affect: ¡Ingrid no ha muerto, Ingrid somos todas53!

In chapter 5, I examined the role of anger in the fusing of group identities and as part of individual, collective, and social healing. In this section, I take a look at empathy, joy, and care. Affective solidarity is at the centre of sustainable feminist politics of transformation (Whittier, 2021; Hemmings, 2012). The politics of affection employed by the WCA utilise empathy and solidarity strategies in the process of creation of possibilities and alternatives to the present, transforming their subjectivities, the communities, and the world around them. The question of the politics of affection in women’s movements has been previously raised by several academics, especially regarding the role of solidarity (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Ahmed, 2004). For Hemmings (2012:150) affective solidarity is ‘the question of affect – misery, rage, passion, pleasure- that gives feminism its life’. The emotions of empathy and solidarity have been highly debated and cast aside by several authors, as a persistent myth of nurturing femininity and female subjugation (Hemmings, 2012; Cornwall, 2007), and a reproduction of patriarchal logics of subjectivity. However, women’s collectives emphasise in their praxis the radical, transformative role that empathy and solidarity play in the building of other worlds in the present. I discuss the politics of solidarity in relation to work by Phipps (2016), which ties affective solidarity to the politics of experience, and Ahmed’s (2004) affective economies. My underlining argument is that the politics of

53 Ingrid is not dead, we are all Ingrid!
solidarity are in direct contestation with atomising, depersonalising, and isolating neoliberal logics and strategies of control (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Richard and Rudnyckj, 2009), and so in their refuge, women can resist against violent hegemonies.

I had the opportunity to attend three conversation circles organised by collectives independently and two events that I organised alongside two collectives (one in the centre, one in the periphery) that allowed me to gain an insight into the collectives’ strategies of care and compassion. As previously mentioned, in these conversations, emotions ran high and testimonies of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in the home as well as on the streets and workplace were shared frequently by women of all ages, with the oldest being in her mid-40s and the youngest barely 12 (mother and daughter). These stories created a sense of collective anger, but also a sense of belonging as their histories are finally heard, validated, and understood. They were not simply another statistic or number on a graph, but a real story of violence that many had themselves lived and experienced through their body. Empathy strategies grant feeling and emotion the legitimacy of embodied relational knowledges, ‘opening a window in the experiences of others’ (Hemmings, 2012: 150). Experiences of violences become embodied knowledge that is exchanged in the collective (Phipps, 2016) and becomes part of a collective embodied, pluri/multi-temporal histories. Through naming, these violences become a common ground of struggle for the collective. The women’s movement in Mexico has always made sure to superimpose the abstraction, disembodiment, and depersonalisation of the victims of feminicide by underlying their humanity. They are not numbers on a graph but real people that had feelings, aspirations, dreams who were loved and whose loss is felt more real than a data number can ever contain. It is a negation of the coldness of this normalisation of violence through statistics. It is a (re)construction of histories doomed to oblivion in the public memory that are recovered through affection.

Through affection, the subjective and collective body-mind-spirit can engage in a healing process, as part of their resisting praxis against violent hegemonies. In this healing, counter-knowledges and community are fostered, and through this engagement with resisting Others, alternative structures and systems are being built in the present (Richardson, 2018), systems that prioritise a dignified life. These systems go beyond a world without violence against women (VAW) and feminicide, although often, this utopia is too implausible for the members of collectives. Instead, they focus on resisting systemic structures in their daily praxis. For instance, through networks to assist women that experience domestic and sexual violence, through public dispensaries and alternative economies, through accompaniment networks assisting illegal terminations of pregnancy, and through channeling cases that require legal and psychological attention to networks of professional volunteers. For instance, Acoso en la U, a feminist collective originally founded in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon in 2018 started its initiative when a number of sexual
harassment and sexual violence allegations were made against a particular professor from the University of Nuevo Leon. A student asked one of the members to help and accompany her through the reporting process, discovering in the process that there were no official protocols to follow. This started their action ‘since there is nothing to do, there is everything to do!’ They decided to write a blog called Acoso en la U where they told the girl’s story. Soon after, more students commenced contacting them with similar stories. They used their blog as a method of filing complaints and reports against professors and students. The same week the blog was published, the #metoo movement started across Mexico, and so their work went “viral”. University students across Nuevo Leon put up a clothesline with their stories written on them and the tag “acosoenlaU”. A week later, the University of Monterrey created a protocol as well as others across the country. The collective then took to the task of reviewing universities’ protocols; accompanying the students in their complaints both psychologically and legally, and organising protests in those universities where protocols were still non-existent. The collective does not receive any funding and many of the members work as volunteers, some are lawyers, psychologists who work on a part-time or ad hoc basis. Through naming, the collective broke the imposed reality that rendered these stories invisible. They made them part of the real, the embodied knowledge of violence that crosses female students’ bodies on the daily and which is reproduced in the silence of the institution.

While many collectives from the WCA continue to centre their struggle in an epistemological (re)imagining of patriarchy, they also challenge violent modernity/coloniality logics including capitalism, racism, heteronormativity, ableism, adultism, anthropocentrism, immigration, etc.

‘Community works especially in the periphery spaces is super important for us. A member of the collective does community work in Toluca. With the media work we have been doing lately, we have also been in contact with several organisations. One of them is an immigrant hostel, so we organised a workshop for them to teach them how to make soap. Media work is super important because it outreaches populations even beyond the periphery [...] this is all thanks to the virtual world. This hostel has contacted us to other organisations including homeless women and children. For a whole month, the food we had from the comedores was given to people living under bridges. Most of this support was given to all women, not necessarily “feminists”’ (Crianza Feminista).

The collectives become shelters for women as much as spaces of contention and community building towards the (re)imagining and (re)building of alternative worlds, where everyone’s differing visions come together. In the next section, I examine in more depth some specific strategies utilised by peripheral collectives in the rebuilding and healing of communities through horizontal, inclusive, and alternative dialogues/conversations.

6.3. Organising Hope from the Margins: (Re)Building Communities through Dialogue

The women’s collectives from the periphery I had the opportunity to work with embodied similar political strategies that can be categorised as prefigurative, “long term” direct
action with a focus on popular education methodologies (Freire, 2000/1970), including strategies that embrace horizontality, collectively and community-driven dialogue and action. By challenging dichotomies of public/activist (Franks, 2003), they build alternative worlds with and alongside the community. Challenging paternalistic and detached strategies, they engage in an open and inclusive dialogue with the community that can lead to collective action. While they select some topics of discussion, collective consciousness, Freire’s conscientização, becomes a relational and experimental critical dialogue, informed by the realities of the people from those communities. As highlighted by Franks (2003), the identity of the subjects performing direct action is key as direct action must be primarily:

‘for the benefit of those who carry it out… direct action should primarily involve the oppressed overcoming, albeit perhaps only temporarily, their oppression. Direct action when successful, for the anarchists, is a form of liberation. Tactics of this form embody anti-hierarchical behaviour that prefigures the forms of social relationship that the actors wish to bring about’ (Franks, 200: 27).

Horizontality is a methodology that assumes power always centralises, and so epistemologies built by the community must challenge this centralisation to allow for pluriversal epistemologies and ways of doing and being to be built (Maeckelbergh 2011). Horizontality requires constant experimentation and openness, there cannot be one united front or singular predetermined goal sought by the movement (Yates, 2015). Rather than imposing their academic knowledges, plagued with linguistic complexities that create distance, women’s collectives from the periphery present themselves as a channel for dialogue between people who belong to the community, for them to share their knowledge and their reality with one another, thinking of other ways of being, living and relating and weaving networks of solidarity (Ventura Alfaro, 2022). The embodiment of these emotions and experiences becomes politicised in the construction of new embodied, affective realities in the community.

‘Community work in the neighbourhood does not take place in a month or two, that is, it is a process of years. We have seen that, and we have discussed it with colleagues who organize other struggles, like the water struggle. [...] You need to generate dialogue, because if you only arrive and nothing else and just put a “workshop” poster in the entry, people will not enter. We have even had to see reactions like “is it free?”. It causes a lot of conflicts that things are free because they are used to giving something in return. So that’s also difficult. People are very cautious. People are distrustful because of all the violence that takes place…’ (Claudia, 28 - Insubordinadas).

Rather than working on the destruction of a particular system, these collectives work on the idea that new realities can be shaped through a critical process in the present. Not by

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54 This does not mean that collectives from the periphery did not also engage in “short term” direct action or other methods of protest, but rather that they appear to have clear objectives to impact the contexts they were situated through “long term”, community-driven direct action.
rejecting all social constructions but by deconstructing their origin, becoming critical of them, discarding whatever is no longer useful or may be hurtful, and keeping and strengthening others under the politics of care. A constant that drives the collective’s grassroots work is the idea of collective construction of knowledge informed by decolonial narratives and in a direct challenge to vertical, centralised state structures.

‘In fact, many times we have been the ayundantas (assistants) because people appropriate the space and speak all that they have not been able to speak and they end up creating things, creating ... a drawing, a poem... so we are like the spectators. We do not feel like teachers or like we know more than other people and rather it is fascinating to see how they see their world, the world, our world, and how ... if there is a problem in the community together, we can figure out how we can solve it’ (Camila, 30 - Femipráxicas).

‘It is not like patriarchal oppression goes on one side and the capitalist oppression on the other, everything is interconnected. Work must be done to understand that everything is interwoven. And for that, we need a collective construction of knowledge, popular education, anti-patriarchal perspectives that are not from white feminism but other feminisms’ (Claudia, 28 - Insubordinadas).

The idea of reappropriating joy and pleasure is not only brought to the space of protest (see chapter 5) but also in the everyday life and all context inhabited by women in resistance, such as cyberspace. Insubordinadas, a small collective in Ecatepec founded in 2018, re-appropriates theories of knowledge that are decolonial, anti-capitalist, and decentralised around two main topics of discussion: cyberfeminism and technologies. They tackle debates around digital violence against women, digital self-defence, and digital detoxification due to the wider context of violence that is reproduced in the virtual world. However, they highlight something key in the navigation of this space: the idea of pleasure and joy. While they discuss tips and self-care, they also emphasise the revolutionary power of technology as it allows them to explore, imagine, play, connect, and above all create community. Through talks and alliances, they created the Hacklab La Chinampa, wherein they meet to learn and share dissident histories and knowledge, organising open workshops and collective work sessions. Here, we see again the struggle to reclaim collective memories of struggle and epistemologies that have been rendered into oblivion by the coloniality of knowledge and power:

‘We promote the use of free software and hardware as useful tools for the development of autonomy -of women and other dissident bodies- with respect to technology, activism, the construction of common projects, digital security, sharing of knowledge, and the creation of free media. We also believe that technology is not only developed from the digital spheres but through the processes of collective knowledge and the transmission of knowledge from our ancestors. For this reason, this space will reclaim and remember the knowledges of our
The periphery collectives’ work in the community is not envisioned as a temporary “workshop-led” action but aims to help break the cycles of violence that are reproduced within the community. They create spaces that allow the community to come together and get to know other realities, challenging their own. Affection and embodied experience become key in the production of collective knowledge which is fostered through strategies of community-driven intervention, popular education, and resilience. These methods allow people in the community to self-reflect on their experiences, think about how they have learned things and why they have learned them. It is autobiographical (Giugni, 2004), but by sharing their own experiences also ignites other minds in the community about their learning processes and experiences, how they differ, why they may need to change. Women’s collectives from the periphery reiterate the importance of naming as part of the resistance Informed by decolonial and community feminist writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Julieta Paredes (2010). They find their voice in the collective, renaming the world as they know it and experience it through this conversation. It is through this process that testimonies and naming and remembering become essential strategies in creating, as these individual experiences open a dialogue that ‘involves understanding, intervening and transforming the(ir) world’ (Motta, 2011: 194). In these spaces, naming becomes a methodology of resistance, giving them agency over their situation and the ability to change it, countering narratives of subaltern women as passive victims in need of external guidance (Motta, 2014). Embodied knowledges can be collectively constructed through affection and the weaving of difference of thought, individual experiences, histories, and subjectivities that validate and affirms this plurality (Walsh, 2012). Embedded theory is being constructed by the concrete experiences and histories of women in resistance, ‘not through individual abstraction […] but rather product of a critical collective reflection, it is relational and immanent rather than fixed and transcendent’ (Motta, 2011:181).

‘A personal experience is legitimate as long as it is yours, you lived it and nobody can say that it is not so, that it is not true. [...] We are not discussing concepts, no one is going to be more correct than anyone else. It is just listening to the experience of the other’ (Nicole, 28 - Vulvísimas).

“We are showing them, perhaps not so much teaching because teaching is something else, but showing people that their body, their spaces can be respected, that it is a right that women demand respect. And through the demand for that respect is how you educate those around those women... If the lady approaches another person who may have already started with those thoughts of “I learned that my husband can also help me”. So, you are already creating a sense of community where an idea is spreading, and it is the idea that you too can demand respect. Then, little by little it is being sown into that social awareness... I think that when you begin to decipher the decolonial perspective, you begin to situate your body and you begin to allow others to locate themselves in their own body and their territoriality. Because then you start to politicize
yourself and you start to make changes in your context, from the urgent needs close to your contexts or to the bodies that accompany you’ (Camila, 30 - Femipraxicas).

Thus, WCA in the community action is marked by horizontality, popular pedagogies, and experimentation as part of their everyday resistance against hegemonic violent structures. It is when this resistance is played in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015) that we can fully grasp their prefigurative potential. Several independent collectives from both the periphery and centre of Mexico City emphasised the weaving and transformational potential of embroidery as collective, dissident epistemologies. Embroidering works against individualist and depersonalised narratives, drawing into the community. Embroidery becomes a way of connecting as another way of knowing, being, and relating, of weaving communities, bringing women together from all classes, races, sexualities, ages, and fostering open dialogues and empathy amongst women. When I spoke to a group of women who embroider in the centre, they explained to me how through embroidering they were able to express themselves and their pain, their anger, and disagreement, for instance, concerning Fatima’s feminicide. This circle and the activity of embroidering worked as a therapeutic methodology wherein women were able to share their grief for the violence Mexican women suffer daily. However, they emphasise the revolutionary power of this transformative language of protest as it creates spaces for negation but also for dialogue, learning, conversing, reimagining. That is a space of creation.

‘Embroidering speaks about collectively, about affection, it speaks of building knowledge beyond words. It is embodied knowledge. That is what makes it an activity of Hope. It is a way of building narratives of justice and freedom that is not in one of the “big languages” that is, academic language or art - it is an everyday language used by women. And that is very powerful’ (Independent feminist, antimonumenta).
‘Embroidering is a possible way to think about different things... for example, we do not know each other, but we come to meet because embroidering allows us to build listening spaces to be able to build those other things that we do not know what they are because it is a utopia and we do not know it, but it is a space to be able to think. To imagine. And finding ourselves and knowing that many people are thinking the same ... is an epistemology that enhances other things. Embroidery speaks about collectivity, it speaks about affections, and it speaks about building knowledge beyond words. It is embodied knowledge. So, well, it is a Hopeful activity, and it is also a way of constructing narratives of justice and freedom... That is very powerful. That is what happens here’ (Independent Feminist).

The women’s collectives from the periphery explore prefigurative action in their engagement with feelings of Hope for an(other) world. Collectives such as Insubordinadas encapsulated this process as key in their “feminist cinema session”, an exhibition aimed at bringing together different narratives and experiences around violence from women across Latino America. The video sample, called Narratives for Hope, was born out of the idea that while VAW and feminicide are ever-present in the media and social outlets, it only appears to be creating an environment of collective anger and depression. To challenge this Hopeless narrative, they invited women across Latin America to share the ways in which they resist this violence, fostering spaces that allow thinking of alternatives to capitalism and patriarchy from a perspective of Hope.

‘If it is true that the media can show the reality of feminicides, it just creates an environment of collective depression. [however] there is a lack of imagination to think of alternatives to capitalism, to patriarchy, so at that moment we thought “we have to start to think from Hope”. Imagining alternatives and claiming autonomy. It is not enough to talk about resistance because you also place yourself in a place of immobility. Thinking about alternatives allows us to imagine other paths’ (Claudia, 28 - Insubordinadas).

6.4. Utilising Affective Politics in the Creation of Alternative Economies

In this section, I examine alternative economies put forward by collectives from the WCA from both the periphery and centre of Mexico City that attempt to escape, at least partially, the mandates of capital. Projects that look to produce wealth without falling into logics of accumulation, depersonalisation, disembodiment, and atomisation and instead put
forward productive political projects led by affect, what Gutiérrez Aguilar et al. (2016: 90) have previously referred to as ‘the production of the commons in common’. They are projects that shed light on the construction of alternative economic and social structures, which put life, particularly the reproduction of dignified life, at the centre of its process. This superposes capitalism’s ultimate goal: the reproduction of capital.  

‘There is no life without biotic communities, that is, communities that are reproduced based on relations of reciprocity, complementarity, mutuality, exchange, and joint determination between members of different species, who need each other to produce and reproduce life (Machado 2015)’ (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016: 81).

Collectives from the WCA engage in processes of rethinking and building alternative economies based on community affection that oppose capitalist individualist logics in every process of production. From the production of the value commodity to its exchange. They insert political resistance into the production process by highlighting its revolutionary power. This is further exemplified through the feminist collective Vulvísima, conceived as a socio-productive project to impact women's economic autonomy. The social component comprises community interventions based on the prevention of violence and community participation methodologies. The productive component is through the collaboration of women involved in the production of goods at the design, illustration, or manufacturing level. This component, however, does not involve purely producing something but rather producing something in a way that is oriented at seeking a personal and collective reflection around women's autonomy, and the transformation of social relations to a more egalitarian society. As the quote below from a feminist from Insubordinadas suggests, this struggle towards a more dignified life, although autonomous, does not occur outside the realms of the state or capitalism, exemplifying the constant contradiction of autonomous movement’s epistemologies and action with, against, and beyond the logics of capital and modernity (Dinerstein, 2015).

‘I wanted to design a project where I could work with women and while it is good to have workshops that develop their psychosocial and psycho-emotional skills, if we are not giving them opportunities for economic development, how are we effectively impacting the structural situation they are living?’ (Nicole, 28 - Vulvísima).

‘I believe that the Chinampa is a very beautiful space with strong claims of autonomy, communality and it is also a space of resistance. [...] But we also know that the Chinampa is not a space absent from capitalism. It is our context, but within what is possible... we think about how not to profit from the project. We think about building a space where communality, coexistence, and the construction of affections are above the exchange of capital’ (Carmen, 29 - Insubordinadas).
While still using capital as exchange, the subjectivities and politics built during the production process are postcapitalist (Zanoni, 2020; Della Porta, 2015; Gibson and Graham, 2006). As part of a feminised resistance (Motta, 2014), the collectives seek to alter community dynamics, challenging traditional conceptions of the family and the community through a deconstruction of capitalism’s framing of social reproduction. Pre-established social dynamics rooted in neoliberal capitalism including individualisation, precarity, the division of labour, and competition are challenged by social dynamic, economic and epistemological alternatives put forward by the movements based on networks of solidarity within the community. For instance, Crianza Feminista (see appendix I), organised food and other basic products dispensaries at the beginning of the COVID-9 pandemic:

’Maternity as a political act has been part of the feminist discourse for a long time. We shape our maternity through our feminist outlook, but we are also thinking of the community, in the collective, seeing the needs of other mothers and how we can solve them together. The comedores that we did at the start of the pandemic commenced because many of the girls from the collectives were left without income and so we wanted to help, but we didn’t have much. So, we started taking donations and we didn’t only help our friends but many more women from the community outside of the collective. That is the beautiful thing about Crianza. We know that our experience is shared by many women, but we are allowed to speak about them. With the protests, we were finally listened to. We have four jobs, we have no holidays, no pay. All those things that transverse mothers’ (Crianza feminista).

The pandemic also ignited alternative economies through an increasingly popular strategy that women’s collectives across the nation continue to engage to this day: mercaditas feministas (feminist markets). Activists from the WCA took over the metro stations in the centre of the capital, as well as other public spaces, establishing feminist markets where people could buy with money, but also trade with other products, services, or knowledges. These markets were not established without a struggle, as feminist activists soon found confrontation from street vendors in those areas. These spaces became a space of contention of capital, but also one where structural

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35 Gibson and Graham (2006) refer to community economies to name the politics of possibilities that can shape a post-capitalist society. They argue these possibilities are already present within capitalism and can be produced today.
inequalities were brought to light. People whose livelihoods depended on their daily income did not welcome the feminist markets, as they were competitive and not established according to informal mercantile “rules”. For starters, the feminist activists had placed their stalls inside the metro station, which is banned by law, then they had taken over “the street vendor spaces”. An activist, who had previously worked as a street vendor as a child, explained to me how informal workers had pre-established zones and each of them had an agreement with a local dealer on the percentage of sales that would be given to them at the end of each day. There were rules that everyone who wanted to trade had to follow. Then, when the feminist activists took over those spaces, ‘without speaking to the local community and without understanding their processes’ (Independent Feminist), the counter-resistance ensued. There were physical confrontations and assaults against the feminist protesters and often police were involved in the struggle. Feminists argued they were not “markets” looking to profit but “protests” against systemic economic violence and capitalist processes. As underlined by Monticelli (2021: 109) ‘prefiguration opposes to capitalism as a form of life through ‘experimental practices that allow for autonomy, playfulness and, at the same time, the interconnectedness between (and within) other human and non-human beings’.

