(Un)Friendly Boundaries: Shared Injury & Collective Healing in Mexican Feminisms

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Abstract

Amidst rising levels of sexual and gender-based violence in Mexico, feminist movements have been influenced by the reality of living with overflowing pain, fear, and outrage. The affective temporality (Lamas, 2021) in Mexico City and the rise of anti-gender and trans-exclusionary movements have contributed to theory and praxis built around shared injuries that violently demarcate feminist boundaries of in/exclusion. In Mexico, sisterhood as a feminist value is being used to validate the exclusion of trans and non-binary people from the movement, essentializing feminism's political agendas around cis women. Grounded in María Lugones's conceptualization of pluralistic friendship (Lugones and Spelman, 1983; Lugones, 1995), this thesis proposes friendship as a political alternative to sisterhood, *compañerismo*, and solidarity.

Through an analysis of feminist virtual practices of knowledge-sharing and activists' understandings of sisterhood and friendship, this thesis shows how terms of affinity frame and are framed by social movements. Sisterhood's automatic nature is contested by the intentionality of friendship — a demanding feminist ideal. Thus, this thesis utilizes a new *metodología disidente* guided by an *ethics of friendship* to reflect on interdisciplinary feminist and queer approaches to theory and praxis and how they showcase the possibility of resisting hatred, even hatred for injustice (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020).

In Mexican social movements, the strong presence of the vocabulary of friendship suggests there is already an interest in pushing the boundaries of solidarity into something more meaningful and intentional. This thesis proposes Mexico City as a case study on how friendship can be a driving force for feminism, creating movements that can be an inspiration across the world. Based on *pláticas* and *chisme* with Mexican people resisting violence, this thesis proposes a new feminist theory of friendship that draws on friendly values — commitment to care, respectful acknowledgment of differences, accountability, and a joyful *withnessing* of each other — to build bridges towards collective healing.

Keywords: friendship, feminist theory, transfeminism, queer theory, CDMX, feminist methodologies, SGBV, feminicide, solidarity, sisterhood.

Trigger warnings: death and mourning, sexual and gender-based violence, sexism, transphobia, violence against LGBTQIA+ people, racism, feminicide, and colonial violence. For a wider discussion on trigger warnings in this thesis refer to page 5 in the Literature Review.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis: 29,820 words
Entire manuscript: 43,070 words

Signed: Kassel Franco Garibay

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List of Abbreviations

8M - *8 de Marzo,* March 8 (International Women's Day)

CDMX - *Ciudad de México,* Mexico City

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEIICH - *Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades,* Center of Interdisciplinary Research in Sciences and Humanities

COPRED - *Consejo para Prevenir y Eliminar la Discriminación de la Ciudad de México,* CDMX's Council on the Prevention and Eradication of Discrimination

FS - Feminist School

LGAMVLV - *Ley General de Acceso a las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia,* General Law of Women's Access to a life Free of Violence

LGBTQIA+ - Expansive term to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Aro/Ace people, or *disidencias.*

SGBV - Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

TERF - Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminist

UNAM - *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México***,** National Autonomous University of Mexico

VAW - Violence Against Women

Introduction

What role do emotions play in feminist boundary-making? I argue that in Mexico, a country with high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), feminist movements are shaped by a fear of injuries. Likewise, real and anticipated injuries frame and are framed by understandings of belonging and affinity. In Mexico sisterhood as a feminist value shapes the movements' boundaries of in/exclusion. In this thesis I aim to theorize a more inclusive feminism through my proposal of friendship as a political alternative to sisterhood and solidarity; thus, I present a new feminist theory and methodology based on an *ethics of friendship*. Through an analysis of the feminist movements and debates taking place in Mexico City (*Ciudad de México,* CDMX), as well as conversations about the meaning of friendship for people organizing against violence, I present the healing strategies that are made possible by theorizing and organizing from a place of care. Due to friendship's affective nature, I argue it is the best strategy to understand the shared injuries that have led to exclusive and violent feminist rhetoric in the name of self-defense. I propose to look at CDMX, where the fear and outrage at the high levels of SGBV have shaped harmful trans-exclusive and non-intersectional movements, as an example of how friendship can push the boundaries of feminism to stop organizing around injury and work towards collective healing.

Contemporary Mexican feminisms largely organize against SGBV and, since 2016, have increased in strength and visibility (Lamas, 2021, p. 25). Feminist collectives have taken to the streets and social media to protest the high numbers of SGBV as well as the impunity at the hands of the government. The feminist discourses denouncing SGBV deploy language of friendship and sisterhood as well as emotional statements when mourning and denouncing violence. In marches and protests, women claim "*la policía no me cuida, me cuidan mis amigas*" (the police does not look after me, my friends do)[1] as they protest police brutality and the abuse of power to silence cases of sexual violence perpetrated by police officers (Animal Político, 2019b, 2021). On social media, people mourn the loss of feminicide victims by reminding us "*todavía faltan mis amigas*" (we are still missing our friends). Similarly, chants of "*tranquila hermana, aquí está tu manada*" (relax sister, your pack is here) speak of the need to stand by each other while mobilizing against SGBV.

[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

Sisterhood and friendship are examples of solidarity-building political strategies — through reading of their connection to CDMX's movements, my intention is to show the healing potential of doing feminism *out of friendship*. Drawing from interdisciplinary literature on feminist solidarities (hooks, 1986; Hemmings, 2012; Basarudin and Bhattacharya, 2016; Zaytoun and Ezekiel, 2016), as well as María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman's conceptualization of friendship (Lugones and Spelman, 1983; Lugones, 1995), in this thesis I analyze how emotions and terms of affinity frame and are framed by feminist discourses. This thesis is a methodological and theoretical contribution on how to work across differences. Friendship allows us to acknowledge, understand, respect, and love that which makes us weep to different rhythms (Lugones and Spelman, 1983, p. 573) — we can use friendship values to work through disagreements. As such, rather than dismissing the shared injuries that SGBV and interlocking systems of oppression have caused (Brown, 1995; Ahmed, 2004; Butler, 2009; Puar, 2012; Hemmings, 2020), I present an alternative way of organizing that prioritizes creativity, perseverance, and acts of love to build a world in which individual and shared injuries can be transformed from wounds to scars (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2015), so that we can come together and collectively heal.

I write this thesis at a time in which debates over feminist boundaries of in/exclusion are fueled by a rise in "anti-gender" movements. While the arguments against "gender ideology" are mostly used by far-right national and religious movements, framing "gender" as a made-up concept that puts womanhood at risk is also a useful argument for trans-exclusionary feminists (Corredor, 2019; Fassin, 2020; Hemmings, 2020; Wilkinson, 2021). While this is only one of the debates present in Mexican feminisms, I was drawn to the disagreements of trans in/exclusion because in CDMX anti-gender feminism utilizes sisterhood to foster solidarity and validate feminism as a cis-women-only movement. Through my research, the gender debate proved to be a main concern for academics, activists, and feminists on both sides of the debate — as I expand upon in the Literature Review, the influence of the Church and rising SGBV statistics make CDMX a particularly fertile ground for anti-gender feminisms to take root. Therefore, I analyze the debates of in/exclusion in CDMX's through an exploration of the role of sisterhood in shaping borders and the potential of friendship as an alternative.

As part of my methodological contribution, each analytical chapter's methodology is largely inspired by friendship values. At all points in my research process, I prioritized care, reflexivity, and accountability along with a focus on the role of emotions, others' and my own. In