Beyond these confrontations in the metro stations and surroundings, feminist markets have gained increased popularity as a place of struggle and subsistence for many women whose condition of precarity worsened after the pandemic. These markets have also been used to conscientise the community on the increasing crisis of VAW and feminicide. This was the case, for instance, at the latest gathering for Diana Velázquez Florencio. Three years after Diana’s feminicide, in November 2020, Lidia Florencio, with the help of local artists, began painting a mural in memory of Diana; in the same place where her body had been found. The feminist collective ‘Rudas Chimalhuacán Aborteras’ accompanied the family and set up a mercadita. Women from Chimalhuacán and other places in the east of the State of Mexico responded to the call. The majority were young people who, like Diana, dedicated themselves to informal commerce to survive. This is a community that has been torn apart by violent economic, social, gendered, racial, hierarchies and which comes together to remember, make sense of the violence, and resist. The territorial struggle is part of a healing process that involves the personal and collective body.

These resisting spaces and alternative economic processes are guided by an emotional, embodied, personalised, collective, caring praxis that leads to community healing and weavings of solidarity. They transform community dynamics and social relations so that a dignified life is at the centre of their dialogue. The commons exceed material objects or

‘Diana was clear about her future: she wanted to study Philosophy and Letters. She lived with her family in the Santa María Nativitas neighborhood in Chimalhuacán, State of Mexico; in a small house full of dogs and cats, which she and her sister Laura de Ella rescued from the street despite how much it cost to feed them all. According to her mother Diana was a young woman passionate about reading, not very sociable, reserved and a good daughter. She sold sweets in the streets of Chimalhuacán, because she wanted to raise money to buy a computer and finish her studies online. On the morning of July 2, 2017, her body was found exposed on public roads. Since then, the Velázquez Florencio family has maintained a tortuous legal battle to bring their daughter’s murderers to justice. On January 14, 2022, Diana’s murderer was convicted to 93 years and three months in prison. His accomplice is still at large.'
services and are instead part of the praxis of creating community and solidarity (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016). Without social relations of collaboration, there would be no *commons*. The building of these alternative economies treads a thin line as capitalist logics is always angling to appropriate these practices. For instance, no long after the establishment of *mercaditas*, street vendors began co-opting the feminist narrative. They transformed the WCA resisting discourses into merchandise, their struggle into cheap objects for consumption. This was arguably not out of malice but out of sheer need. The violence of capital is reproduced by the desperate need for survival under capitalism, as ‘the civilising form of capital attempts to erode and destroy our collective human capacity to define the use-value of life’ (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016: 82). The production of the commons is a contentious process. In this construction of the commons, I highlight the new relations and subjectivities that are fostered by the differing women’s collectives from the centre and periphery of the capital under strategies of horizontal, inclusive dialogues. The production of commons is the production of a new *us*, an *us* which is in direct confrontation with the violent, atomising logic of capital.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the process of the creation of concrete utopias in the present through personal, psychological, spiritual, social, and relational healing strategies. Social change is achieved through a ‘plural configuration of practices and iterative processes of experimentation, re-organisation and re-imagina tion’ (Monticelli, 2018: 511). In this praxis, the WCA challenges the individualistic, materialistic logics of capitalism, challenging hegemonic structures that reproduce gender, class, race, etc. violences. In the first section, I argued about the importance of naming, memory, and remembering as means of resisting and disrupting historical hegemonies. The second section examines the value of feminist, affective therapies for collective, spiritual, and psychological healing, as well as for creating the borderlines of who belongs and who is outside of the movement through affect. I challenge these same ideas of feminist belonging by looking into the experimental dialogues facilitated by peripheral women’s collectives informed by community, decolonial feminisms. Through community-driven, horizontal strategies, they look to (re)build fragmented communities motivated by the urgency of survival and working towards the creation of alternatives, towards a dignified life under a narrative of Hope. I finalise the chapter by featuring some concrete examples of alternatives through the analysis of the *mercaditas feministas* as affective politics processes popularised by the WCA. The mercaditas are counterhegemonic strategies against capitalist disembodied economies, that highlight the need to (re)imagine capitalist modernity and place *life* at the centre.
CHAPTER 7:
CONTRADICTIONS AND MEDIATIONS IN
THE CONSTRUCTION OF ALTERNATIVES

*The oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside" ... The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure.*

The Women’s Collective Action (WCA), as well as social movements in general, work towards new constructions of reality in a non-linear manner, full of contradictions and dangers. As reiterated throughout chapter 4, to list a series of demands by the WCA would be giving a false account of the unity of the collectives within the movement which are diverse and, at times, embody opposing praxis and epistemologies. Similarly, it is problematic to speak of the state as a ‘single, monolithic entity that uniformly challenges autonomy’ (Goodwin, 2020: 239). While some authors choose to define the state as the institution that can justifiably instrument violence against its people (Mbembe, 2003), the complexities of the state go far beyond this homogenous organising. The hegemonic structures reproduced by the state are not only represented by state actors but assimilated and embodied by companies, groups, and organisations, as well as by members of society at large. For instance, numerous institutions which are part of the state also work alongside civic societies and community projects headed by the WCA members. This blurred division opens endless opportunities for the state to translate the movement’s demands, de-radicalising their praxis and epistemologies, and leading to disappointment as the movement “fails”. Similarly, both the state and the movement are contained within the imposed reality of capitalist modernity functioning under the modernity/coloniality power matrix. As stated by Dinerstein (2015: 10), capital ‘is constantly translating autonomy into complementary practices’… ‘appropriating new forms of commoning to persevere itself as a social force’. Autonomy/self-determination is demarcated by the hegemonic imposed reality of capital that fights to reproduce the violent systems that maintain it i.e., the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being under patriarchal, racial, heteronormative, etc. rules.

In this chapter, I look at the WCA’s navigation of these contradictions. Firstly, in relation to the state and the ever-present dangers of translation in its different forms (the movement’s co-optation; translation by erasure; and repression and direct violence). All these diverse translations slip through the community’s collective imaginary to create an “objective reality” around the movement. It is through this objective reality that the movements’ level of “success” is often measured (this idea is further explored in chapter 8). In the second section, I discuss the internal contradictions of the WCA as it becomes mediated by capital hegemonic logics. Rather than condemning these conflicts, I raise here the urgent need to engage in a critical, horizontal dialogue to address these internal disconnections and prevent the WCA’s division and downfall. I focus my discussion around two main matters: centrist/periphery power divides under capitalist modernity and the reproduction of the coloniality of gender through biological dysmorphisms by the hand of trans-exclusionary and separatist organising tactics in the radical feminist militant branches.
7.1. Negotiating Autonomy with the State: The dangers of Translation

Prefigurative movements guided by Hope are in constant ‘struggle to survive in the context of capitalism in which they are immersed’ (Monticelli, 2018: 512). The State translation of the processes of resistance from the WCA and the integration of their language, ideologies, and demands within law and policy lines is multi-layered. Sometimes the translation is a product of negotiation between the WCA and the state; at times, it is a direct (mis)translation or co-optation of these practices and epistemologies; other times, it is translation “by erasure” (Vázquez, 2009, 2011); and others it is direct repression and state violence against the WCA, such is the case in the latest mobilisations. This section examines three modes of the multiple and increasingly aggressive, but always violent, modes of translation employed by the state into the imposed reality of capitalist modernity and its demarcations. As previously stated, while some collectives from the WCA frame their struggle under one of autonomy and/or self-determination in complete rejection of the state, many do not, with autonomy becoming a spectrum. While some are wary of and reluctant to work alongside state actors, their demands are still framed in terms of policy, law, or state actions. For some activists, it is a paradoxical impossibility to be asking a patriarchal State the solution for Violence Against Women (VAW) and patriarchy, as the state is benefiting from the reproduction of these structures:

'It is like “pedirle peros al olmo” (similar meaning to the English expression “to get blood out of a stone”). It is thinking within the very same patriarchal logic how we can find a solution. What we need is to imagine alternatives to this political, social, economic model as they are the ones that propitiate VAW. This is how we transform.' (Carmen, 29 - Insobidinadas).

Activists from the peripheral collectives challenge the state from its core, rejecting hegemonic feminist demands to the state as they deemed them to be always in contradiction. They exemplify their argument with the central feminist continued demands to the state with regards to feminicide penal classifications and punitive measures. The peripheral feminists warn against the dangers of state surveillance and heightened power and control through these policies. On the other end of the spectrum, some collectives directly engage in dialogue and work alongside the state to develop and design policies with a “gender perspective”. The constant tension and struggle between the WCA and government actors arise both feelings of distrust within and between the collectives of the movements as well as feelings of frustration, anger, and suspicion against the state. The dialogue between the WCA and the state is in constant tension, with politicians appropriating symbols and slogans, de-radicalising the movement’s narrative, and the movement’s ever-growing antipathy against the government for their failure to engage in conversation. Politicians have failed to identify that Mexico is at a breaking point. The watered-down liberal feminist discourse present on the legislative agendas of a political party through “gender-sensitive” strategies is no longer enough. What the feminist movement is demanding is a different way of doing politics altogether (Cerva Cerna, 2020a).

'I think they have not realised that they cannot manage us, [...] What we are doing today, what we did yesterday, what we did
on Sunday and what we have been doing every week and what thousands of other compañerías are going to do in all cities and all parts of the country. And what we are seeing is how big the gap is. Even with the allies. Even with the feminist politicians. Even with those who agree with certain approaches, the gap is enormous and those who have to walk to close the gap are those in positions of power. Men and women, legislators, judges, magistrates, judges, the head of government, governors, they are the ones who have to measure up to us. Not us to them’ (Suhayla, 29 – independent feminist).

7.1.1. Translation by co-optation: ‘menos oportunismo, mas feminismo’ case study

In this section, I offer a concrete example of the negotiations and contradictions that collectives within the WCA navigate when making demands of state actors and having these demands co-opted and translated, or in this case, simply ignored to fuel political gains and support. Some feminists decided to take advantage of the momentum brought forward by the 9th of March 2020 protest that led to a large number of politicians “co-opting” the feminist narrative for political gain. On the 6th of March 2021, a group of feminists from different collectives and feminist organisations as well as independent feminists under the umbrella of “less opportunism, more feminism”, called a protest in front of the senate to demand from the government congruency between what was said on media outlets and what they were doing in the senate.

‘If the nine points that we raise here in our pamphlet are institutionalised, that is fine. In other words, what we want is precisely for legislation to be enacted so that abortion is safe and free throughout the country. That the law on conscientious objection is reformed, which violates women's health rights. The problem is not that our message becomes institutionalised, but that women’s rights are not respected or guaranteed. It is not an agenda that has occurred to us out of thin air, it is the rights that we have and that we are demanding to be respected and guaranteed. And then if they soften them, the contrast between what we are demanding and what they can do is evident’ (Suhayla, 29 – Independent feminist, senate gathering).
While their demands lacked the prefigurative character much of the movement carries, in a political and social context of violence and emergency, this liberal strategy is in itself somewhat prefigurative. Their demands continue to be powered by the dream of concrete actions toward a society where women are free of violence and have autonomy over their bodies. The visit to the senate became a hastened version of the stages/modes of autonomy (negation, creation, contradiction, and, ultimately, disappointment) (Dinerstein, 2015).

When we arrived at the protest in front of the Congress building, they had planned to do a performance whereby they placed pink crosses across the building wall. A speaker was then to read out their demands while the rest of the protesters lay down their bodies on the floor as though they had been murdered (see picture p. 100). Shortly after they were finished with the performance, a representative of the MORENA party approached the group, offering to arrange a meeting with one of the congresswomen. The girls navigated this proposal conflicted, they had not planned to dialogue with anyone from any party, and some nearby activists warned them to “be careful” as the party had been attempting to co-opt the movement for weeks before the march. The “less opportunism, more feminism” speakers decided to attend but only under the condition that all party representatives attended the meeting, so that they would bring the collectives’ demands directly to congress. The representative and the protesters went back and forth until a “negotiated promise” was made they would let those in Congress know of the meeting but they could not guarantee their attendance. Within the hour, we proceeded to go into the chambers for the meeting. It became apparent from the beginning that the protesters’ demands were not taken seriously and it was instead a media stunt to showcase the party’s support of the movement. Only members from the MORENA party, one from the PAN, and one from the PRI parties (none of them head representatives) attended the meeting. The congresswomen refuted the protesters’ demands as “naïve”, young utopian dreams, and argued instead that their work from the “top/down” was more successful and never simple. The girls decided to leave shortly after, chanting a series of feminist mantras while exiting the room. During the space of one morning, these activists were left with a feeling of frustration and disillusionment, once it became clear that their message was not going to be either listened to or translated into policy.

‘For me, it has been a disappointment more than anything. I feel frustrated because their positioning is a lot of speech and little in action. They do not make it very clear to us if they are going to consider our demands. If there is an interest to take this type of action mentioned in our agenda or at least to listen to us. [...] We are still left with uncertainty. This is the Senate, it is the representation of the entire legislative power throughout the country, so we need clarity. We don’t need speeches, we need action’ (Lucia, 24 – Acoso en la U).

By engaging in a process of reframing (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), the liberal branches of the WCA hope to gain control over how the state discusses VAW and inequality, challenging archaic, stagnant policies that box and label women into categories or narratives which they do not fit. While the diversity within the WCA can make apparent the plurality of oppressions that women experience by highlighting for instance the failed attempts by Western feminist theory to frame the struggles of indigenous women, women of colour, or trans women, these benefits should not be assumed or necessarily view this as beneficial as they become translated into the languages of power. Instead, they need to be
seen as part of the struggle, as a space of contention that is surrounded by the constant dangers of assimilation. Interacting with state and non-state actors runs a continuous risk of incorporation and disappointment. I asked an independent senator about his perspective of this broken dialogue between the WCA and government, and around the co-optation by political parties from the opposition:

‘It is the theory of change not to change. Because if they don’t, they are thrown away. It is a phenomenon of snatching flags so as not to be left out. It can also be seen as a cultural and political triumph, feminism. I think feminism has to exemplify it, but not concede. My colleagues have a hard time taking off their investiture and not speaking from the Zócalo. They are angry that they are being scolded by them, they are angry that they are telling them the truth. [...] These girls of course have reason to be angry. Of course, changes have been made in the Senate, it is not static, but you have to understand that this aggravating reality occurs at the same time’ (Senator Emilio Álvarez Icaza).

Indeed, sometimes the translation of the WCA by the state has given way to a process of collective mobilisation, assimilating some words and realities into the collective imaginary, as was the case after the integration of feminicide within the penal code. While feminicide is not a perfect legal terminology (see chapter 2), the work brought forward by academics and activists made the state responsible for the extreme situation of VAW in the country, as well as named it a social problem that was, until then, “unseen”. When state action became insufficient, the terminology helped mobilise women against this violence, through networks of solidarity, exceeding and always overflowing, the state’s capability of translating the struggle. Therefore, while the WCA remains in its majority separated from the state and institutions, it continues to hold it accountable, forcing it to comply with their demands when needed. However, this is not without risk, as an overemphasis on State-WCA negotiation can lead to what Varela (2020) calls a “culture of simulation”, where the state continues to develop policy with a “gender perspective” while violence continues or grows. ‘Autonomy as a relational, contradictory process rather than a binary outcome (e.g., autonomy v incorporation). Interacting with the state involved the risk of incorporation and subordination, but also created opportunities to develop autonomous capacity’ (Goodwin, 2020: 248). The WCA is in a constant struggle in this state negotiation between being integrated into the logics of the state and capital and remaining independent from it, always struggling towards the possibility of moving beyond (Dinerstein, 2015). Despite the general rejection of the state and consensus to remain independent from political parties and organisations, there is an impossibility of working outside of the context of state and capital.

7.1.2. Translation by erasure: Selective histories and moralising discourses

In terms of translation by erasure (Vázquez, 2011), we can see examples of this in the constant negation of statistics and minimisation of the growing crisis of VAW and feminicide by the president and allies (Cerva Cerna, 2020a; 2020b) (see chapter 2). The degree of manipulation of the reality lived daily by women can be likened to that of psychological gaslighting that infiltrates the public imaginary and constructs public
memory. Remembering becomes resisting praxis against a violent state (see chapter 6). The counterstrategy employed by the activists is remembering the histories of the victims, their names, their lives that were taken away and deemed unimportant. This is in direct opposition to abstract public history constructed by the modern state. For instance, a feminist collective from Monterrey, through the “they live here” podcast, remembers the victims of feminicide as full people in their life as opposed to merely their final day. Each story is accompanied by an illustration of the honoured woman, created by collaborating with visual artists. On the podcast, the relatives of these women, often their mothers, narrate who they were and who they wanted to become. The young women conduct the interviews, either online or by phone. To date, the project has 20 episodes dedicated to women from Mexico and Latin America. ‘Here, your name will never be erased, nor reduced to a statistic’ (Ellas Viven Aquí, 2021).

Another discursive violence inflicted upon the women who struggle as part of the WCA is that of moralising discourses. I have previously highlighted this practice in section 2.4.2. Through moralising narratives, the state mediates and delegitimises the WCA, through discursive repression of protest. It establishes a narrative around the marches, which minimises the importance of the collectives’ demands and inflates the degree of damages and violence in a bid to discredit public protest. This practice is just as, or arguably more, successful in the maintenance of the status quo than violent, direct repression, or as expressed by Cerva Cerna (2020a: 203), ‘the police does not need to go out to repress protesters when the president’s discourse is strong enough to delegitimise and penalise protest’. These strategies lead to the negotiation and translation of the WCA struggle for autonomy beyond the autonomy-state-capital nexus and beyond the internal contradictions within and between the collectives (Goodwin, 2020), and bring with it a third dimension: negotiation with the rest of society. The rhetoric around the WCA mediates their relationship with communities. As the state normalises the degree of violence experienced by women and uses moralising discourses of “good/bad” women, the WCA finds the need to reaffirm itself in the space that was never really given: a legitimate space in the eyes of society. Anti-feminist sentiments, gender-trolling, and misogynist, machista behaviours flourish in this social climate. VAW materialises in protests and feminist networks through harassment and threats amplified by the state narrative. Collectives are seen as a “public enemy” (Cerva Cerna, 2020b). This is part of the dangers and negotiations of capital mediation of social relations, as communities that are crossed by systemic violences are given a scapegoat. Communities whose subjectivities are shaken and threatened by the praxis and epistemologies of the WCA and who feel validated in the political discourses. It is part of the continuous struggle between capital and Hope movements, a simultaneous battle between a system that divides and tears the social fabric, and one which battles to heal it. In this subjective contention, the state employs direct repression and physical violence against the WCA as a secondary strategy, repressing and silencing the bodies of women who resist.
7.1.3. Translation by repression: Silencing the WCA

Having explored co-optation and silencing forms of mediation in the negotiation of the WCA’s autonomy against and within the state, I present here the physical and direct violence the state employs in its struggle against the WCA. I do so by highlighting the importance of witnessing and remembering contentious struggles through the testimonies of those subjects who have experienced state violence and repression through their body-mind-spirit. Stories of resistance that need to be told as part of an alternative history, against a state that holds the power of representation and construction of public memory.

Since November 2019, there has been a progressively increasing repression against the activists from the WCA at the hands of state actors and police. Protesters have been attacked with tear gas, pressure hoses, fire retardant as well as direct physical violence. As a result of the state holding the legitimate monopoly of violence over the population (Foucault, 1979; Mbembe, 2003), police repression during protests can be seen as part of the state’s democratic right to maintain social control. What drives the cruelty and violence of police officers? Zlobina and Andujar (2021) highlight the process of dehumanisation that occurs in contexts of protection that legitimises and normalises the inflicting of violence upon the bodies of the protesters. They highlight two distinct forms of dehumanisation animalistic, which has often been employed in racist discourses, and mechanistic. I add here the moralising discourse that arises in political narratives of the good/bad women wherein women are seen as second-grade, subjugated citizens that need to be controlled into “good behaviour”. This discourse can be seen as part of the logic of the coloniality of gender that struggles to demarcate and impose patriarchal realities upon the bodies of dissident subjects. The constant mediation of feminised resistance by a Violent, colonial state fosters and reproduces the control of bodies on the other side of the colonial difference.

By August 2021, on my latest visit to Mexico City, it became apparent that police repression had only worsened. Many activists had been arrested and prosecuted for their part in the protests. Social media platforms were used as a tool to identify and go after particular members. A few activists had also experienced the police entering their apartments with the pretence of illegal activity, allegedly planting incriminating evidence to delegitimise their protest. As recalled by one of the activists from the centre:

*On the 7th of March in Polanco, at the home of one of the compas who works. They were preparing a performance for 8M with fire, there is a girl called fire flower. There was a girl from Ciudad Juárez who is a documentary filmmaker, and she recorded several videos of all of us who have been*
repressed, and that day this girl was with her in the house. Recording how they were rehearsing for the performance because she wanted to make a documentary about the whole process, how they prepare, and so on. So, this girl had her swords covered in cloth that she soaked in gasoline and set on fire. Then, while they were rehearsing, a group that did not identify themselves from the prosecution arrived and forced their way into their house and locked them in a small room. This documentary filmmaker girl has photographs of all this because even though they take away her camera, her microphone stays outside of her recording. And she from a little shore continues recording. Then they arrive and you see how they plant things that don’t make sense. They even said that they had 18kg of marijuana and accused them of drug dealing, building weapons, and almost terrorism. Because what was happening is that they were trying to delegitimize the 8M movement...

While Monticelli (2021) highlights the need for a double mutually reinforcing political strategy: prefigurative politics and conventional politics to 'counteract hegemonic and regressive forces' (p. 115), in my research, activists emphasise the impossibility of working with a violent, oppressive state. It also became abundantly clear that the geographical, social, and political contexts between the centre and periphery allowed for vastly different degrees of police repression. While activists from the centre were attacked in the protests, these were often events attended by a large number of people. Moreover, while the centre works as a protected space for the activists, their presence in public spaces becomes more normalised. On the other hand, protests in the periphery were more sparse with higher levels of police presence and repression. A concrete example of this can be seen when contrasting the levels of repression of the two occupations of the CNDH premises. The centre has continued to be occupied by activists for over a year, while the attempted occupation of Ecatepec, one of the most dangerous peripheral zones, barely lasted 14 hours. I present here the testimonies of an activist who were detained in the occupation of the Ecatepec CNDH and one who was, at that moment in time, in the centre Okupa:
I was on my way to the Okupa of the CNDH in the centre, but a friend calls me and said “no, don’t come here. They are trying to take over the CNDH in Ecatepec” which was only a few blocks from me. They said, “go take a look and see how they’re doing and then come over here!”. I was getting ready to go to the centre because they had already been guarding the building for three days and they were tired. I was with a couple of other friends from the centre and said to them “let’s just wait, here in Ecatepec there is another take taking place”. We arrived there and the seizure of the building had been done pacifically. We were accompanying an 8-month pregnant girl who had eight children, victims of trafficking who were asking their case to be paid more attention as they had put their report in 2019. They took the report in the CODHEM and simply said it couldn’t be resolved. So, I contact the girls from the city saying that we were going to stay. That we were going to seize the building with them, seizing which had been authorised by the CODHEM. And the girls from the centre send us an uber with food, water, medications… everything so that we could stay. Six of us were prepared to stay. Then around midnight, everything disappeared from the centre of Ecatepec. Everything.

I told my compañeras “I’m very scared” and started crying. They asked why, I said Ecatepec was not the same as the city. Something happened. We were in an avenue where public transport passes y constantly. I said, “I can hear no public transport”. A friend told me not to panic, otherwise I would make everyone else panic. It’s very tiring to be constantly alert. I thought ‘well, they know we have kids with us here, they are not going to do anything stupid’. Inside the building, we had three friends from the press. Around 11.30 they had said “we have been 3 days in the Okupa, we will come back tomorrow early morning”. Two of them asked for a taxi and left. The other one had arrived later and decided to stay with us to see what sort of things you do during the night. We were just getting some rooms ready for the kids. We were making food as we had not yet eaten. It is then that one of the girls that just left called us. She said “you know? Here in the streets, there is a lot of police”. We called the girls from the centre to let them know. They said they were going to send two girls to us to see what was going on. Everyone was hooded, I had my stencils that I was carrying from earlier on to go to the Okupa in the centre. And suddenly the police get off their vans and start shouting at us “se querian un desmadrato, ahora si las vamos a matar” (you wanted a rampage, now we are finally going to kill you). It is a very small building the CODHEM. They started kicking the doors and shouting at us. They even used enforcers between three of them, but the door opened outwards. The kids started crying as they came in. They took all the food and supplies the girls had sent us and they took us in these white vans that weren’t patrol cars. They had not identified themselves. They start saying, “you wanted a rampage see how you feel when you are disappeared”. Things like that. The entire time I was talking on the phone with the girls from the city. They said not to hang up so they could hear everything. I started a live stream from our Facebook group Manada periferia (collective that seeks to unite several peripheral feminist collectives to see how they can action together and the precautions to take). I shared my location with them, and it went viral. The girls from the press were nearby and came back outside the Okupa in Ecatepec, following the cars. They did not take us to the Ecatepec precinct. Form the CODHEM to the Ecatepec precinct is like six minutes on the car. They drove us for over two hours. They took us to Atizapan, to another municipality. We were through five municipalities before we were taken to a precinct.

[I ask whether everyone was taken] Yes, including the mother and children. The kids were also pictured in the prison with us. They took us to the precinct, and they started being nice to us. Even gave us water! The water the girls had sent for us… The girls from the city came to meet us to Atizapan, getting there around 4am. I felt secured inside the precinct behind bars as I could hear them. I started hearing the girls from the centre outside calling for us. The girls from the press got there around the same time. The police took them by force and started breaking their window cars, threatening them for them to go away. I think they never expected press to be there that late at night. My friend said the police officers were so scared from the girls outside that they started to throw metal chairs at them from inside the precinct. It was a very violent struggle where another three of our compañeras were detained as they were documenting all that was happening. They were human rights defenders; they didn’t even go there to action. My compañero [male friend] was badly beaten up, and then put him behind bars with me. I could see a big wound on his head, could have sworn I could see his cranium. We spent the night there and were let free at 11am. Because it had been so long without medical assistance, the wound could not be sutured, and he was immobilised for almost four months. He is of collateral damage from our protest in the periphery. I have said it to many that if people had not been watching the online stream I would have been disappeared. I say to them “I was saved by social media”.

I come from Neza so most of my friends were from the periphery. I spoke to them [the activists that were about to occupy the premises] and asked them to, *echame un grito* (translated literally as throw me a scream, give me a shout). Here we say “*echame un grito*” to mean “send me a message, tell me if anything happens”. But it was literally a scream. They called me to tell me police officers were coming in. At that moment Yesenia [Zamudio] told us not to go as “*our place was here*”. And yes, perhaps my place was here but I came from the periphery, and I know what repression is like in the State of Mexico and they are my friends. I felt so guilty as I basically put them there. I would have been arrested too if I was there with them. I said I would go see if I could do anything to help. I went with a few friends of mine and on the way, we found a girl who had a car… When we arrived at Ecatepec, we were told they had taken them elsewhere. So about ten of us got in the car and went to Atizapan. We wanted to make noise so they would let them out. We never expected such a violent response. All the police officers were initially inside the precinct. Then a cabron [bastard] came out with a long weapon and so many of our friends that had never done direct action before panicked and started running away. We screamed at them “*don’t run*”. What was giving us power was that we were united. That is what they fear. We were a group of women united. The moment they see one of us running away, the police come out and start throwing chairs and tear gas at us. They started shouting that they were going to grab us and rape us and then kill us. And a friend of mine said to me that while they were inside, they were being harassed by the police as well, with policewomen making fun of them saying “*now you’re scared!*”. When they heard us making noise she said, “I knew you were there”. And so she turned to the policewoman and said “*you know who those are? They are our sisters, and they won’t rest until we are found and let out*”. It stayed with me very deeply since I felt a lot of regrets, a lot of guilt. Fortunately, they were let out the next day. We came back to Ecatepec from there and set the CODHEM on fire. If it’s not theirs, it is no ones.

What compels WCA to struggle against an oppressive system? Against state repression and violence? Scholars including Poma, Parades, and Gravante (2019) have explored the motivations behind activists to protest and resist in a context that they consider high repression and violence levels or high-risk activism. Understanding emotions in this context are vital to understanding the action, as political repression can lead to a strengthening of the movement through anger as much as the disintegration of the same due to fear, frustration, or impotence (Flam, 1998). How emotions function in these contexts are never predictable but contextual as the particularities of the space inhabited by the activists as well as their individuality will rise different feelings (Hochschild, 1975, 1979) and lead to different actions. For instance, Della Porta (2021, 1998) analyses emotions amongst militants of the FARC in Colombia where she underlines feelings of brotherhood and loyalty creating a "second family". Scholars such as Jasper (2018) have underscored hopeless emotions in high-risk activism through the notion of *the nothing-to-lose-effect* (cited in Poma, Paredes, and Gravante, 2019: 5). This effect has been likened to the movement of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina or suicide bombers in Palestine. Emotion work becomes vital for *the nothing-left-to-lose* action to take place as strong emotions are channelled into longer-lasting ones e.g., rage into vengeance (ibid.). Perhaps that is the way some may read this praxis, as a last desperate move.
Instead, I place it as part of the latency of the Not-Yet. Through anger, they act. They don’t resign but rather they jump into the unknown because they know life can be different, even when perhaps it won’t be. Those who have nothing-left-to-lose act out of wanting for something else, not simply out of desperation. ‘If it’s not theirs, it is no ones’ is not a feeling purely driven by desperation or rage, it is by the affirmation that the space can and should be theirs. It is their space to feel safe, affirm life, and organise Hope when they have previously considered it impossible (Della Porta, 2021).

In this section, I have examined the diverse strategies employed by the state to delegitimise, erase, and extinguish the WCA. Depending on the social politics of the place of struggle the methods vary from direct confrontation physical violence, and life-threatening dangers to more symbolic and discursive tactics to mobilise counterinsurgencies against the WCA from below. All these are part of mediation to conserve the status quo that reproduces modernity/coloniality violences. In the following section, I engage with a discussion of the current divisions and shortcomings of the WCA, which are founded in these same pervasive hegemonic logics. To overcome these, I argue that the WCA must come together and reframe social relations beyond this imposed reality through decolonising praxis and epistemologies, to release the excess that can radically transform the present.

7.2. Negotiations and Contradictions within the WCA: The Internal Politics of Revolutionary Praxis

7.2.1. Intersectional feminism (un)challenged

Contemporary grassroots activisms and social movements are diverse, and it is within this diversity that they struggle for ‘difference-in-equality and equality-in-difference’ (Escobar, 2004: 224). It is within this struggle that Santos (2005) warns of a need for mutual understanding and discussion within social movements. Comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds, worldviews, beliefs, and customs, this dialogue often finds itself at odds, leading to an impasse in creating mutual learning and transformation. The importance of making connections and affirming connectedness is crucial in the navigation of prefigurative action as part of the WCA’s resistance. However, it should not be assumed that collective identity is the starting point or the force behind the organising of the WCA struggle, on the contrary, it is built into a negotiation process that transforms the personal identities of those who are involved in the movement (Cerva-Cerna, 2020). This is the final stage for anger to become a transformational, radical emotion as it leads the mobilisation of collective action (Reger, 2004). It is therefore critical to explore the internal dynamics within the WCA and how internal differences between these diversities of women’s struggles are negotiated.

Feminised collective identity is built in the resistance. At the centre of this identity is solidarity and Hope for another reality, expressed individually as a promise and not just as a pragmatic interest (Cerva-Cerna, 2020). Connectedness is negotiated through networks of solidarity, through horizontality and emotion-sharing methodologies (Reger, 2004) embodied experience, and alternative epistemologies. These are, as previously argued, in direct contestation to capitalist modernity logics under an environment of growing social, economic, and political violence. ‘Prefigurative epistemologies are embedded in the collective construction of multiple readings of the world’ (Motta, 2016: 35). The project of creating new realities within, against, and beyond hegemonic violent structures becomes a simultaneous collective project, full of mediations and disappointment (Dinerstein, 2015). Connectedness becomes a painful journey that must
recognise the cultural and social violence women experience, as it is full of contradictions that arise as part of a dialogue of difference. While collective anger against feminicide is a shared emotion (Reger, 2004), reciprocal emotions between collectives, activists, and movement participants are mixed (Jasper, 2014). These can give rise to feelings such as friendship, solidarity, and loyalty but can also lead to discontent, feelings of injustice, and alienation (Motta et al., 2011).

Advocates of the fourth feminist wave argue that what differentiates this wave from those in the past is that it is informed by intersectionality (Álvarez Enríquez, 2020; Cerca Cernal, 2020a, 2020b; Muñoz-Saavedra, 2019). Across the different women’s collectives, I spoke to from the capital, university, and peripheral areas of the city, debates around intersectionality were prominent. The socialist feminist groups spoke about intersectionality from a class perspective as the “main” or overarching intersection. Both radical and liberal feminists adopted intersectional feminist discourses within their ideology, speaking about oppression by class, race, sexuality, as well as their privileges as white, middle class, and, many of them, university-educated. The problem, however, appears to be that within this very discourse, feminists from the periphery and independent feminists recognised some incongruences. As argued by Dinerstein (2015), capital’s mediation of autonomous struggles goes beyond the state-movement dichotomy and instead mediates all social relations. Gibson-Graham (2006) contend that theorising and working towards alternatives cannot be mistaken for the notion that we can think of ourselves as being outside of the repressive, violent system of capital and state repression. This was similarly voiced by an independent feminist I met in the Marea Verde gathering:

‘My students get very angry when we start talking about social issues and I am like “OK, now we see that we live in a sewage”. It’s dirty, it’s awful, it’s smelly is unjust. So, because I see it I am suddenly clean? I still live in the sewage, I may not like it; I see it now. But I stink. Because I live in a sewage. And so that is the deconstruction work for me. How I clean myself a little every day, and then I go out into the world, and I get dirty again. It is the eternal work of deconstruction’ (Andrea, 31-ACTO)

I place this discussion through a decolonial lens and argument that the modernity/coloniality mediations continue in the form of ‘social, political, economic, legal, and cultural forms of social relations’ under capital (Dinerstein, 2015: 20), in which members of the WCA do not automatically escape. Instead, social hierarchies continue to be reproduced due to the persisting logics of coloniality. In this space, emotion plays a key role to understand the internal dynamics of the WCA (Whittier, 2021). The dynamic I would like to highlight here is empathy’s limited potential for the WCA coalition. To examine these contradictions, I return to Hemmings’ (2012) and Phipps’ (2016) works on affective solidarity. Particularly, examining two questionable forms of empathy that can be reshaped in praxis: failed empathies and selective empathies.
7.2.2. Failed Empathies: Centre-Peripheral power imbalances

Failed empathies are understood as ‘lazy and false empathy in which we take the other’s place’ (Dean, 2003: 96 cited in Hemmings, 2012). Failed empathies may lead the people in the relationship of affect to “fake solidarity” without true action. ‘A transformative empathy explicitly resists essentialising gestures and is a profoundly politicised rather than natural skill that requires struggle over and above passive recognition or advocacy’ (Hemmings, 2012: 152). As already highlighted when discussing horizontality, solidarity and affection do not equal consensus. Women’s differences across the axis of class, race, sexuality, ableness, etc. cannot be blinded for the sake of the “unity of sisterhood” but need to be reckoned with and worked on however painful the journey (Phipps, 2016; Mendoza, 2002). Intersectional solidarity entails ‘confronting differences… and grappling with how power and position shape emotions and feeling rules for both the dominant and the subjugated’ (Whittier, 2021: 374). Real empathy requires a struggle with oneself and will inevitably lead to the loss of some of the privileges that are enjoyed under current hierarchical social constructions, which women are not outsiders too. Beyond superficial gestures, it is an action that can lead to the formation of real horizontal social relations and the (re)building of communities. The uncomfortable nature of this struggle is reflected in this section through the example of the concreteness of territorial privileges when exploring centre/periphery feminist divides.

As outlined in chapter 4, there are distinctive dominant branches that have existed within the WCA throughout history and which have done so independently from one another, without a horizontal dialogue. This has resulted in the dominance of some privileged groups, that put forward homogenous demands and are seen as the “speaker” of the movement. The existence and plurality of these groups and their independent struggles is representative of this new wave. Yet, something that has become apparent is that different branches still hold widely different degrees of visibility and power within the social discourse, with hegemonic feminisms from the centre receiving most media attention and leading the talks in institutional and governmental changes. For this reason, many of the demands that have been absorbed by the government or have had the highest political advocacy impact are demands from those more visible feminisms (radical student movement, institutionalised feminisms) which continue to frame their demands under homogenous terms, always directed at the state. Therefore, their political praxis reproduces a concept of gender wherein women are treated as victims in ahistorical contexts under patriarchy and who come together with uniform social demands. In contrast, dissident feminist and women’s collectives from the periphery reject this dialogue with the state, instead focussing their efforts on community-building and weaving as transformational, prefigurative praxis against the widespread context of violence.

As I showcased in my historic and organisational overview of the WCA in chapter 4, there is a clear ideological and geographic divide between the periphery and the centre of the Capital. Most of the feminist movement has historically been popularised from the centre outward, with university spaces and the historic centre becoming the main spaces of feminist struggle. However, it is in the peripheries of the capital and surrounding states where most of the VAW and feminicides occur. In these spaces, the WCA is still sparse and disconnected, with collectives from the centre failing to establish connections to these
areas. It is in these areas where there is an urgent need for community-building, and the
deconstruction of violent social, economic, and political hegemonies.

‘There has been an abandonment of feminist events and feminist activities in the peripheries. A reason why we focus on the peripheries has to do with the fact that high levels of violence are centered there. [...] What we are missing are spaces and more people [in Spanish, comaradas] who are also there as if to say: “we will build with you.” They are all there in the center instead, like in Rome, in the most expensive areas’ (Claudia, 28 - Insubordinadas).

‘I think we must remember that feminism is very centralised. Here the marches in the city are gigantic, we have a chance to do graffiti, to do damage. Go to a march in Ecatepec, which is one of the most dangerous municipalities to be a woman in the entire country. And go to some marches and there are 30 or 40 women at the most. Where they have to walk carefully... not do anything that attracts much attention. Forget about graffiti and destruction, because the situation is so bad, they cannot even march in peace. We must be very aware of that. We also have our privileges here in the city’ (Rosa, 23 - Grl Pwr peace circle).

Feminist collectives from the peripheries challenge this centralisation and in turn, the Westernised feminist discourse that is so prevalent in the centre. As one of the founders of Vulvísima argues, ‘being a woman from the periphery already allows you to think and do feminism differently, due to your own life story, your set of mind’. This is similar to a statement made by a member of Crianza Feminista: ‘all the women in Crianza have lived in our own flesh the periphery and are aware of all the limitations that present from being in those conditions. We have a double perspective being women from the periphery and being feminist women’. Feminism slowly becomes more inaccessible to everyday women who are given a whitewashed, Westernised version of the theory by feminist elites. The lack of choice within the present feminist discourse makes them believe women have to choose between being a feminist or their community.

‘When you work in the communities you realise that the problem with feminism is that when you talk about concepts and try to make people visualise specific problems instead of listening to them. The issue here is that you are asking a man or woman to forget their identity, the identity that constitutes them as a person and as valuable beings in their community’ (Nicole, 28 - Vulvísima).

Other feminist collectives have themselves felt unwelcome within the ranks, acknowledging that patriarchal, classist violences continued to be reproduced inside of the movement:

‘It has happened many times. In most of the spaces we have attended, where many women said to get back in our house.
They questioned why we were protesting with our children, that we were exposing them. Even one of them told us “I DO work”! and this happens often. It’s very sad and very violent to hear that from women who assume the feminist flag. [...] even in the metropolitan assembly, they wanted us to not bring our kids with us. They even talked about opening a space like a nursery so the mothers who wanted to march would leave their kids there. How are we going to leave our kids with strangers?! That was a confrontation with the syndicalist collectives who appear to not understand what it is to be a mother, what it is to be a feminist mother. They want us to educate in the private sphere when what we want is to get out onto the streets. Get motherhood out of the house!’ (Crianza Feminista).

An example of feminism’s epistemic privilege can become clear when exploring, for instance, conversations around new masculinities. Feminists are essentially trying to modify men’s identity from a provider and family head to suddenly an equal partnership, where he loses all his perceived control and superiority. Members of the community are asked to give up their identity for a new identity constructed outside of their control, outside of the context of the community. Similarly, workshops and seminars put forward by feminist collective from the centre which seek to empower women as “leaders” contradict the collectivist ideologies that mark indigenous identities. They are cookie-cutter, white-washed exercises that emerge from a privileged feminist academic setting and fail to be translated into the experiences of women from popular sectors and indigenous contexts. This is in contrast to the resilient, inclusive and community-led strategies put forward by collectives in the centre who build together through horizontal dialogues. For this reason, rather than imposing, abstract, decontextualised strategies that do not ring truth to the life experiences of people outside privileged spaces, community processes which are inclusive of every member of the community are fundamental to truly transforming the present situation of violence in Mexico from its roots. Otherwise, the movements’ progress will remain purely discursive and institutionalised.

‘Until now there hasn’t been a real representation of the voices of the marginalised attending to the reality we live in, it is very difficult to recognise and understand the problems of the marginalised when you have not lived them’ (Nicole, 28 - Vulvísima).

‘Central feminisms continue with this learning process that the academy has brought us since I can remember, “imagine a problem, and now imagine what solution you are going to give to that imaginary problem”. Everything from the abstract, everything from something that you do not even understand, you do not even have the notion of what you are talking about. We continue talking as in this current of centralism, of whitewashed feminism, then trying to make solutions for everyone, like falling into this standardisation as well. the solutions are either too unreal or too homogeneous. And you think, in other contexts, this is not possible. So, time is wasted in that, in offering solutions without contextualising the
problems and that is one of the failures’ (Alicia, 26 - Femiprxicas).

When looking into the specificities of “failed empathies”, a key territorial struggle is the privileged division between Centre-Periphery along the lines of public transformation. For central women and feminist collectives to go through the inconvenience of having to navigate the periphery, which lacks an adequate transportation system, can become a concrete example of true solidarity:

The state of Mexico is not like Mexico City which has a transportation network that connects you in some way. There are the Metrobús, the trolleybus, the cable bus, there is not a lot of transportation here in the city, not in the state of Mexico. Where I lived there was no direct transport between outlying areas. It was better to see each other here in the center or here in Buenavista than to try to coincide somewhere out there. Also, the periphery is not kind to us. It is also the same situation when we come to protest. We come here because transportation is easier and friendlier. When we started asking the girls from in the city who have never had to do those tours to join us, they didn't want to go. And they still don't want to go. I mean, it's still something that needs to be worked on a lot in feminism (Crianza feminista).

The bubble of privilege makes them unable to see other collectives in the periphery and all the things that are involved in acting in the periphery (Independent feminist, Stencil workshop).

It is important to note that, in the last five years, there have been great changes to the extent to which these statements can be taken as “absolute truths”. The 2020 International Women’s Day march in Neza, for instance, was one of the most attended marches to date. The peripheral feminisms have also been gaining space and momentum on social media and during the pandemic with their Rodadas. Resist Pedal is a peripheral collective, which by making use of cycling and cycling repair workshops looks to create new transportation systems among women from the periphery that are safer and cheaper. As highlighted by Zononi (2020: 11), modernity/coloniality mediation of social relations is not definite, as mediation ‘always contains the possibility for its own negation, de-mediacion’ (Gunn, 1987 in Dinerstein, 2015: 21-22). Women’s contentious praxis must become aware of the reproduction of violent hegemonies at the inside of the WCA. Most of the feminist collectives I spoke to, both in the centre and the periphery, did highlight how women’s experiences in the periphery were vastly different from those in the centre or at the universities, aware of the centralisation of the movement. Many were in the process of active deconstruction of their privileges. While this is a positive path to follow, open dialogue and active listening of those women who have been historically rendered invisible are key to the growth and enrichment of the movement. It needs to go beyond the feminist tags.

56 Protests on bicycles.
'We have to start resisting from all spaces, stop lying down to our unique resistance process because feminism is not thereby itself. Feminism is a process of defense of the territory, it is a process of anti-capitalist defense, and we have to begin to be with them and to abandon precisely these small spaces, all bounded, that they will not let us learn. We have as a primary need to begin to see those intersections, to begin to see those various expressions and how sometimes our discourse is not going to fit in some contexts. What do we do with them? Do we abandon them, do we force them to live our process? [...] the communities have traditions, and those traditions are there. The reality is that when we go to a space on the periphery where we are different, we assume that they must be like us and that is not cool. We have to start dialoguing’ (Marta, 32 - Fueguitas Intransigentes).

Acknowledging the feelings of anger, disappointment, and alienation that feminists from the periphery experience is not an attempt to divide the movement, but rather it can work to pre-empt its downfall. Feminist discussions around anger are often focused more on institutions, government, and men than a discussion around accountability amongst and between women from the movement. In the second wave, dominant feminisms suppressed other women’s anger tagging it as destructive rather than moving, failing to acknowledge intersectional relations of power and domination amongst women (Lorde, 1984). While feminists from the 1970s, as well as feminists from the contemporary Mexican WCA claim to work horizontally in their discussion, they place consensus as a goal that may ‘impose a will to agree despite ideally involving argument [...] small difference of opinion can be shunted away until the frustration of members who feel unrepresented builds up and erupts in anger’ (Holmes, 2004: 220). This present anger and disappointment embodied by peripheral collectives must be acknowledged as valid emotions that can help strengthen the movement rather than as personally directed blame or resentfulness, which does not allow for dialogue and negotiation to occur. Harmony may not always be desirable and amiable in the pursuit of alternative social dynamics, especially in relation to marginalised groups. As highlighted by Whitter (2021: 380) in her work on the Women’s March in the US in 2019, in the end,

‘the strong shared anger towards a common enemy and the feelings of solidarity formed in collective action were insufficient in the long rung to transcend the negative feelings of coalition partners towards each other’.

Embracing difference and disagreement as part of the construction of other worlds allows for the openness of possibilities. “Empowerment” as a feeling of resistance, should not be only analysed as a personal feeling alone but rather as a collective (Poma and Gravante, 2017), as expressed by an activist from Fueguitas Intransigentes (previously known as Insendiosas): ‘It is important to emphasise that empowerment is not individual, right? If the community is not empowered, if the movement is not empowered, there is no real empowerment’. In their work with the community, periphery feminisms reject the intellectual and codified language of academic feminism and instead engage in direct dialogue with the community (see section 6.4.)
‘The reality is that there are no spaces in the periphery, that is, there are no spaces for the girls to approach because I assure you there are many interested girls. In the end, these experiences cross them, they live them in their daily life, fear, precariousness. What is missing is more companions who are also there as if to say: “We build with you”’ (Carmen, 29 - Insubordinadas).

‘For us, it is very easy because the space is already ours so to speak. But going to places like Neza like Ecatepec, that space still isn’t theirs. That is why it has to be this question of taking over public space and after we have it and dominate that space’ (Independent feminist, 23).

It is vital to recognise and engage with the work of feminisms in the periphery, emphasising the potential for social change in strengthening those already present subaltern feminisms, whilst revisiting how academic, elite, and institutional feminisms approach these practices. While intersectionality and Decolonial feminism theory are gaining popularity, it is becoming co-opted and intellectualised by centrist feminist groups, losing their radical power for social change. This limits the debate and conversation to elitist academic circles that permeate the theory and practice of Decolonial feminism with inconsistencies and contradictions. For instance, when a radical feminist claims to be informed by intersectionality but also believes in gender separatism and trans women’s exclusion. I would like to turn here to a discussion on selective solidarities and the historically debated discussion inside and outside of the WCA: that of women-only or non-mixed, separatist spaces and trans-exclusion led by radical feminist praxis.

7.2.3. Is there a place for men within the movement? Separatism as a Radical Choice

Hegemonic feminisms frame women’s emancipation as a struggle against gender oppression (Espinosa Miñoso, 2019, 2014), that is, the idea that women are oppressed because of their gender. Historically, however, and as I have contended throughout this thesis, the label “women” has often excluded and arguably continues to exclude the bodies that sit at the other side of the colonial difference (Lugones, 2010). Gender and womanhood are instead used as a homogenising category that simultaneously discounts working-class, racialised, non-binary, non-heteronormative bodies while reproducing and (re)imposing the logic of coloniality/modernity by the hand of white, Western hegemonic feminism, taking away subaltern women’s agency (Curiel, 2015; Cusicanqui, 2012; Paredes, 2013). At the same time, the assertion, “women are oppressed because they are women”, falls under a radical form of identity politics that reduces women to vulnerable, passive actors and men to their oppressors. These labels reproduced within hegemonic feminisms have led to a popularisation of gender separatism. That is, the practice of excluding men from feminist spaces as a way of guaranteeing women’s safety, which is becoming an increasingly widespread political strategy amongst the WCA in Mexico City. In a country where 10 women are killed every day, where rape and sexual harassment are normalised and a violent state reproduces patriarchal rhetorics that aid the impunity and social and community violence inflicted upon the bodies of women, it is easy to understand why men become vilified and how women-only spaces are seen as the safest option. I found how regardless of whether the group aligned themselves with one
feminist ideology or another, collectives from the centre and universities and, even at times collectives from the peripheries, adopted this strategy.57

“We are separatist because we try to create safe spaces for ourselves and apart from that because men are already present in all spaces. I’m tired of men taking away my voice […] I mean, I feel you can’t fight hand in hand with your aggressor. I think men should question their attitudes and question the violence that they exercise and that we as women also exercise… I think they can question all the attitudes that they have reproduced’ (Ximena, 19 – Aquelarre violeta).

‘I believe that there have to be some separatist spaces because they are necessary […] when there are dudes the dynamics change completely. When we work on sexting issues that are sexualities at the end of the day, I mean, if there are men it opens a giant barrier’ (Carmen, 29 – Insubordinadas).

Women-only collectives argue that the dynamics within the group change when men are present. Women become less outspoken, feel less safe in spaces shared with men. They cannot be themselves. Therefore, arguably the ongoing repression and social invisibilisation of women in both the public and private sphere is in danger of reproducing itself within women’s collectives. Assertions such as “men cannot be feminists” and “men do not belong in the feminist movement” were common, with several women expressing their reluctance to accept men into the movement in fear that it would be co-opted or appropriated by them. There were two extreme positions as to whether men could or could not consider themselves feminists. That is, whether they could de-construct and re-build themselves with feminist ideals. While many thought men could be empathic to the cause, they believed their upbringing, their socialisation as males alongside their ignorance and lack of first-hand experience as women, made them unable to ever become truly de-constructed or a ‘real feminist’. While men can unlearn patriarchal attitudes and behaviours, they can only be sympathisers or allies. Therefore, their role within the movement also becomes limited.

‘Men cannot be feminists because it is a very constant conflict […] you cannot understand what is happening unless you are part of those affected. I don’t think a man can’t be empathic with the movement, we can all be empathic with other movements, but you cannot be part of the movement if you are not part of the communities that are experiencing the struggle. What is asked of men is that they de-construct themselves for example with the consumption of pornography, when they send their girlfriend’s nudes to their friends. That is like the

57 Feminist socialist collectives i.e. Rosas Rojas, Pan y Rosa and Mujeres Revolucionarias are headed and represented by women, a ‘female faction’ within the international political organisation. While often they have women-only sessions and workshop, when protesting in the public spaces that they often share spaces with men (see more in section 4.3.3.). As clarified by one of the collective members: ‘Rosas Rojas is made up purely of women because we are the political subject of feminism, it would be contradictory to have men. We have our own autonomy our own demands that only cover women, but we also have a political program as a group.’
machismo that they live and reproduce daily, they need to realize that and change it’ (Independent feminist, anti-monumenta).

‘Women have to fight and when I speak of women, I am not only speaking of one type of woman, I am speaking of racialised women, trans women, lesbian women, bisexuals, all types of women, we have to fight, we start from there because it is our struggle. Later, we can reach a society where men would have to be more aware of their role in the patriarchy, but not as part of our movement, as part of a general movement that seeks to end inequality in society’ (Lorena, 26 – Menos oportunismo, mas feminismo, senate gathering).

Dangerously, feminist separatism can lead to the creation of false moralising dichotomy between the “good women” and “bad men” that falls into biologistic gender logics, homogenising both groups as totalising categories and rendering their roles and behaviour in society as static. The predictable logic this follows is exemplified by one feminist’s affirmation: ‘the man who is your ally is violent to another [woman]’ (Semillas de Curie), or ‘you cannot trust a man that calls himself a feminist ally’. This moral dichotomisation creates the female victim and the male aggressor as unmoving figures, doomed to reproduce these violent patterns. This problematic is also present among women’s collectives of mothers, who face rejection by other activists inside of the WCA if they have sons. Numerous feminist mothers recalled being told that they could not be true feminists if they had sons and/or were married to a man.

‘Many of our friends from the collective said that they felt uneasy as many of them as well as their daughters had been abused and assaulted by the 12-year-old cousin and other relatives, young men, adolescents. We decided to empathise with them and so boys over 12 are not allowed to march alongside us. We try to always give a voice to the mothers after so long of being set aside. That is how we walk our path in Crianza. Many of us still have young boys, once they are growing up, we will make some changes as we go along’ (Crianza Feminista).

While feminist collectives’ stance that men need to be active in their de-construction and reassessment of social violences as “it’s not women’s job to educate” may be valid, separatist strategies do not translate into the reality of the community. Women from the periphery highlight how separatism is a privilege for the few that can live their struggle
and activism purely as a separatist effort, but it is unrealistic for all communities to work this way. To them, it is an unrealisable utopia to imagine a world where women can work towards their own deconstruction and men will eventually follow.

‘We are not going to achieve a radical transformation of society, as structural, material, in terms of violence only when women are building. There are mixed spaces and there are separatist spaces, and we work on both of them. [...] I think feminism would become more popular in Mexico if we took a community feminism perspective. This dichotomy of gender would no longer exist. We would not divide men and women’ (Claudia, 28 – Insubordinadas).

Furthermore, this binary of men cannot be feminists and women can and should be feminists evokes a homogenising logic that imposes once again a set of whitewashed, radical feminist ideologies upon the other bodies, how women’s emancipation can be achieved and how society (and women in that society) should function. In turn, this (re)produces the fallacy of a unified, ahistorical, single patriarchy that affects all women the same. ‘The feminist project that aspired to the overcoming of “gender inequality” or the domination and oppression of women, or even, in its later acceptance, the overcoming of dichotomous-binary gender and tells us not to skimp by origin and condition [is] the same feminism that has played an important role in defining what is possible and desirable’ (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016:146, author’s translation). This logic also continues to reproduce systemic hegemonies under modernity/coloniality, aiding in rendering invisible the oppressions women themselves can embody:

‘It is difficult to assume yourself as an oppressor. It is better to talk about how they are also oppressed and then talk about how they oppress others. If you tell them that they are oppressors from the beginning then obviously there is a rejection because it is like “hey, hold on because I am very cool and I have a shitload of pain”. And it’s true, we live in a very unfair world for many people, it is particularly violent and unfair for women, but it is very unfair and violent for many others. I work in Iztapalapa and I have male students who tell me “man, I want to be a poet, but I study all day, then I go to work in a taqueria, and then when I sit down to write the shootings outside distract me”. [...] It is very difficult because I do understand men who react as “I have suffered too”. In the body suffering is lived the same, you cannot know whose suffering is harder’ (Andrea, 31 – ACTO).

Despite the fact I raise here the problematics and impracticalities of employing separatist strategies in popular neighbourhoods, how it reproduces biologistic logics that trap women/men in victim/victimiser dichotomies and renders away women’s agency, the ever-present contradiction of offering safe spaces for women inside of the movement while simultaneously generating radical social change is not an easy one to navigate. It is an endeavour that encounters multiple inconsistencies and, while the dilemma can perhaps be solved theoretically, it is not so simple when dealing with women who have suffered that violence in their bodies and feel betrayed by the movement when their safety
is not placed as a priority. While urgent measures of non-mixed, short-term strategies may be needed in the violent present climate, similar to the government’s pink area policies, an open dialogue is simultaneously required to go beyond the radical separatist epistemology and praxis that reproduce perpetrator narratives and trap men into a paradigm of biologically-determined toxic masculinity. This dialogue is already enacted by collectives from the peripheries who encourage open, experience-full, and emotion-led dialogues between members of the peripheral communities to discuss the violences that cross their bodies. It is through this conversation that communities can heal and sew together the social fabric that has been torn.

7.2.4. Selective empathies: The rise of trans-exclusion

One of the main debates present across feminist collectives during my fieldwork was the inclusion/exclusion of transwomen within the women’s movements. Many feminist collectives, informed by radical feminist epistemologies, were outspoken about their refusal of accepting trans women within gender separatist spaces. This problematic was seen as a Western-washing of feminised resistance and feminist praxis in Mexico by a number of decolonial feminisms from peripheral and central collectives who rejected trans-exclusion. I did, however, recognise two distinct stances that trans-exclusionary collectives defended: those who believed trans feminism was a different, separate, although “valid” struggle; and those who rejected the very premise of trans women being women. Remarkably, all these positions were adopted by feminists who also assumed themselves as intersectional feminists or claimed their praxis was informed by intersectionality. While the radical feminists I spoke to did acknowledge their privileges of class and race over indigenous, black, and working-class women, many argued that the transwomen’s movements should be separate from the feminist movements. They contended that because trans women had a different upbringing, and thus life experience, to cis women, they could not be part of the feminist struggle. This argument, under one of western radical feminism, falls into biologistic immobile claims, reproducing the very same gender stereotypes and constructions the movement is trying to rid itself from.

‘It is something very complicated ... I consider that trans women should be like ... I don’t think that being a woman is a feeling. I know many trans girls and ... and they have their own spaces. Trans-activism is fine, but it’s like something different, being a cis woman than being a trans woman. So ... my feminism is intersectional, yes, they are with us, but a little apart’ (Janet, Semillas de Curie)

‘We believe that the struggle of trans women is separate, not because they do not suffer violence but because we believe that they are very different types of violence that go through us due to the socialisation that we have experienced. We have been socialised 100% as feminine and trans women as adolescents or children... have been socialised differently. It is not like we

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58 Pink areas in transportations are women-only zones where men are fined if they trespass. Police officers are placed in the stations to ensured this is followed (albeit not always effectively). While seemingly patronising measures, these are needed zones to ensure the safety of women. Specially women from working class areas who are more likely to use and are more vulnerable to this violence due to the zones they navigate.
do not recognize their resistance, but we believe that it is quite separate’ (Aquelarre violeta).

At this point, I would like to turn to Phipps’s (2016) work, which using two case studies, one concerning sexual work’s abolition and one trans-exclusion in women-only spaces, showcases how those enjoying privileged spaces in the movements, appropriate “survivor stories” and distressing experiences and turn them into “investment capital” in affective economies (Ahmed, 2012). Far from chastising the use of embodied knowledges or highlighting the disconnections between feminism, Phipps (2016), much like myself, problematises these partial stories that are told as hegemonic truths within the same movement that attempts to escape violent systems. However, in this effort revictimises and discredits the realities of those at the other side of the colonial difference. Stories become ‘commodified in the political field’ (Phipps, 2016: 305).

Personal experiences through testimonies are “invested” into the politics of care and affection of the WCA when discussing and shaping the collectives. In this process, some experiences become more “valuable” than others. In the case of trans-exclusion, it becomes experiences of trans women being violent against cis women in these spaces, including cases of sexual misconduct and rape. The trans woman’s subjectivity is constructed within trans-exclusionary collectives as violent, dangerous, and, essentially, a male predator (Phipps, 2016). These narratives were for instance reproduced during the seizing of the CNDH (present Okupa) wherein trans women were excluded from the shelter afraid they would predate or attack cis refugee women. Despite the fact that trans women were part of the seizing of the building, the Okupa members declared that of October 2020, they no longer welcomed trans women into the space. As a result, trans women, one of the most vulnerable members of Mexican society, were excluded from these services.

‘This politics is part hatred and part fear, both of which concern border anxieties and the construction of boundaries between selves and others… hate is used as a defense against injury (Ahmed, 2012): in this case, an imagined threat of injury from the trans woman is warded off by the mobilisation of another injury, the experience of being raped by a cisgender man’ (Phipps, 2016: 306).

Trans-women become “stuck” in this association with maleness and the penis wherein the penis is attached to that construction of sexual violence as seen in the 70s, 80s by radical feminist constructions of masculine bodies. These personal stories play into the politics of fear and structural violences that affect those whose own stories have been rendered invisible. This unequal exchange of personal experiences, therefore, creates selective empathies wherein only selected personal experiences are granted validity if they concur with the dominant discourse, further hindering the stories of those who oppose it. This immobile, homogenising narrative reproduces the coloniality of gender and power, as well as reimpose violent hegemonies upon the bodies of people who depart from “the” binary gender/sex system. To overcome these shortcomings, I argue, feminist epistemologies necessitate on engagement with decolonial critical thought and praxis.

‘For me, a feminism that is not intersectional is not feminism, why? because there are many cases of women within the movement that are TERFS, women who do not accept trans
people within feminist movements. For me, it is an incongruity because if you are fighting for women's rights, you are fighting against feminicides, you also have to consider that the life expectancy of a trans woman is 30 years due to hate crimes or suicide... if it's not intersectional, if you don't deal with black women, indigenous women, trans women, you don't care about the women's movement. Women who are not intersectional feminists are fighting for the right of cis white women and your movement cannot stop there. It is a privileged point of view. The feminist fight has to be for all women, and it has to evolve so that all women feel safe within feminism’ (Independent feminist, Marea Verde).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the multiple contradictions and negotiations that the WCA mediates in its struggle toward autonomy. I have highlighted the state’s always luring danger of mediation through three main strategies: translation by co-optation, translation by erasure, and translation by repression. I have also spoken of the internal politics of the WCA and the need to decolonise their praxis to deal with continuous structural violences, that are reproduced between and within collectives, especially, those concerning the ongoing erasing of stories and knowledges of women on the other side of the colonial difference. I have focussed the discussion on the ongoing struggles and negotiations between women from the centre/periphery and collectives that are trans-inclusive/extrusive. How the collectives mediate and dialogue these differences and their position via a violent state will result in two continuous contending processes: fostering disappointment and/or Hope. In the following chapter, I examine what remains after these translations, which cannot be co-opted or interpreted within the logic of state and capital: the transformative power of the excess.
CHAPTER 8: RECOGNISING THE NOT-YET: HOW THE WOMEN’S COLLECTIVES ENCAPTURE THEIR POWER OF TRANSFORMATION.

Imagination will often carry Us to worlds that never were. But without it, we go nowhere
- Carl Sagan (1980: 4)

How does the women's collective engage with the excess of their praxis after being “defeated” or “translated” into the logic of the state? How do we measure the movement’s success after disappointment? Contemporary social movement theory often measures the success of a movement through its impact on government policy or general impact at the political level or individual and cultural impacts (Silva, 2005; Meyer, 2003). However, these are often compared in relation to an “objective”, pre/post movement reality. By reimposing modernity/coloniality logics, the “winners” the State reshape the Women’s Collective Action (WCA) into an “objective history” and the reality of capitalist modernity. The success of a movement can only be measured empirically in comparison to this objectivity. However, the measurement of success can, and should, never be in relation to the oppressor. To recall Lorde (1987: 103), the master’s tools will never dismantle the master's house. The WCA can never win within the pre-established demarcations of what the state considers a victory. An apparent victory by the WCA would suggest that it has been somewhat corrupted as it is mediated by the language of power. In contrast, the impact of social relations built through alternatives praxis cannot be measured by the parameters of the state. The “Not-Yet” (Bloch, 1959/1986) is not an empiric reality that can be contained, it is excess. We need to go beyond the imposed reality of capitalist modernity to comprehend the full transformative potential of the WCA that is anticipated but has not yet been revealed.

In this chapter, I engage in a critical discussion of some of the shapes that the Not-Yet can take in the form of subjective (de)mediations. This has proven a difficult, near impossible, endeavor without the correct tools to fully grasp and recognize the transformative power of Hope prefigurative movements. Thus, this initiative is experimental and speculative. I demonstrate how, despite the “tidy” analytical framework that I have proposed throughout the past three chapters, it is impossible to contain the Not-Yet to a particular stage of autonomy. As reiterated from the beginning, the process of organising Hope is not linear or sequential, and it does not follow a clear path. It is a collision of forces where all four modes of the struggle towards autonomy, towards a dignified life, occur simultaneously without a certain order. It is when we comprehend the unpredictability of the process that we can learn from its excess. To highlight this, I put forward the case study of the Okupa as an example of organising Hope. The Okupa case study contains a material potential for transformation within the networks of solidarity that are weaved with the community, and which go beyond the feminist subjects. Each of the separate modes of autonomy I suggested here through testimonials and witnessing accounts hold in themselves an excess that cannot be delimited within traditional research or empirical parameters. Nor can they be translated within the logics of reality and exceed these by engaging with the real, which possesses all possibilities (Dinerstein, 2015). I venture beyond clear definitions of action and goals put forward by
the feminist collectives to offer here glimpses of this excess. What Santos (2014: 29-30) identifies as *emergences*, which are ‘the signs of possible future experiences, under the guise of tendencies and latencies that are actively ignored by hegemonic rationality and knowledge’. The driving force behind this excess is their struggle toward a dignified life without violence and feminicides. This force illuminates alternative worlds that are possible within the concrete prefigurative action of women’s collectives. I close this chapter by offering another form that excess can take: Hopeful generational anticipation. While the WCA’s impact can never be grasped fully or predicted, activists experience a latency, an anticipation that the world as it is must change. Through this prefigurative action, they are approximating these future alternatives. What brings their struggles together is the Hope for a future (better) world.

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Me: I thought the takeover was started by black bloc radical feminists, from what the media and other girls say.

Independent feminist: It is a very common misconception to think that the seizing of the building was by young radical feminists. In truth, it went like this… On September 2, a mutiny by mothers began at the interior of the building. One of those mothers decided to tie herself to a chair. People continued working as if there was no protest here, they didn’t care or saw them as important. So, several feminist collectives who are not radical made a sit-in outside the premises on the 2nd of September, to support the mothers who were inside. Collectives precisely from the periphery, from Neza, from Ecatepec. Girls who are also mothers, and, although they belong to the feminist movement, are not radical feminists and are not that young. They were the ones who decided to take over the building on September 4. They asked the people who were working here to leave the place. That’s when the takeover officially begins. And well, it was made by eight girls who are mothers of families. Feminists but, none of them carry the banner of radicalism. Here are women in resistance. Women who, fed up with the null capacity of the institutions to solve their cases and eradicate violence against women and children, decide to take over the CNDH so that the real change is in those who resist from within day by day. Okupa. Black bloc.
feminism. From then, the support from other girls arrived. So many converged here, young, not so young, radical, anti-speciesism, anti-racist, anti-colonial.

To showcase the multiple forms in which excess overflows each step of the WCA struggle, I use the case study of the National Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos or CNDH) Okupa in the centre of Mexico City. I analyse the trajectory and process towards organising Hope through the testimonies by independent feminists and their experiences as part of the seizure of the building and living in the space. The quotations used are at times erratic and convoluted with information, I have chosen not to edit or alter these significantly aware of the chaotic and volatile nature that is the struggle toward self-determination and a dignified life. Through this example, it becomes ever clearer how synchronised the four modes of the WCA autonomous struggle truly come to be. To fully comprehend the movements' transformative power beyond imposed reality, we must examine their collective actions towards the creation of alternatives in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015).

8.1.1. The takeover: ¡Ya Basta!

I briefly introduced the Okupa in chapter 4 when looking at the milestones and the watersheds in the history of the WCA in Mexico in general and Mexico City more specifically. In this section, I re-examine the beginning of the seizure of the building through the testimonies of three women who were part of this resistance or witnesses to it. I have reconstructed their testimonies as part of an – albeit always partial – collective story to examine the process in the creation of alternatives. These testimonials lay over the material hegemonic dominant narratives put forward by the state (see chapter 6.7.), offering instead, partial, emotion-filled, embodied knowledges that can be used to recreate this collective, alternative, and embodied history. I have used italics on those statements that elicited a response in myself when listening to the testimonies and reading them over. This includes self-reflection with regards to my research, but also bodily and emotional responses, including outrage, admiration, laughter, heartache, disappointment, goosebumps, etc. To the following testimonies, I have added clarifications or additional information where information was unclear.

On the 2nd of September 2020, Marcela Alemán and Silvia Castillo arrived at the CNDH demanding a solution to their cases. In Marcela's case, her daughter had been abused by the institution it theoretically protected her. Her daughter had also been photographed. Those photographs were shared as child pornography. The commission had plenty of proof, but as you know any time there is a powerful person, the brother of a powerful person, or cousin of a powerful person, they won't do anything. So, they had Marcela going in circles. Same with Silvia. Silvia's son, Alan, had been set on fire a few blocks away from where she lived in San Luis Potosi. When they arrived here, they were told by authorities, they had to go somewhere else, and they refused. They tied themselves with their shoelaces to the chairs of the offices upstairs and took over the meeting room. Even when they were protesting, the entire building continued with their activities as if nothing was going on. To us it was disrespectful. There you realise how the fucking law works in Mexico. A place where you are listening to the mothers' testimonies and they

The daughter of Marcela Alemán denounced that her daughter Lya was sexually abused by about four people when during her stay at the Instituto Gonzalo Urbina school in San Luis Potosí. The abusers worked at the school, according to the testimony of Marcela Alemán.
were completely indifferent, doing their work. They think "as long as it doesn't happen to them everything is good". They live in that privilege (Recounting of events by Teresa and Sofia).

When they (the mothers) saw no one was paying attention, they called us through the national feminist network "ni una menos", as well as another twenty relatives of victims who were already protesting nearby. When the relatives of the victims arrived, they didn't let them in. When we arrived on the 2nd of September, four of us at that time, we took over the outside of the building and started graffitiing on the street. We did not have the means to go in at the time, we could not risk police arriving and arresting us. We had called a lot of women, but it was only four of us. If we left, then who else was going to come? It was a strategic decision to remain outside. Even then, 15 police cars arrived trying to threaten us. We just kept them out of our way, we had plenty of experienced actioning before this.

We were not going to be intimidated no matter how scared we were. We stayed all night. We were going to leave the proper graffitiing and occupation for the next day when the journalists arrived. (Marcela)

Some more girls arrived in the morning with coffee and breakfast. We put our money together and started buying some sprays and started graffitiing. Two "mediators" from the CNDH came out, very well dressed, and told us "Don't paint on the walls, it is a peaceful protest". I said it was our protest, and it was completely peaceful. They could have gotten angry at the other graffiti that didn't say a thing, from men that graffiti their names there because they think it's their space. Men that come to the building to pee on the side of the wall. They don't say anything then. I only painted "don't mess with the little girls". Not only in sympathy for Marcela but because I was also a little girl who was abused. I feel very identified with this protest because I would have also liked that someone would have fought for me at the time when they raped me. Someone that said, "you know what? No, you can't mess with her". For me it was catharsis.

I was not trying to make her understand but she said to me "no, I understand I am also crossed by the same violences". And it is then when she says that it felt like a kick in the gut. How can she think that the same violences that cross me, that I come from Neza, that I wake up at 5 am to get to work at 8 am in a male-dominated space, that I have to take public transport where I'm constantly harassed, where they can assault me if I come back slightly too late, when I only have time to get home after work, have a shower, make my lunch for the next day and sleep because at 5 am I have to be getting up once again. How could she say that? For her to say that she lived the same violences when I had seen her arrive in her nice car, with her nice coffee and her nice clothes. Don't fake empathy.

I said, if you want a peaceful protest, this is a peaceful protest because if I wanted to, I could burn the building down. Do you want a violent protest? I will burn you and all your colleagues inside. Maybe then, you will finally turn and see us. (Sofia)

As more girls arrived, we sang, we put up a tendedero, we made a big fire and burnt our underwear (we didn't have what else to burn!). We saw the change of attitude in Marcela and Silvia. They started encouraging us saying "yes, paint the building!" to "you can stop. They told us if we keep protesting, they are not going to pay us any attention". We said that if they didn't pay attention to them, more reason to stay until they did. Until they paid attention to all of us. The night of the 3rd, while we were resting and eating after the busy day, we see Marcela get out with people from the CNDH and she simply said, "they are going to reopen the case". No explanations. We didn't know if she was leaving or if she was coming back. We were shocked, what happened to the last two days, all the kicks.

Clothesline, see chapter 4.
and the bruises? The lack of sleep? The protesting? We were in conflict because Silvia was the one remaining, and she was fighting for her son. We were not there to ask for justice for a man, as feminists, we were there for women. I said, let’s not stay for Alan, but Silvia. She is a mum, and many of us are women. Our chant can be for her, not for him.

So, we decided to stay for her, for the mothers, for the girls, and for ourselves.

(Marcela)

Many of the girls left at that moment. A friend of mine and I stayed there. Just days before, in my house, she and I were talking about how always we have wanted to occupy an empty building as I love restoring and redecorating. There are so many empty buildings… [Sofia talks about restoration for a while here] We had the idea of taking over a building and making it a shelter and okupa since then. And so, my friend shouts at me “what do you think about this building?” (Pointing at the CNDH). We were thinking about an empty space. This was a public building! If we were going to do it, we needed to do it carefully. Because even if this is the centre if we take over a public building the police officers, the ateneas and maybe even the military police could come here, arrest us or worse disappear us.

(Sofia)

We wanted to occupy the building in the morning. A few of them left and only eight of us remained outside. I would like to point out that only one or two were from Mexico City, everyone else was from Neza, Ecatepec, from the periphery. It was very significant for us because normally nobody sees the periphery. It’s always the same 30 marching. It was women from the peripheries that were occupying spaces in the centre. People hear “black bloc” and think it’s young university students. We were women, mothers, in our late 30s, but the media never showed it. In the first interviews, it was Yesenia that came out every time. We were planning to wait until everyone else got there, we simply decided to close the entrance. No one could come in or out. We only let some people come in if it was a quick query. No reports, no demands. We said, "I'm sorry this is not the CNDH any longer". (Teresa)

No women arrived but they were plenty of cameras. So, we said, ni modo, that’s it! We were going to do it ourselves. Even if they kick us, we were going to have to force our way in, they would not be able to let us out. We thought it was going to be a really hard occupation, that there was going to be a lot of police and they were going to beat us up. But thankfully it was relatively fast and easy. We did have a lot of media and public attention. They probably thought “it’s only eight of them, they’re not going to do anything!” (Marcela)

We got everyone out and took off the cameras around the building. We broke off locks and opened doors, taking all the workers out. We put up a barrier with some benches and the x-ray machine. We just waited to see what the reaction was going to be. We couldn’t believe how “easy” it had been. Now that we had the building, we had to resist and never go out. From now on, we were more in danger outside than in.

The police officers arrived not long after. We threatened them with burning all the documents if they did not go away. We only burnt blank paper, but it still worked. When the news media started advertising all this, more women arrived to help. We each took turns in guarding the building. It was about twenty of us guarding that day, not even counting the families that were upstairs. We started organising. The relatives of the families went to the kitchen and as they saw us moving things and sorting out rooms, so they made some food. There were luxurious cuts of meat. There are still two cans of very exotic mushrooms in the kitchen, 61 Female police officers that are sent to women’s marches.
but we only wanted beans and rice! So, it's still there... That's how we spent the first few days, adapting the place for us as a shelter. (Sofia)

These testimonies become a retelling of a struggle against, within, and beyond the violence of capital in a concrete contentious space. Public servants ignore and continue working on the premises, proof of the tear in the social fabric prompted by capitalist modernity that fosters relationships as transactional, distant, and depersonalised where empathy bonds are broken between people that share a space. Capitalism atomises individuals from society, making them cold and affectionless as they struggle for their own survival. In contestation, feminised resistances fight towards collective survival, reclaiming bonds of solidarity in contrast to this community fragmentation: 'To us, it was disrespectful… if we had left, who else was going to come?'. This is a synchronised process of negation/creation.

The struggle is as much of a political, as a subjective and territorial one. It occurs in a public space, which reaffirms the importance of understanding protest from a body-mind-spirit, territorial/community/personal struggle. While some scholars have affirmed that in protest, fear can transform into anger (Poma E. and Gravante, 2017; Jasper, 2014), we can see here the continuous bond between these two emotions. Protesters experience fear as they are living under a system that continues to threaten them and anger against this oppressive violent system emerges. However, this does not mean the vanishing of fear. The WCA employs strategies underlined by the politics of care and affect for the uniting of women in resistance.

The public space is chosen as the field of struggle which is of high relevance when examining the place of the body and how social relations and hierarchies are mediated in the same. For instance, when the activist becomes furious at the fact that her place in this space is questioned, whereas men's continuous misuse of the same is unchallenged. Or the faked/failed empathy transmitted by state actors who are oblivious to oppressions of class and territories. Women from the WCA reaffirm their place in these spaces, negating violent hegemonies. In the process, the healing power of protests arises. Resisting histories are written on the walls, validating past feelings of abuse, and reassuring future generations of girls that they are protected by affection and resistance. The state, however, is always quick to intervene and mediate these struggles.

This becomes clear in the testimonies through all three forms of translation: translation by co-optation with the empty promises offered to the relatives of the victim; translation by erasure when denying the legitimacy of WCA; and finally, translation by oppression through police intimidation. In this struggle, there were both successes and failures. A collision of this thesis's arguments emerges in these testimonies. The violence of the state, the daily fear, the lack of justice for the families, the experience of sexual violences from an early age, and through all these embodied violences, the anger that arises. Anger as they note the injustices that cross them and compare themselves to those privileged bodies that fake empathy, that offer unfulfilled promises of justice, and of police that attack them rather than protects them. Anger at their impotence, and then transformative anger when the impotence is no longer left as such, and instead are moved to action. Their action is driven by the determination of building another (better) world that can be offered to others who suffer the same violences.

When I asked what moved them to occupy the Human Right Commission building and what kept them there, after almost two years of resisting, to them it was clear: anger. However, this was a particular type of anger: 'I don't understand anger as rage nor as an annoyance but as a "that's it", "that's enough". I want to live; I don't want to just survive. I deserve to live' (Marcela, 37-Okupa).
This is reminiscent of Jasper's (2018) nothing-to-lose-effect (cited in Poma, Paredes, and Gravante, 2019: 5) examined in chapter 7. I place this anger as part of the latency of the Not-Yet. It is praxis guided by hope. Through anger, they act. That feeling is excess. That deep-sided anger against an unjust system cannot be translated or co-opted by the state. It cannot be readily interpreted into policies. It is a deep feeling of knowing that the life they deserve is not the one they are given. Knowing that the current reality they experience is not the only possible one as they are doomed to pure survival. In that anger, they reclaim their life. They reclaim other worlds.

8.1.2. Walking the resistance

After the takeover of the CNDH, the "easy" part was over. The activists planned to transform the space into a shelter for victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, immigrant mothers, any women who needed help. The steps towards the construction of this space, however, were uncertain. Feminist psychologists, lawyers, and professionals offered their services for free, but the activists still needed to figure out how to take care of the refugees, feed them, clothe them; keep the place habitable, and clean, cook, and organise; all the while maintaining a physical, emotional, and legal resistance against the state. In this struggle, social media became a crucial platform of weavings of solidarity, especially when needing a particular legal or basic service. For instance, a recent Facebook post requested: 'The Okupa is seeking for a translator of Mixteco for the shelter, a refugee's baby needed medical attention and doesn't speak Spanish'.

In the initial stages of the Okupa, worries around capital were met with mass donations from women across the nation and internationally. With these needs covered, the activists commenced the task of turning the premises into a shelter. Alongside all the work with the shelter, they arranged feminist therapy groups and regular workshops and lectures, embracing feminist support from across Mexico City. Horizontality and open dialogue strategies were vital for the survival of the space as the activists that came together in the Okupa arrived from different contexts and with different life experiences. To address this difference, open and honest conversations were key to appease tensions. Group discussions liberated all these emotions, as well as the past experiences of violence, as much as the present tensions that arose from sharing a space: 'We were trying to figure things out on the inside. Nobody tells you about the rules for an Okupa. There are no instructions. So, what we have been doing this whole year is improvising. [...] every night we held meetings here on the patio. We all sat in a circle, we talked about what had happened that day, we all listened to each other, we suggested strategies to solve problems that had occurred during the day. And what these all meant for the next day' (Sofía – Okupa).

'Work between collectives is... I don't want to say complicated, but I can't find another word. but it is complicated because we come from different places, from different contexts and each of us deconstructs ourselves at different paces. I'm sure great differences came up in the Okupa but I think the state takes over this narrative to say that these differences divide the movement. You know, divide and conquer. The media took over this narrative to fragment the movement. Saying that women could not come...
together that we always criticise each other. That we have to be
eenemies. They tried making us believe that we couldn’t co-
habitate in a space and make that space a place of resistance
for women and children. But obviously, they were wrong. The
Okupa continues’. This resembles the “walking-
questioning” praxis of Zapatista prefiguration. The uncertain
steps towards these other worlds. All avenues must remain open if they are to build a more
just society. However, before constructing these alternative worlds, they still had to make
life in the present one. The Okupa became a concrete utopia in the making as they were able
to experiment with strategies of care and affection between women beyond the transactional,
disembodied capitalist logics of exchange. Their struggle overflows the Okupa as they form
relations with people in the community outside the premises. After the initial overwhelming
support, and informed by what they argued their condition as women from the periphery,
they decided to share the benefits of their resistance beyond the Okupa:
‘Ever
everyone donated lots of food at the beginning. It was too much
for us, and so we saw the people that came by. People were also
in precarious working conditions, so we started sharing with
them. Even if it was just for a minute, we wanted the things that
were
being given to us to also benefit them’
(Teresa, Okupa).
Here we encounter a glimpse of the excess once again, the struggle in the Okupa
is part of a
concrete utopia that exceeds the realms of the physical premises and overflows to the outside.
It becomes an example of resistance to the world that continues to live in the imposed violent
reality of capital and becomes concrete proof of all
the open possibilities within, against, and
beyond the same. These alternatives ways of being, relating, and living become part of the
real. Acknowledging that they cannot simply escape imposed realities, they still shake it from
its core as they contest
the central logic of capital, placing their struggle towards a dignified
life at the centre. While they may only relate to the “outside” on concrete occasions, they are
clogging the capitalist machine in their reaffirmations.
‘Sorority makes us one. We can share the pain, not take it from
another but feel it together with them. The best mode of revenge is
us being happy (nuestra venganza es ser felices), but if we cannot
be happy, at least let us live well. With dignity. In this place, we
can try to find some of this, perhaps eventually translating it
outside. But for now, in here, it must be that way. La
vulnerabilidad compartida te hermana
62
(Marcela, Okupa).
The transformative power of real empathy becomes apparent in these testimonies. An
empathy that is transformative and collective. In this process of resistance, the WCA inside
the Okupa challenges
modernity/coloniality logics or monocultures (Santos, 2004) and
replaces
them with ecologies of knowledge, temporalities, recognition, and productivity from
a local scale. They open “cracks” (Holloway, 2010) in the weaving of capitalism and
commence their weavings of social
relations
inside and outside the Okupa, which place
dignified lives at their centre.

62 Shared vulnerability makes you sisters.
8.1.3. Roadblocks on the path toward alternatives

The Okupa became a space of struggle and contention. However, this does not mean that the Okupa is a space free of capital mediation. The building of these alternative worlds is not a one-way, smooth ride. This process is struggle, it is in constant danger of being negated or translated within the languages of power. As already reiterated in chapter 7, the mediation of capital does not only occur from the political, from the nexus between the state and the WCA, but negotiates all social relations. The Okupa coexists within the reality demarcated by violent hegemonies that surround them (and slip in). The Okupa does not exist outside of this reality, instead, it becomes a contentious struggle that becomes apparent in the negotiations between the bodies of radical subjects that coexist in the space.

In the following section, I present three main “bumps” on the road that the Okupa met and continue to meet in its resistance: violent hegemonies which are reproduced in the space; the state’s constant attempts of translation by repression; and how the reality of capital continues to be imposed upon the Okupa.

The Okupa not only brought up the problematic nature of the different feminist ideologies or branches that converged in the space, but also the same injustices and oppressions that existed on the outside. Questions of class, race, and sexuality did not disappear simply through the “sisterhood” of women who cohabited. Instead, these differences became ever more apparent as women from the periphery had been the ones that initiated the take and the ones who had a clear goal for the same: the transformation of the government building into a shelter.

‘A lot of girls came who felt invited by the Okupa, a very anarchist reason for the fight. And they began to want to say that this is done like this, like that. And we, yes, it’s all very cool but we are not anarchists. We are mothers who have experienced the violence of not having money to pay for a room and having to move around with our children. Well, that’s what the girls kind of didn’t get. Well, almost all the anarchists that came were 20-year-old girls, who were studying, who had their parents who were supporting them financially, who had a home. Many even some good houses. And when we say it, ok, it’s cool if you want to come around, but the space is needed for a woman who doesn’t have a home, a woman who is running away from her husband, from a violent situation, from the narco. You have your home, it’s great that you’re here supporting us, but you must give space to women who don’t have those accesses. They started saying ‘that’s not anarchism, you don’t rule’... and we, well, we weren’t ruling, we just wanted the space for the reason we took the space in the first place! […] if here or at home you don’t like to clean, organize, take care of your siblings, or cook, then here is the least suitable place to come because here what you have to do is just that. You have to make your bed and take care of your room because it is a common space for all of us. Because when you leave you can’t hand over a dirty place. That is what they did not understand, what we are talking about here is collectivity. And the community has to take into account all the people who live here in space,
including mothers, babies, victims, relatives of victims. Nobody is left behind.

I will not go into detail on the diverse problems that arose during the two-year period, which involved both common questions within feminism, including trans-exclusion and classism as well as ordinary tensions that arise when co-habituating. These are all predictably part of the journey in self-determination, it is an open dialogue that necessitates active listening and decolonising radical praxis to oppose the logics and reality demarcated by the coloniality of gender and power.

While the imposed reality of capital could be initially disregarded thanks to donations, it became apparent that the logistics of maintaining a shelter with little funds would not be an easy endeavour. Is the Okupa doomed to failure because of the concrete needs that capital imposes even in these contentious spaces or “cracks”?

“We were mothers who had the idea and the need to look for a space… knowing above all that here in Mexico you don’t have the certainty of being able to access a piece of land, a house. And if you are lucky enough to access a house, it will be on the periphery of the city... because everything here is super expensive. It’s very crazy because you realize that only on this street there are a lot of vacated buildings and then a lot of people on the street. So, our slogan, or at least mine has always been neither house without people, nor people without houses. The fact that the people working here get paid well for doing administrative work but not doing anything for the cases. And we who live in precarious situations, who live on the periphery of the city. We, without legal, health, psychological training, who had had to learn in our own way to help other colleagues who come to us to ask for support in their cases. We have more rights to be here than they do. We do not earn anything, we have done it without any pay, taking it out of our pockets, by our means with other compañeras [translation]. They have everything here, they have the money, the contacts, the resources, and they’re doing nothing...it was insulting” (Sofia, Okupa).

“At first, they received 2,000 pesos in donations but now they are having to use their own money. Three of our refugees found work and a place where they could start over. And well, the economic situation that we are going through right now is what we are working on and self-managing” (Marcela, Okupa).

Finally, I highlight how in these struggles towards autonomy are the tensions within, against, and beyond a violent state. Unsurprisingly, the girls involved in the seizing of the CNDH were prosecuted. Activists in the Okupa had to keep guard for the first few months as there was a constant police presence. This dissipated after a while, ‘Here what there was more was police harassment rather than repression because in reality they never wanted to come and evict us. However, there has always been such a latency that there is such a possibility. But in practice it is police harassment, the sirens ring, the patrols come and well, we have to go out and chase them politely (laughs)’ (Teresa, Okupa).
A total of 25 investigation files were open since the Okupa, with the government employing ever more abrasive legal methods in the protests since. Social media becomes a blessing and a curse as they find support through the virtual feminist networks and it is simultaneously used by the state in their witch hunt against protesters. Many women from the Okupa resorted to deleting all media platforms and becoming virtual phantoms. As explained by Teresa who was part of the Ecatepec CNDH attempted seizure: the women from the Okupa are not only risking their lives but their freedom. However, against this constant fear of state repression (Flam, 2005 cited in Poma and Gravante, 2017), the activists “reappropriated anger as an antidote”.

‘After they opened my carpeta de Investigacion, my friends asked me “are you not scared”? I will always be afraid but will hide no more. So much hiding, so much time running away, now that we are here, that we have all this, for me, it is more motivational for this to continue than for me to hide away. So much resisting, so much lived, that for me to simply cross my arms and just say “I can’t no more” is unthinkable. That is where the rage comes from, from all the violences. If I keep living in fear, those who come after me, my daughters, my nieces... I need to do what I preach, that is what I can teach future generations. If I show fear, even egocentric, thinking I am the only one going through this or the only one that can resist. But I can show them, even if you are afraid, you will always have two or three women who support you. two or three women who are with you. maybe there are more, maybe there is only one but feeling protected gives you strength’ (Sofia, Okupa).

This anger becomes evidence of excess in the contradictory contention of capitalist and WCA weavings. The reality of modernity/coloniality imposes itself into the concrete utopias and cracks, always attempting to assimilate them back into its logic. However, there are subjectivities, emotions, anticipations, and all that cannot be named, which will never be able to be translated into the homogeneity of modernity. There is a discomfort, a want/need to do and be different that is heightened in the struggles and which, whether its concrete “wins” materialise or not, cannot be extinguished. This is the fire of feminised resistance.

8.1.4. And then there were some…

Over a year after the initial seizure of the then-CNDH premises, the novelty of the Okupa started to wear thin. Many younger feminists, who “had their own house” to live in, moved away as tensions around co-habituating arose. When I visited, there were only a handful of activists living within the premises. The activists remaining were mostly women from the periphery who reclaimed the space as one of dignified living. While the premises continued to be seized I wondered whether this would be translated as a “failed” movement under contemporary social movement theory. Rather than analysing it that way, I searched for the excess. The first thing that came to mind seeing how the numbers of activists had dwindled was the ease with which the state could take back this utopia from them, so I enquired about this danger. What protected them? What kept them there? Their answer surprised me: the neighbourhood. The community now held the power to keep them in or kick them out.

‘Right now, what protects me is my rage. It’s what has protected me since we arrived. At the start, there used to be a lot of police...’
officers that would come to harass us. They don't come around as often or anymore. And even if they do come now, I have the protection of my neighbours. The neighbours have more power to take us out than the government. If they organised and they said, "we want them out", we would be out real quick. We have earned their support.'

In my view, this struggle is also part of the excess. How their resistance is translated from the Okupa onto the streets, what was originally Okupa-State, now becomes Okupa-Neighbourhood-State, with the communities as the new mediators. They argued that as women from the periphery, they understood better than most the potential power, including their transformative power of creating community. As previously argued, the Okupa does not stand on its own in the centre of Mexico City, it is as much of a relational space as a material concrete utopia of what it could be. While the weavings of capitalism continuously fight to be let in and logics of modernity/coloniality slip in to mediate the social relations, their resistance, their struggle, also glides out. For instance, the activists from the Okupa had managed to obtain a formal letter from the local government that there was to be no police presence within two blocks of the CNDH building. They printed out copies of this letter and shared them with nearby businesses and street vendors who were often harassed by police. This relationship between the WCA and the neighbourhood only grew from then on: 'When we first arrived, we would shout out at the neighbours to warn them if police officers came to the street and tried stealing from their stalls. Apart from taking things from them, things they need to survive and make their living, they hit them, they take their tools and their ingredients, the meat for the tacos, the masa for the tlacoyos [...] So we have started politicising the workers nearby. We said, it's great that you talk to us, and you can rely on us. However, if at any point we can no longer help, you are going to be the ones left with all the mess. The last thing you should do is run away. Because that is what they used to do, the police would arrive, and they would run away. We said, "they are going to be taking your stalls one by one if you let them". You need to come together, unite. If you don't let the police take the stall from your neighbour, they will go away. You need to confront them. And it happened last time, I was on my own in the Okupa and some police officers arrived. I had warned the neighbours they may need to go into the building if I was on my own to defend it but rather than that, they started defending me, shouting at them to go away. I said to the police "look at how many of us are and look how few of you. If we wanted to right now, we could take even your patrol car. So go away. They have said to us, "anything you need, we will be part of it". Even if it is just four of us, we know that the barrio has got our back.'

The weaving of dissident struggles and community is in direct opposition to the weaving of capital. The diverse contentious struggles connect as they reject the power of capital and 63 Okupa activists had seen from the inside of the building how a police officer was trying to extort a neighbour. In an act of defiance, they decided to take the bikes from police officers. They agreed through marabunta (a volunteer organization that negotiates between state and collectives) that they would return the bikes if an official letter was drafted that stated no police was allowed around the area.
8.2. Generational Excess

The struggle toward the creation of alternatives is embodied in multiple temporalities. We must once again break away from linear understandings of time to engage with the Not-Yet that is encapsulated within the concrete anticipations of activists from the WCA concerning future generations. The concrete histories of past resistances and their memories in the now serve as the fuel of resistances in the present that seeks to change and transform the present for the future. Many of the WCA activists I spoke to who belonged to collectives of mothers found the concrete actions of younger generations to be historical materialist proof that (an)other world was being built in the present. In Mexico, young girls were building new identities and relations as they raised their voices and said “no”, reaffirming their voices both in public and institutional spaces. Young girls were organising against patriarchal narratives reproduced by teachers and headmasters in their primary and secondary schools. They are taught about self-respect and value, placing their right to a dignified life at the centre. In turn, younger generations teach other lessons to those around them. These narratives of Hope and collectively in the new generations is, for many, what paves the way towards the Mexican feminist utopia. This collective resistance is the healing process that takes place while the wound of social violence is still open. This is the struggle within but against, and someday beyond, oppressive hegemonies.

‘Really, the new generations are being re-educated by teaching the girls that they can allow something to happen or not. Before street harassment was something normalised, now it is not. And that also educates those who are around because you confront them, and you no longer wait for the state to give you a gender perspective workshop at school that will never happen. We are showing them, perhaps not so much teaching, that their body can be respected, that they have a right and a place in the public spaces, and to demand that respect. And through that demand, you educate those around these women. […] I think that the turn that new generations to feminism give is that we have stopped waiting for the state to respond to us. I mean, we are living in a situation
of “we are not going to wait for you anymore” and we are no longer going to be sitting here waiting to see what you are going to give us. We are going to do it ourselves, we are going to take care of ourselves, we are going to organize ourselves’ (Camila, 30 - Femipraxicas).

The WCA is fuelled by these concrete anticipations of future (more just) worlds. The growing widespread notion that they are living under a violent system becomes the main reason behind the continuous struggle toward other realities. It is this combination of fear and anger that I underlined in chapter 7. Mothers, sisters, aunts, are under the constant tension and fear that either themselves or their relative is going to “be next”, and this feeling is the same one that feeds their resistance.

‘Maternity in feminist conversations has been long equated with a pedagogical branch of educating your children without gender roles. But it goes much further. It is combative parenting. They talk about respectful parenting and all these pedagogical currents that sometimes we don’t agree with. Many privileged mothers come around to talk about ways of parenting that have no place everywhere in Mexico. A mother that works two jobs and comes back at midnight to her house, how are you going to demand respectful parenting from her? Of course, through maternity, we are building the future, but we also question the reasons behind maternity. Many women have not decided to become mothers, what are the reasons behind their maternity? We can see life beyond an anti-patriarchal, adult-centric gaze, but we also need to take a look at class and all these other things’ (Crianza Feminista).

Having spoken to several collectives who encountered numerous obstacles since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While their work as activists could be sometimes burdensome, it was also a question of survival. As highlighted by an Aquelarre Violeta activist: ‘many times, we have wanted to stop, even for just a bit, but we can’t. We can no longer remain indifferent’.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to show glimpses of the transformational excess that slips through the weavings of capitalism and that proves untranslatable within the logics of the state. These are feelings of anticipation, anger, and Hope. But also, material and concrete weavings of resistances outside of the WCA, a politicisation and conscientisation in their situated contexts that (an)other worlds are possible and that these are contained within multiple temporalities, including the now. I have explored the journey of struggle of the Okupa in Calle Cuba, Mexico City, wherein emotions, actions, subjectivities, and relationships that are being transformed and (de)mediated can be identified as emergences (Santos, 2014), particularly in the form of collective, subjective struggles. In the struggle toward a dignified life the members of the Okupa weave networks of solidarity with the community and the context they inhabit, which reach far beyond feminist subjects. To conclude, I have presented another key anticipation that drives WCA: that of generational excess. The certainty that the
collective actions carried out in the present, and informed by the contentious struggles of the past, can lead to another (better) more just future.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

In my analysis, I have brought together social movement literature on emotions and affect, prefigurative movement theory in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015), and decolonial feminist epistemologies and praxis to analyse the complexity and encompass the transformational potential of women’s collective action (WCA) in contemporary Mexico as a way of resisting violent hegemonic logics under the capitalist modernity and (re)imagining and building alternative systems as part of their struggle. I contend that it is only when we employ a combination of these theories and acknowledge all which exceeds comprehension through our current epistemological tools, can we begin to understand the great power that women’s solidarity weavings possess in the building of alternative societies within, against, and beyond current modernity/coloniality logics. These actions have emerged from WCA across Mexico as an urgent experiment to oppose the current multiple hegemonies that violently cross their bodies in the form of feminicide, but also in the form of precarious working conditions, double work burdens, racial and heteronormativity violence, ageism, ableism, gender stereotyping, territorial struggles, community violence, trauma, family violence, physical, sexual, and psychological violence, the list goes on. As a way of concluding this work, I present in this chapter my research’s main arguments throughout this thesis, as well as its theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions to the decolonial feminist and social movements literatures. I follow this by underlying some of my research’s limitations and conundrums that I have encountered throughout this journey, looking at possible future avenues of research.

9.1. Addressing Research Questions

At the beginning of my thesis, I planned to address the following questions:

➢ How do we understand the growing crisis of VAW and feminicide in Mexico?
➢ How does decolonial feminism allows us to look beyond gender-centric motivations and patriarchy-driven, structuralist explanations of VAW and feminicide and what implication does it have for women’s resistances?
➢ How do women interpret the multiplicities of violences they experience through their bodies from the personal and collective to a systemic reality?
➢ How do Women in Action resist these violent processes and what are the journeys of struggle towards autonomy they go through in this resistance?
➢ How do affective solidarity networks and pedagogical community-driven strategies engage in the (re)imagining and (re)building of these violent realities?

As a mode of concluding and to some extent answering these complex questions, I offer here a summary of my thesis to cover my research journey as well as the struggle of the WCA in Mexico City.

I commenced this thesis by problematising hegemonic feminisms and policy-driven conceptualisations of feminicide as they carry several limitations and contain endless dangers on themselves. Specifically, I highlighted their active role in the reproduction of violent modernity/coloniality logics through the imposition of universal, homogenous policies aimed to tackle VAW and feminicide from an international/Western Human Rights framework. As I have contended throughout my work, this framework reproduces the figure
of the Third World Woman or women from the periphery as “poor, uneducated” subjects, oppressed by their cultures (Romero, 2019; Mohanty, 1988). Aside from replicating harmful and paternalistic stereotypes of the Other, these theories of feminicide result in the invisibilisation of all those murders that escape this social imaginary. The murders of trans, indigenous, afro descendent women are often excluded from the policy and academic literature on feminicide as they do not necessarily fit in the specific legal definition or are not purely ‘gender-driven’. To avoid these homogenising, ahistorical, conceptualisations of the multiplicity of murders that cross Mexican women’s bodies, I argue that we must analyse feminicide from a feminist decolonial lens and under the matrix of modernity/coloniality. A decolonial feminist framework allows for gender to be viewed as a colonial construct, constituent to other violent structures under the logic of capitalist modernity. Under this framework, I maintain gender cannot be treated as a mandatory analytical starting point and less so as a unifactorial causal factor in the analysis of feminicide, as it constricts the bodies of feminicide victims to those fixed biological dysmorphisms of womanhood. We must instead move beyond the category of gender to produce concrete theories of knowledge through the embodied experiences of those subjects who resist. Under this reasoning, I have engaged empirically with the struggle and collective action of women in Mexico to understand the complexities surrounding the multiplicity of murders that women who struggle navigate daily and how they build alternative systems to these violent hegemonies in the present.

As a way of furthering these theories and finding the complementary analysis of the vast literature on feminicide in Mexico, I have produced a comprehensive structural framework of the co-constituent violences that cross women’s bodies under the modernity/coloniality matrix in the context of Mexico City, and that reach far beyond the category of woman or gender. Informed by academic feminist theories on feminicide in Mexico as well as embodied knowledge of women in resistance, I have encompassed those violent structures underpinned by the feminist academics and activists under the decolonial framework of modernity/coloniality matrix. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, it is a contending analysis of hegemonic readings of feminicide from a gender lens. These factors include an oppressive and violent state that, under the pretext of a state of exception in the war against drugs, continues to silence and suppress resisting bodies. The methods vary as they hinder investigations by failing to acknowledge the growing problem of VAW in its totality, and reproduce the coloniality of gender both discursively and in practice. As a second complementary force, I highlight violence exacerbated by economic deprivation, that fuels a crisis of masculine identity in parallel with a social devaluation of women. This results in the tearing communities apart, reproducing coloniality/ modernity hierarchies along the axis of class, race, gender, sexuality, etc. Finally, informed by Valencia’s (2010) “Gore Capitalism” theory, and in contrast to “parallel” or “second” state theories (Segato, 2010, 2016), I analyse the growing presence, socioeconomic and territorial control of OCGs, as a structure that continues to replicate the violent logics of modernity/coloniality under a masculinist, violent business and reimposes violent hegemonies upon a broken community.

These are all drivers of the rampant VAW and feminicide in Mexico, and therefore, we must understand them in their totality as co-constitutive oppressions under capitalist modernity. Gender must be examined as another one of these violent logics. In contrast to and against these homogenising, violent logics, we must analyse feminicide and VAW from the historical, geopolitical, territorial specificities of the context inhabited by the victims of this violence. Particularly, by engaging with the plural ways of resisting and rich and diverse embodied knowledges that sit outside the colonial difference. Women’s Collective Action (WCA) in Mexico City calls against state violence, exploitative capitalist economies,
misogynistic patriarchal structures, and sexual and racial violence, (re)imagining and building alternatives in the present within, against, and beyond capitalist modernity.

In my endeavour to engage with these plural struggles, I have recounted the inconsistent, contradictory, and generally arduous task of employing decolonial feminist epistemologies as a researcher of the Global North in the Global South. With the use of reflective, alternative conversations as my method and epistemology, I endeavoured to establish horizontal, open dialogues with the activists, searching to fight rigid researcher/participant power dynamics that have traditionally been part of academic research. This was much harder in practice than in theory. As part of this struggle, wherein I encountered failure and partial successes, I found the need to reflect and note my changing thoughts and emotions throughout, around the WCA but also my own moving ontology and subjectivity. To examine the WCA struggle, I introduced my framework the Process in the Creation of Alternatives, inspired by decolonial, feminist epistemologies, and theory and shaped by a combination of Dinerstein’s (2015) Art of organising Hope and Tuhawai-Smith’s (1999) decolonial methodologies. This framework is employed throughout the remainder of the thesis to showcase how the WCA in Mexico City resists, challenges, and builds alternatives to the present.

In their mobilising, they exercise negative dialectics and praxis, as they break away from imposed patriarchal reality as part of the logic of modernity/coloniality and challenge it through action. This act of negating contains in itself an affirmation: another (more just) world is possible. I have examined dissident praxis in the form of short-term direct action as a form of prefigurative action that has popularised amongst feminist collectives in the centre of the capital (and across other Mexican cities). In this discussion, I highlighted the intervention on the monuments as sites of contention as they negate the hegemonic history of the nation-state and build a new collective identity as women reclaim their place in history as well as on the streets, in their communities, and homes. This action emphasises the personal (body-mind-spirit) and community healing potential of direct action. In this struggle, I have underscored the numerous challenges and contradictions that are negotiated within the WCA, with and against the state and society, as counter, anti-feminist movements emerge legitimise by state discourses that work as mechanisms of social control to maintain the status quo.

I follow this examination through the process of creation of concrete utopias in the present through personal, psychological, spiritual, social, and relational healing strategies. Social change is achieved through a “plural configuration of practices” and ‘iterative processes of experimentation, re-organisation, and re-imagination’ (Monticelli, 2018: 511). In this praxis, WCA contests the individualistic, materialistic logics of capitalism, challenging hegemonic structures that reproduce gender, class, race, etc. violences. I highlight the importance of naming, memory, and remembering as dissident strategies for resisting and disrupting historical hegemonies. As well as underlying the value of affective therapies for collective, spiritual and psychological healing which trace the borderlines of who belongs and who is outside of the WCA through emotion. Women’s collectives in Mexico create spaces for open dialogues legitimising and highlighting the importance of experience, emotions, and knowledges otherwise (Escobar, 2004). This is ever-present in the resisting praxis of women’s collectives from the periphery as they employ experimental dialogues and resilience methodologies that look to (re)build fragmented communities through horizontal, open dialogues motivated by the urgency of survival and Hope towards a dignified life. Finally, I have used the example of the mercaditas feministas as affective politics processes popularised by the WCA, that function as counterhegemonic strategies against capitalist disembodied economies.
I have examined the multiple contradictions and negotiations that the WCA mediates in its struggle towards autonomy by focussing on the state’s always luring danger of translation through three main strategies (translation by co-optation, translation by erasure, and translation by repression), as well as the pervasive capital mediations of social relations. In this struggle, I highlight the need to decolonise the praxis inside of the WCA to deal with, continuous, structural violences that are reproduced between and within collectives. Especially, those concerning the ongoing erasing of stories and knowledges of women on the other side of the colonial difference, trans women and women from the periphery. How the collectives mediate and dialogue these differences and their position vis a vis a violent state will result in two continuous contending processes: either it will end in frustrations and disappointment or it will lead to a radical, transformational praxis guided by Hope, creating alternatives towards the Not-Yet.

I finalise my argument in an experimental chapter that examines the “excess”, which cannot be translated within the demarcated logic of state and capital through the case study of the Okupa and the notion of “generational excess”. I argue how the transformative potential of the WCA cannot be contained within neat schemes or methodologies and instead overflows through each stage of organising Hope in the construction of alternative worlds. Hope (Dinerstein, 2015) is key in the construction of (an)other worlds ‘marked by a feminisation of resistance’ (Motta and Seppälä, 2016: 6). These resistances alter community dynamics in relation to the family and the community through a deconstruction of capitalism’s framing of social reproduction and production, challenging dominant violent epistemologies around social and cultural stratification. By opposing these structures through direct community action both short and long term, women fight the revolution from below and work towards that which has not yet been realised, but that is instead latent in their Hope-filled praxis. It is in this diversity of strategies that the WCA in Mexico shines through the endless possibilities and openness of the present, as much as the future. Together with, and alongside the community, activists from the WCA challenge and resist exploitative capitalist processes, dominant academic discourses, heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial hierarchies through the reimagining of more just societies. Rather than one united front with a series of political goals, the only strategy this movement embodies is its desire to build (an)other worlds, without violence, without feminicides.

9.2. Research Significance

There are numerous contributions my research brings to the bodies of literature of feminist epistemologies and theory and contemporary social movement theory through my engagement with feminist decolonial epistemologies and prefigurative praxis.

Regarding feminist literature, I further VAW and feminicide analysis by challenging hegemonic readings of feminicide in the literature, which continues to place gender at the centre of its framework. Instead, I have produced an analytical outline that comprehends VAW and feminicide through a theoretical and empirical interpretation of the multiplicity of co-constituent factors that reproduce these violences beyond gender and patriarchy under the matrix of modernity/coloniality. This allows further analysis of the cultural, social, economic, and political factors that reproduce and perpetuate VAW and feminicide by reaffirming the need of understanding the individuality and specific historical, territorial, and personal circumstances that may not necessarily fall under a “patriarchal” or gendered understanding of these violences and which contends abstract, monolithic readings of
victimhood. In contrast, while still producing a framework at the macro/structural level, I contextualise feminicide in Mexico City and surrounding peripheral areas under the matrix of modernity/coloniality that comprehends the multifactorial violent logics that reproduce these crimes. While this analysis cannot be easily extrapolated, nor should it be, the framework can be a useful tool to comprehend the diverse logics that reproduce VAW and feminicide in other contexts.

I argue that understanding the diversity of factors that reproduce VAW and feminicide is only possible if we engage with the ways of resisting embodied by the women in those contexts who, again, might not understand their struggle under one of feminist resistance. Instead, their battles can be understood as one of changing the(ir) world for the better, towards a dignified life, free of violence. By engaging with the ways of doing, living, and resisting women, we can also further hegemonic and Western feminist literature that continues to place gender and patriarchy at the centre, and which remove agency from resisting bodies. Particularly, they challenge carceral feminist logics and cultural and social stereotypes which continue to be reproduced within hegemonic feminist demands and policies against VAW and feminicide. Through my research, I can back and further these arguments both empirically and theoretically through my engagement with women’s collectives from the periphery of Mexico City who contends one-size-fits-all, homogenous strategies of feminisms from the centre and reclaims their agency to change their circumstances as part of their situated resistances.

With regards to the study of social movement, my research broadens and furthers the literature empirically, methodologically, and theoretically. In the first instance, I have produced an empirically informed analytical framework to analyse processes of resistance that engage in prefigurative action, and which current social movement theory fails to encompass within traditional research methodologies. Through my framework the Creation of Alternatives, I am able to incorporate previous literature on social movements, specifically that related to emotions, into a prefigurative reading of these emotions by placing them in the key of Hope (Dinerstein, 2015). Reiterating the importance of a decolonial feminist engagement with the literature on prefigurative movements, I have placed special importance in my framework of understanding resistance through the body-mind-spirit, personal/collective/territorial interpretations of struggle. This complex framework has allowed me to produce a comprehensive reading of the WCA in Mexico City by highlighting the movements’ prefigurative potential but also navigating the multiple contradictions, epistemologies, and praxes that are looking to reconfigure violent hegemonic capitalist logics. This engagement with the case study of Mexico City also contributes to the larger literature of feminism, decolonial and social movement studies as concrete empirical proof of these resistances.

Finally, methodologically, and practically, I have reiterated the need to adapt research to the demands of women’s resistance through an engagement with prefigurative, decolonial methodologies that challenge researcher/participant power dynamics at the epistemological level. Instead, through my engagement with alternative methodologies, I offer further practical tools and insight as to how to adapt methods to the co-creation of epistemologies and knowledge through the “art of conversation”. My empirical recounting of the difficulties of this experience can prove helpful to the current limitations of traditional research both methodologically and in the theories of knowledge, as these stiffened power dynamics continues to reimpose themselves upon prefigurative praxis and research, always aiming to translate it within the demarcated realms of “valid” academic knowledge.
9.3. Research Challenges / Desafíos

As is the case with the majority of research, my thesis is also subject to several limitations. I have examined each of them under the categories of theoretical and methodological constraints as well as research conundrums that open up possible avenues for future research.

9.3.1. Theoretical Conundrums

While I engage with a critical examination of current theory on VAW and feminicide under a decolonial feminist lens, I am also aware of the difficulties of escaping the language and analysis produced under the coloniality of gender. The coloniality of gender continues to plague social relations and how these violences are conceived by women who struggle as well as reproduced at the social and institutional level. In my research, I do not attempt to escape the category of gender as a researcher that becomes blind to these social dynamics, but rather I seek to denaturalise and demystify this dichotomous, colonial construct and challenge the pervasive need to place it at the centre of VAW and feminicide theorisations.

In this endeavour, however, I fear my research may downplay the importance of the imposition of these dynamics, especially within the deeply patriarchal culture that prevails in Mexican Society and which it is the root of many of the divisions that reproduce inside of the WCA. Furthermore, while I have underscored the need to contextualise and understand the specificities of experience-based understandings of the violence that crosses women’s bodies, it is also clear that it is the predominance of this systemic violences that form solidarity bonds and mutual affection on the inside of WCA. Therefore, with this approach in which I attempt to escape disembodied knowledge, offering an overview of the concreteness of systemic violence, there is equal potential to fall into an essentialisation of the same violences that fuel the struggle. I have therefore navigated this conundrum through a combination of both approaches to comprehend the macro and micro factors that reproduce VAW and feminicide.

In the same line of inquiry, escaping the language of the coloniality of gender in my analysis proves an epistemological, practical, methodological and ontological challenge. I am highly aware of the contradiction that supposes claiming to engage in decolonial work while simultaneously doing research within and for academia, and funded by a government body. While I have fought to decolonise my research at every step of the research journey as well as my own colonial presumptions of what is or is not “valid” knowledge, academia continues to tailor research within demarcated limits of legibility and so I have inevitably “left out” anything that could be considered “unviable” research. In this journey, I am still required to produce a material, succinct body of work that underlines impacts and contributions and it is not simply “embodied knowledge” unless I put it into the language of academic accomplishment. Similarly, perhaps unconsciously, I may be in fact reproducing colonial logics, ways of knowing, and doing through linguistic colonialism (Ravishankar, 2020) as part of my naiveite. I do not presume to have escaped my internal colonialism processes but hope to have, albeit imperfectly, engaged in a critique that can help towards the larger work of decolonising praxis, research, and knowledge.

In terms of my theoretical analysis of feminicide as well as the WCA, most current literature is based on Ciudad Juarez and other border cities, with very little literature based on Mexico City and Estado de Mexico. I have therefore found this epistemological gap an opportunity for furthering research, but also problematic as I struggled to offer a sound critique of what
I felt could be or not extrapolated to generalised dynamics in the capital. As Mexico City, as well as peripheral areas, are such vast geographic zones, extrapolating my empirical examination across the capital becomes inviable. I navigated this conundrum by putting forward and discussing my analysis with academics as well as with activists who struggled in the city. However, when comparing these discussions and experiences with the over 8.8 million people that live in the capital would be deceptive. Therefore, I offer my framework and research as a “granito de arena” (in Spanish, similar to offering my “two cents”) in this complex and vast literature, to continue comprehending and producing an analysis that can encompass the multiplicity of violences that cross women who live in the area.

9.3.2. Methodological constraints

As I have reiterated throughout my work, I positioned myself as an ally to the WCA in Mexico City. As a feminist militant myself, I am in a dual outsider/insider positionality that allows me to reach out to the activists, albeit always at a distance. My double positionality as an outsider and insider to the movement contains potential openings to research experimentation as well as epistemological limitations to my capacity of understanding the struggle and the lived particularities of the activists. I, however, do not pretend to hold the answers nor the solutions for these internal politics and external struggles, but rather bridge them here as a form of dialogue within feminist literature and more widely women’s studies to look into and learn from the particularities of the feminised resistance that can prove largely advantageous for the constructions of other more just worlds. In this journey to understand the plurality of ways of knowing, doing, and being of a wide range of women’s collectives within the WCA, I face limitations as I was unable to work more closely with one or two collectives and truly learn from their disruptions on a closer and more involved basis. This, however, offers future research opportunities as I have formed these bonds and can work alongside them in future projects from a more familiar and informed position. In future projects, I also believe my research would benefit from embodying a type of “militant ethnography” wherein I not only produce a theory of ‘sociology of the body… but also a sociology from the body’ (Wacquant, 2004: viii). To be part of the common experiences and emotions of fear, anger, solidarity, and joy that are part of the collective. For this reason, and after much thought, I also believe my future projects should also take place in the context(s) I inhabit, wherein I can produce embodied-theoretical-practical *sentipensante* knowledges that can be of benefit beyond my context, leading to a contentious dialogue of struggles. This way, I would be able to produce a theory from my action and action from my theory.

One of the advantages that I possessed as a researcher was my native tongue. However, this soon became a blessing and a curse. A blessing in that I was able to communicate (albeit with some differing, always amusing slang) with relative ease with the activists and we were able to form cultural bridges alongside the main differences but also the similarities of Spanish and Mexican cultures. However, during the research journey, I found that having both Spanish and English literature to review was, at times, a burden. This was especially challenging when engaging with decolonial writing while simultaneously diving into and highlighting the shortcomings of western literatures (social movement literature, the politics of emotion, sociology of the body, feminist literature) which are vast and long-dated. Ultimately, I had to curtail the literature within particular boundaries and topics of discussion, as I would imagine is the case for most researchers. However, I believe for me this progression was done later than normal as a result of a continuous feeling of “missing out” on a particularly ground-breaking theory.
In this section, I must also address more specifically the limitations of my research with regard to methodological shortcomings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the selected research design, I encounter several constraints when phased with the confines of lockdown, remote research, and the psychosocial effects of living through a pandemic. As I already explored at length in chapter 4, my research was largely impacted as I had to return two months earlier than originally planned, at a point in time when I was feeling more confident in my work and forming closer relationships with some of the activists. As a result, the alternative, inclusive, prefigurative, and decolonial methodology I hoped to embody was largely impossible to employ from a distance as stiff participant/researcher dynamics arose when conducting online research. While I was able to return a year later, this was also shortened in time as my research was increasingly constrained by deadlines and my needing to produce a final draft half a year after the trip. As a result, the time I was able to spend alongside activists was significantly reduced. While I have maintained contact throughout the research journey with several of the activists, this was short from the experiences of “being there” and “embodied, relational knowledge” I was hoping to live through to be truthful to the ways of relating, knowing, and resisting of the WCA.

9.4. Final Remarks and Future Research Avenues

In navigating my research, I have encountered several topics of discussion within feminist literature, epistemologies, and praxis which pose questions and offer different avenues of inquiry into these dilemmas in future research. I have explored these throughout my thesis as well as more thoroughly in my reflective exercise (section 3.3.) However, I will present these here as a way of concluding this critical dialogue into several uncertainties that continue to affect research on WCA as well as their resisting praxis.

In the first instance, it remains unclear how to bridge decolonial feminist epistemologies that consider gender and womanhood colonial constructs with community-based feminisms whose members continue to be largely reliant and empowered by feminine subjectivities as well as more institutional feminist epistemologies. An open, inclusive dialogue is the only possible strategy to bridge these diverting epistemologies and forms of feminised resistance. However, it is unclear how this discussion can take place horizontally without placing some validity on one epistemology over another, falling into epistemological impositions for the sake of “harmony”. While I would argue decolonial feminist epistemologies successfully address these differing and contending theories, this may also be part of a biased opinion that places certain significance on one framework (modernity/coloniality) as opposed to another, for instance, when dialoguing with feminist socialists (class). In future research, I would like to examine these avenues of dialogue with regard to the historic internal contradictions within the different branches of transnational WCA including strategies such as gender separatism, trans-exclusion, and abolitionism as well as the bigger issue around autonomy and radical change.

Similarly, there are some unanswered discussions in my thesis, particularly in relation to carceral feminism. While I offer a critical account of punitive-based strategies to tackle the rise of VAW and feminicide, alternatives to the current system remain largely indeterminate. This is not a discussion that I can effectively cover as, although linked to my research topic, it transcends the realms of this study. While I have underscored the paternalistic, colonial nature of imposing nation-state judicial systems over the community justice systems of indigenous and local communities, I am yet to explore alternatives in urban and western contexts.
If there is one concluding remark I would like to take away from my research is the idea of openness and latent potential which has slipped through at every stage of my research journey, both as negating, critical praxis, and continuous questioning of my own presumptions, but also as one of lurking infinite possibilities. The anger, exhaustion, care, affection, frustration, disappointments but ultimately unrelenting Hope within the ongoing feminised struggles make me even more certain of the openness of the world and its unrealised potential. However, I cannot but fall into its uncertainty of what has Not-Yet materialised. Can the WCA overcome the ever-present contradictions within capitalist modernity resist the dangers of mediation and translation of the struggle? Will capitalist modernity eventually consume all dissident struggles or is this part of a never-ending battle towards prefiguration of a dignified life? Will capital finally crumble, as the unsustainability of wealth accumulation over life is finally unmanageable? These are unremitting and unanswerable questions that I hope to continue to examine in my research, from a broader philosophical aspect but also from the contingent and concrete local struggles of dissident subjects who fight to survive and resist within and beyond the violent hegemonies of modernity/coloniality.
Afterword

I realised with great sadness the swiping power of state violence and my own naïveté that reproduces in the distance as I receive news of the dismantling of the Okupa Cuba in April 2022. On the 15th of April, while I was on holiday in Greece, I received a message from an activist with a link to a newspaper article on the operation. Dozens of police officers had descended on to Calle Cuba in the centre of Mexico City under orders to evict and arrest the activists who had lived in the premises for the past two years. They had been deemed a risk to public safety a few days prior after an altercation in a nearby street between a university scholar and some of the girls from the Okupa. On the day of their arrest, the girls tried escaping through the balcony, shouting and crying for the neighbours and other activists to aid them. Their faces were shared on social media when in custody, with little care for their privacy or their presumption of innocence. One after the next were indited with numerous charges: assaults, aggravated robbery, property damage, drug dealing. Their trials still awaiting at the time of my submission.

I thought of my ever-present feeling of distance to my field of research since my return. The contrast between the shared laughter, food, smiles, and secrets with the activists and the cold academic setting where I am to present my work for it to become dissected, its successes measured. However, I encountered something completely different in my VIVA evaluation, not an assessment of my methods or theory, but the unconscious logistical shortages of my thesis. ‘Why don’t you publish your PhD alongside the names of the activists, as co-authors?’ enquired the examiners. My heart sank as I realised this was never contemplated as an option in my head. Was it possible? I had dedicated the work to them, aware of their vital roles, their voices, their stories, their feelings, their independent struggle that exceeded and reached far beyond my research, and yet I had been the one writing them down, taking the credit. I looked at the possibility of co-authoring PhDs in Bath but this was far from a possibility at this stage in time, specially as academic achievements revere isolated work and single authoring, diminishing the importance, validity, and value of collective, co-created work. Even in those suggested PhD alternative formats, there were conditions: Yes. ‘You can include co-authored papers in an alternative thesis submission but a substantial part must be your original work’. What counted as ‘original work’? What part of my work was ‘mine’ and which ‘theirs’? To disentangle my mind process, my critique and thoughts from their influence, their questioning of the system, their questioning of my own process appeared an impossibility, worse, an abomination. I chose to submit my thesis as it stands, with me as its singular author, acknowledging this as part of my limitations and as another stage of battle to decolonise academia. The original question lingers and places responsibility in a system that is in much need of change: why had it never appeared as an option in the first place?

**To avoid any unwanted risk to the safety of the Okupa activists, this thesis latter chapters (7-8) will be redacted from public library publications**
## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Women’s Collectives Profiles

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Description</th>
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| CIIDHG         | National University       | Ideology: Institutional/Liberal Feminism  
Summary: The Interdisciplinary Research Collective on Human Rights and Gender (CIIDHG) is a feminist collective founded in 2015 out of an INJUVE (youth institute) governmental programme called the Youth Observatory for Human Rights, which aimed to train young people on human rights and public policies. In this program young people reviewed policies around security, drug policy, sexual and reproductive health. The collective, although independent, was receiving funding from INJUVE until 2017 for community projects. The collective attempted to establish itself as a civic society in 2018, but with the change of government and AMLO’s austerity agenda, their funding was rescinded. The collective continues to focus their activities, talks, and projects around public policy from youth and gender perspective, adopting what they call a “multi-vulnerability” approach to their critique which appears to be closely linked to intersectionality. Although officially established in the centre, many of the projects they carry out take place on the periphery of the city. Although they believe governmental engagement is crucial for social change to occur, they are also critical of the government’s ineffectiveness and lack of engagement. |
| Acoso en la U  | National University (Originally from Nuevo León) | Ideology: Institutional/Liberal Feminism  
Summary: Acoso en la U is a feminist collective originally founded in Monterrey, Nuevo León in 2018. The collective started its initiative when several sexual harassment and sexual violence allegations were made against a particular professor from the University of Nuevo León. A student asked one of the members to help her through the reporting process, which she agreed to, discovering in the process that there was no official protocol to follow for such claims. They decided to write a blog called Acoso en la U where they told the girl’s story. Soon after, more students commenced contacting them with similar stories. They used their blog as a method of filing complaints and reports against professors and students. The same week the blog was published, the #metoo movement started across Mexico, and so their work went viral. University students across Nuevo León put up a clothesline with their stories written on them and the tag “acosoenlaU”. The collective demand was for the universities in which cases had been reported to create protocols that address harassment and sexual violence on campus. |
A week later, the University of Monterrey created a protocol as well as others across the country. The collective then took to the task of reviewing universities’ protocols; accompanying the students in their complaints both psychologically and legally, and organising protests in those universities where protocols were still non-existent. Shortly after they decided to consolidate as an NGO whose main goal is to eliminate gender violence within educational spaces. The collective does not receive any funding and many of the members work as volunteers, some are lawyers, psychologists who work on a part-time or ad hoc basis. They do adopt a separatist strategy to safeguard the members of the collective as well as the victims.

| Las Constituyentes | Centre | Ideology: Institutional/Liberal Feminism
Summary: Las Constituyentes was founded in 2016 when Mexico City’s local government called for organisations and the community to engage in the reframing of the local constitution. It is then that the Constituyentes realise the invitation was not inclusive, that it was not for the entire population as women were excluded from the re-drafting of the constitution. Their work was then to engage with the constitution from a gender-sensitive perspective. The new “violet” constitution proposed by the collective is framed “from a democratic and inclusive logic, of a popular nature, with citizen participation, from a diverse and politically feminist vision, as well as the reforms to the legal framework that derives from them”. They put forward eight legislative proposals, only three of which passed: the right to be cared for with dignity and to personal time; the inclusion of the three Ts (Transgender, transvestite, and transexual) within the constitution; and finally, the right to live a life free of violence. In the “violet constitution”, they highlight women’s rights and inclusion in violet colour to visualise women’s historic social and legal invisibilisation. Las Constituyentes is currently guided by what they consider to be “unwaivable” rights, feminist rights that are key in their political agenda, their demands to the government. These include women’s autonomy over their bodies including abortion and reproductive rights; a secular State; LGBT+ rights; human rights; and finally, their fight against VAW and feminicide. These demands form the axis of their political agenda. |

| Restauradoras con Glitter | Centre | Ideology: Liberal/Academic feminism
Summary: Established in August 2019 created by a big group of conservators, restorers, archaeologists, historians, anthropologists. They framed their work as a collective with a gender perspective at the initial |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Collective</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
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<tr>
<td>Las del Aquelarre</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Institutional/Liberal Feminism</td>
<td>Founded in February 2016. The collective is made up of feminists from various disciplines, but all defenders of Human Rights. They provide guidance and accompaniment to various cases such as self-managed or assisted abortion, guidance in cases of violence sexual violence, and all sexist violence in its various modalities. Within their agenda is the visibility of violence against gender, the denunciation of feminicides, the promotion of sexual rights and reproductive rights. They facilitate gender courses for private initiatives and some public spaces, as well as talks and conferences related to the Human Rights of Women and Feminism. While they officially do not ascribe to any particular feminist branch, they state they have tendencies of radicalism. This radicality, however, is in question as the members all met in the government sphere, aiming to place gender issues in the local government. They were promoters of the activation of the Alert for Violence against Women, decreed on November 21 in Mexico City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosas Rojas</td>
<td>National University (UNAM)</td>
<td>Marxist/Socialist feminism</td>
<td>Rosas Rojas was founded in 2009. Their perspective is informed by revolutionary Marxism. As a collective, they vindicate socialist feminism as a political positioning within the feminist movement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pan y Rosas</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Marxist/Socialist feminism</td>
<td>Pan y Rosas was founded 20 years ago in Argentina and 10 years ago in Mexico. It is an international association created by a section of women from the Socialist Workers Movement (MTS in Spanish). The movement started as a reactive response to the VAW and brutal feminicides that were occurring in Ciudad Juárez. Not all women who are under the Pan y Rosas movement belong to the SWM, while some are socialist or part of the political party, others remain independent. The working field of Pan y Rosas extends to educational organisations, universities, primary/secondary schools, working environments, and unions, as well as domestic households. They organise forums, panels, study circles, workshops from whichever space they inhabit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mujeres Revolucionarias</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marxist/Socialist feminism</td>
<td>Mujeres Revolucionarias was founded 2 years ago. It is part of an organisation called Socialist Left (In Spanish, Izquierda Socialista). The feminist</td>
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A section within the organisation was created as a response to the ongoing violence women experience in Mexican society. They have two main working fields, the public space, that is, educational organisations and universities as well as the streets; and the inside of their organisation or more “private” debates. In these spaces, they question the origin of VAW, women’s oppression, and whether the best emancipatory method for women is Marxism or feminism.

| Aquelarre Violeta | Faculty of Political and Social Sciences (FCPyS) of the UNAM | Ideology: Radical Feminism (Originally, 2020); Decolonial / intersectional feminism (2021)  
Summary: Aquelarre Violeta was founded in 2019 and is made up of 14 students from Anthropology, Sociology, and Communication majors. They ascribe to radical feminism and believe in separatism as a political strategy, not including trans women within the movement. They also adopt an abolitionist perspective against prostitution. At the university, they have organised several feminist events and workshops, including self-defense, feminist rap, English with a feminist perspective, and poetry. The collective adopts direct action as their method of protest and, at the time of our interviews, had taken over the faculty. The collective closed off the faculty, living within the premises, for almost 3 months, demanding that the university re-address the harassment and sexual violence campus protocol as they considered it inadequate. These demands were drawn together with people outside of the collective, the community of women from the faculty that includes teachers, workers, students. Other collectives were also striking across the university. At the time of my second visit to Mexico City (post-pandemic), their ideology had been morphing towards a more intersectional, Decolonial feminism. |
<p>| Semillas de Curie | Faculty of Chemistry of the UNAM | Summary: Feminist collective of the Faculty of Chemistry UNAM. When I first met them, it was only a couple of months since its formation, noting an absence of feminist collectives in the faculty. They had planned weekly activities before the 8M march in 2020 including seminars on feminism as theory, looking at the UNAM’s policy on gender and sexual harassment, providing accompaniment to the women in the faculty, organising clothesline denunciations as well as welcoming families of the victims of feminicide to share their testimonies. They have not officially ascribed to any specific feminist branch. However, when I spoke to a couple of members their perspectives were widely different from more radical trans-exclusionary feminists to liberal advocates of a gender perspective. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vulvísima</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>Community feminism</td>
<td>Vulvísima is a project in the periphery of the city, designed as a socio-productive project that can impact women's economic autonomy. The project, which is integrated by women, has two main components: a social and a productive one. The social component is community interventions based on the prevention of violence and community participation methodologies. The productive component is through the collaboration of women involved in the production of goods at the design, illustration, or manufacturing level. The project is at a micro, community level and is informed by community feminism. They conduct three types of activities: workshops, conversations, and peace circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordinadas</td>
<td>Ecatepec; Iztapalapa</td>
<td>Decolonial and anarcho-feminism</td>
<td>Insubordinadas is a small periphery collective based in Ecatepec and formed by three head members. They met at university, they all studied in the political science and communication faculty. One of the projects that cemented the collective was a “feminist cinema session”, an exhibition aimed at bringing together different narratives and experiences around violence from women across Latino America. As a collective, they are critical of the homogenisation of feminist narratives by academics and activists in the centre and call for community-based feminist strategies to inform their praxis. The collective is informed by community feminism leaning toward an anarcho-feminist political stance. They re-appropriate theories of knowledge that are decolonial, anti-capitalist, and decentralised. They direct their work to women in the communities of the periphery in zones like Iztapalapa or Estado de Mexico, where rates of VAW and feminicide are highest. The collective has two main areas: technology and production. Their workshops and activities discuss topics around cyberfeminism and technologies. They also tackle debates around digital violence against women, digital self-defense, and digital detoxification. A constant that drives the collective’s grassroots work is the idea of collective construction of knowledge informed by decolonial narratives around horizontality and in a direct challenge to vertical, centralised State structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femipraxisicas</td>
<td>Iztapalapa</td>
<td>Decolonial and community feminism</td>
<td>Femipraxisicas is a feminist collective from Iztapalapa, created by two sisters, a theatre actress, and a psycHopedagogue, over 5 years ago. Their events and workshops take place in different spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fueguitas Intransigentes (previously known as Insendiosas)</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Ideology: Intersectional, trans-inclusive feminism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summary: Fueguitas intransigentes is an open dedicated to political discussion from various trenches, experiences, and feminisms. The space is trans-inclusive, non-abolitionist, intergenerational, and intercultural. I originally met them at a protest after the 8M march denouncing the excessive use of force by police officers as well as incriminations of criminal activity at the march. Their protest took place in front of the prosecution building in the centre. They were together with a lesbo-feminist collective las de Los Tambores.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narradoras Urbanas / Colectivo Yolotl</td>
<td>Centre/Periphery</td>
<td>Summary: the members aim to preserve the collective memory of women in Mexico City through a sound-literary laboratory, where women have a public and open space to narrate their stories and heal through art and words. The collective is not autonomous as it is supported by the Secretary of Culture of Mexico City. When I met them, they were problematising this association. The project is created and managed by the Yolotl collective. More information on:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crianza feminista</td>
<td>Centre/Periphery</td>
<td>Summary: Crianza is a network of mothers started in 2018. Separatist collective for mothers and women who parent. Boys are allowed to be part of the marches up until 12 years old (as per transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
regulation). Mothers were rendered invisible within the home. It was important for them to go out on the streets, demanding their rights and making themselves visible with their kids in their arms, their cots. There are not many feminist mother collectives or support for mothers and their kids. They’re anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-agist/anti-adultism. Society does not embrace maternity or children. That is one of their main objectives, visibilising maternity and recognising their spaces. They exchange their cleaning products for hoods. They became hooded mothers as a result of the ongoing state repression.
Women’s Collective Action in Mexico City and the Periphery

MILITANT

Socialist feminist groups

- Mujeres Revolucionarias
- Rosas Rojas
- Las Constituyentes
- "Liberal" or Institutional feminist colectives

Pan y Rosas

HISTORICAL

Student Feminist Movements

- Semillas de Curia (Chemistry)
- UNAM
- Aquelarre Violeta (FCPyS)
- CRONG

Primary and Secondary Schools / Prepas

- Acceso en la U

- Restauradoras con glitter
- Abogadas con glitter
- Insubordinadas

Autonomous peripheral collectives

- Fempraxicas
- Yuhisima

POPULAR

Family of Femicide victims

Mujeres indígenas in CDUAC

Independeñistas / no collective

Enseñadoras

Marea Verde

GL Pier

Independent radical feminists ‘Las encapuchadas’

GUAM
## Appendix II: List of Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Collective</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acoso en la U</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>03.04.2020</td>
<td>AcoUApr2020</td>
<td>Lucia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquelarre Violeta</td>
<td>UNAM (during the take of the faculty)</td>
<td>10.03.2020</td>
<td>AqueVioMar2020</td>
<td>Ximena; Guadalupe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquelarre Violeta</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>03.09.2021</td>
<td>AqueVioSep2021</td>
<td>3 members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bloc activist</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>28.02.2020</td>
<td>BlackBlocFeb2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bloc activist</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>12.03.2020</td>
<td>BlackBlocMar2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bloc activists</td>
<td>Okupa</td>
<td>12.08.2021</td>
<td>BlackBlocAug2021A</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bloc activists</td>
<td>Okupa</td>
<td>10.08.2021</td>
<td>BlackBlocAug2021B</td>
<td>Marcela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIDHG</td>
<td>Marcha Ingrid (Periphery)</td>
<td>15.02.2020</td>
<td>CIIDHGFeb2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIDHG</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>01.04.2020</td>
<td>CIIDHGApr2020</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family of victims of feminicide</td>
<td>Police Station</td>
<td>15.03.2020</td>
<td>FamVicMar2020</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Femipraxicas</td>
<td>Anti-monumenta (centre)</td>
<td>05.03.2020</td>
<td>FemipraxMar2020</td>
<td>Camila, Alicia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Femipraxicas</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>31.07.2021</td>
<td>FemipraxJul2021</td>
<td>Camila</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMThought</td>
<td>Coffee shop in the centre</td>
<td>14.03.2020</td>
<td>FMTMar2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Marcha Ingrid (Periphery)</td>
<td>15.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Marea Verde gathering (Centre)</td>
<td>19.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Marea Verde gathering (Centre)</td>
<td>19.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020C</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Marea Verde gathering (Centre)</td>
<td>19.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020D</td>
<td>Andrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Embroidering by the anti-monumenta</td>
<td>21.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Feminist</td>
<td>Embroidering by the anti-monumenta</td>
<td>21.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent feminist</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>23.02.2020</td>
<td>IndFemFeb2020G</td>
<td>Andrea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent feminist</td>
<td>Stencil workshop</td>
<td>10.08.2021</td>
<td>IndpFemAug2021</td>
<td>Teresa</td>
</tr>
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<td>Interviewer/Group</td>
<td>Location/Details</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Key</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana (Gender Consultant)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>06.2020</td>
<td>GenConJun2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crianza Feminista</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>08.2021</td>
<td>CrianFemAug2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela Cerna Cerva</td>
<td>Coffee shop in the centre</td>
<td>09.2021</td>
<td>DanCerSep2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel (Equis Justicia)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>07.2020</td>
<td>IsaFreJul2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marabunna member</td>
<td>Protest for indigenous rights in the centre</td>
<td>06.08.2021</td>
<td>MarabAug2021</td>
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Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ana (Gender Consultant)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>06.2020</td>
<td>GenConJun2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crianza Feminista</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>08.2021</td>
<td>CrianFemAug2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela Cerna Cerva</td>
<td>Coffee shop in the centre</td>
<td>09.2021</td>
<td>DanCerSep2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel (Equis Justicia)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>07.2020</td>
<td>IsaFreJul2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marabunna member</td>
<td>Protest for indigenous</td>
<td>06.08.2021</td>
<td>MarabAug2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula (Human Trafficking Lawyer)</td>
<td>Coffee shop in the centre</td>
<td>02.2020</td>
<td>HTrafLawFeb2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renata (Pan y Rosas)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>04.2020</td>
<td>PanRoApr2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restauradoras con Glitter (group)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>11.08.2021</td>
<td>ResGliAug2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen Emilio Álvarez Icaza Longoria</td>
<td>Coffee shop in the centre</td>
<td>03.2020</td>
<td>EmiAlvMar2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen Xochitl Galvez</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>03.2020</td>
<td>XocGalMar2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria (Mujeres Revolucionarias)</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>06.2020</td>
<td>MujRevJun2020</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Feminist Therapy Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Of Activists and Organiser</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grl Power (15)</td>
<td>Bosque de Chapultepec</td>
<td>07.03.2020</td>
<td>GrlPwrMar2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grl Power and myself (5)</td>
<td>Bosque de Chapultepec</td>
<td>13.03.2020</td>
<td>GrlPwrTAOHMar2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordinadas, Vulvísima, narradoras urbanas and myself (5)</td>
<td>Periphery (activist’s home)</td>
<td>08.08.2021</td>
<td>PerFGAug2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menos Oportunismo, Mas feminismo (7 activists)</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>27.02.2020</td>
<td>MenOpFGFeb2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosas Rojas (6)</td>
<td>UNAM</td>
<td>11.03.2020</td>
<td>RosRojMar2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III: Thematic Analysis Codes
Appendix IV: Information Sheet and Consent Form

'Ni una más': An exploration of how social movements advocating for the end of violence against women in Mexico influence social policy development and community culture.

Maria Ventura (m.j.ventura.alfaro@bath.ac.uk; phone: + (44) 7921402781)

Project Description: My Ph.D. project attempts to understand the interaction between changes in public policy and the demand of social movements, particularly focusing on the potential benefits of a ‘co-construction of policy’ between social communities and political organisations. In particular, it looks at the case of Mexico and the rise in femicide over the last decade. The overwhelming figures which climb up every year have led to a country-wide social movement: “Ni Una Más”, in Spanish “Not one (woman killed) more”. The Mexican government’s gender policy has failed to address this ongoing epidemic and so my project attempts to bridge this divide between the reality of violence against women and the gender policy design by bringing the voices of the social movement into policy development in an attempt to bring to policy formulation crucial aspects of the social reality of gender-based violence which are currently being overlooked by policymakers but have been mobilised by social movements.

Procedure and Risks:

I, María Ventura, a Ph.D. candidate in the Social and Policy Science Department at the University of Bath, aim to conduct a research project divided into two stages: the focus group and the optional one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The focus groups will be made out of between 6 and 8 individuals from two different organisations: social activists from the Ni Una Más movement and policymakers from the Mexican government. The focus group meeting and individual interviews will be audio-recorded and later encrypted. The researcher will be taking notes at the same time. All information and data collected for this study will then be eliminated after 10 years term, as per university protocol. The data collection will only take place once the consent forms are signed. All information collected will remain confidential and within the scope of the study.

I am aware of the emotionally charged subject discussed and so I remind those who feel uneasy about a particular question that their participation is voluntary and they are free to either leave the question unanswered or withdraw from the study if found necessary. If a third party were to ask you about the subject of the study please refrain from giving details of the project to avoid any potential verbal or physical confrontation. Instead, provide the following answer: I am participating in a study on metropolitan development in Mexico City and the researcher wants to know my opinion about the area I live in.

Please do not hesitate to contact the number on this page if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

Maria Ventura
CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research study led by Maria Ventura, a research postgraduate student from the University of Bath funded by the ESRC. This document is proof of my agreement to participate in the project, which is divided into two stages: a focus group and after this, if I agree to do so, a one-to-one semi-structured interview conducted face to face.

1. I have obtained information about this research and I am satisfied with the information provided and the objectives of the study. I am aware of what my participation in the interviews implies and my role as a participant in the study is clear. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled by the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

2. My participation in this study is voluntary. I have not been pressured directly or indirectly by any person who is an outsider or part of the study.

3. I will be part of a focus group debate conducted by Maria Ventura. The meeting will be conducted in a location to be disclosed closer to the time of the appointment and will last approximately 40 to 60 minutes. I agree with the researcher recording the sound of this group meeting. I understand this recording will be destroyed as soon as it has been transcribed and anonymised.

4. I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the study at any given time if I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I can withdraw my data up to two to four weeks after the interview.

5. I am not required to answer any of the questions if I am not willing to do so. If I do not feel comfortable with the topic discussed, I have the right to change the subject or withdraw from the study if I wish to do so.

6. I am aware that the information shared will be confidential and my identity will be kept anonymous.

7. I am aware that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Bath and the Social Science Research Ethics Committee (SSREC). If problems or questions arise about the research project, I am aware to contact the Chair of the SSREC at the University of Bath.

8. I understand the risks involved in participating in this study and agree to follow directions stated by the researcher regarding any questions about the study from an outside party.

9. I understand and accept all statements on this form. All my questions have been clarified and I am satisfied with the information received. Therefore, I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project.

10. A copy of this consent has been signed by the investigator and delivered to me.

_________________ ______________
Signature Date

For more information, please contact: Maria Ventura (mjva20@bath.ac.uk; tel: +(44) 792140281)
# Appendix V: Interview transcript notations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(laughs); (cries); etc.</td>
<td>This reflects an emotionally reactive to the conversation or activist’s response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[name]; [city]; etc.</td>
<td>This is used to indicate information that was shared in the audio but has been removed from the transcript to guarantee the activist’s anonymity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>???, [unintelligible]</td>
<td>This is used when the audio quality was unclear and an accurate transcription was not possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[…]</td>
<td>This indicates that sections of the conversation have been removed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>Short pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pause)</td>
<td>Long pause</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VI: Un Violador en tu Camino

The original Spanish performance was written by the Chilean feminist collective, Las Tesis, in Nov. 2019 and is based on the writings of academic Rita Segato. Author’s translation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El patriarcado es un juez que nos juzga por nacer, y nuestro castigo es la violencia que no ves (x2).</td>
<td>Patriarchy is a judge that judges us for being born. And our sentence is the violence you don’t see (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es feminicidio. Impunidad para mi asesino. Es la desaparición. Es la violación.</td>
<td>It is femicide. My killer’s impunity. It is disappearances. It is rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y la culpa no era mía, ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía (x3).</td>
<td>And the fault wasn’t mine, nor where I went nor how I dressed (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El violador eras tú. El violador eres tú.</td>
<td>The rapist was you The rapist is you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son los pacos, los jueces, el Estado, el Presidente.</td>
<td>It’s the cops, the judges, the state, the President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Estado opresor es un macho violador (x2).</td>
<td>The oppressive government is a macho (sexist) rapist (x2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El violador eras tú. El violador eres tú.</td>
<td>The rapist was you The rapist is you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duerme tranquila, niña inocente, sin preocuparte del bandolero, que por tu sueño dulce y sonriente vela tu amante carabinero.</td>
<td>Sleep peacefully, innocent girl. Don’t you worry about the bandit. Your lover cop watches you over your sweet happy dream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El violador eres tú (x4).</td>
<td>The rapist is you (x4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VII: Canción sin miedo

Canción sin miedo was written by Vivir Quintana in March 2020 and has since become a feminist hymn against VAW and feminicide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original:</th>
<th>Translation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Que tiemble el Estado, los cielos, las calles</td>
<td>May the State, the sky, the streets tremble,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que tiemblen los jueces y los judiciales</td>
<td>may the judges and policemen be afraid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma</td>
<td>Today, peace is taken away from us women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos sembraron miedo, nos crecieron alas</td>
<td>They sowed fear in us, we grew wings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cada minuto, de cada semana</td>
<td>Every minute of every week, they steal friends from us,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas</td>
<td>they kill our sisters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destrozan sus cuerpos, los desaparecen</td>
<td>They destroy their bodies, they disappear them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No olvide sus nombres, por favor, señor presidente</td>
<td>Don't forget their names, please, Mr. President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por todas las compas marchando en Reforma</td>
<td>For our friends protesting on Reforma,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora</td>
<td>for all women struggling in Sonora,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas</td>
<td>for the female commanders fighting for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana,</td>
<td>Chiapas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for all mothers that keep searching in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tijuana,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia</td>
<td>we sing fearless, we ask for justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gritamos por cada desaparecida</td>
<td>We shout for every missing woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que resuene fuerte &quot;¡nos queremos vivas!&quot;</td>
<td>Let it resound strongly: &quot;We want us alive!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que caiga con fuerza el feminicide</td>
<td>Let the murderer fall fiercely!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo todo lo incendio, yo todo lo rompo</td>
<td>I burn everything, I destroy everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si un día algún fulano te apaga los ojos</td>
<td>if one day some nobody turns off your eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya nada me calla, ya todo me sobra</td>
<td>Nothing will shut me up anymore, it’s enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si tocan a una, respondemos todas</td>
<td>If they touch one of us, we all answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy Claudia, soy Esther y soy Teresa</td>
<td>I'm Claudia, I'm Esther, and I'm Teresa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy Ingrid, soy Fabiola y soy Valeria</td>
<td>I'm Ingrid, I'm Fabiola, and I'm Valeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy la madre que ahora llora por sus muertes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y soy esta que te hará pagar las cuentas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Justicia, justicia, justicia!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por todas las compas marchando en Reforma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora
Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas
Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana
Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia

Gritamos por cada desaparecida
Que resuene fuerte "¡nos queremos vivas!"
Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida
Y retiemblen sus centros la tierra
Al sororo rugir del amor (x2)

I'm the girl that you took by force.
I'm the mother that now cries for her dead daughters.
And I'm also the one who will make you pay.

Justice! Justice! Justice!

For our friends protesting on Reforma,
for all women struggling in Sonora,
for the female commanders fighting for Chiapas,
for the mothers that keep searching in Tijuana,

we sing fearless, we ask for justice.

We shout for every missing woman.
Let it resound strongly: "We want us alive!"
Let the murderer fall fiercely!

And the center of the Earth shall tremble
At the sisterly roar of love (x2)
Appendix VIII: Poniendo el Cuerpo as a Researcher

If I ever wanted to know how it felt to be a sardine in a can, I experienced it today. The march in the centre was meant to start at 2, I got there at 1pm and there were already thousands of people by the monument. I went there with a friend, an independent feminist, experiencing her first march. I tried finding some of the girls I had been meeting the previous days. Tough luck. How naïve was I in thinking I could find or even see one of the 50-ish girls I had been working with in this sea of people! For a good hour at the start of the march I couldn’t move. I couldn’t take pictures. I couldn’t do anything but hoping I wouldn’t break a rib. Slowly we started moving. On our path, the girls chanted, danced, painted graffiti, broke windows. On my way, a girl was crying, her arms were burnt. I stopped with my friend who is a doctor and we tried helping the small group of people gathered around her. Gave her our water. My friend asked how it happened. Someone said she burnt herself with her spray can. My friend and I continued moving. “It doesn’t look too bad” she reassured me “they acted quickly, and it looks like second degree burns, they will heal and possibly won’t even scar”. We continued, looking at how the violence seemed to have escalated in our way. Some groups had broken into shops and restaurants. KFC was a complete mess. Under the name of an anti-capitalist campaign, they broke business’s windows and doors. Once we got to the Zocalo, the space around us tripled. People started leaving slowly, the different collectives divided and formed their own groups. Women danced, played music, did rituals, talked. It was beautiful to see. We walked a bit more towards the stage where different collective representatives did their own little speech. In front of the door of the national palace, police and the black block were in confrontation. Pepper gas was thrown. I asked my friend to stay behind, and I put my gas mask on. I did not see what the news showed me the next day: the Molotov bombs thrown by some people (police say feminists, feminists say infiltrates), burning a policewoman, a reporter, and some feminists as well. When I got there I saw girls covered in white powdered, obviously from the extinguitors that were used shortly beforehand. A girl approached me “Maria Jose! It’s me [NAME]. This is crazy!”. Crazy indeed. I looked back and saw a huge fire close to where I last left my friend. I ran there, the feminists had made a firepit out of the wooden bars that were used to build the barrier around the monuments. Girls danced around the fire. I felt ecstatic. Maybe it was the obvious fascination with fire these girls seem to have. I am not going to lie, after two marches, 8 hours and all the smoke from fires and gas, I had to leave before everybody else left. My head was killing me, and I needed to lie down. Luckily, as I saw the next day and after talking to several girls about it the next few days, nothing much really happened later in the evening (Fieldwork notes, 8th of March 2020).
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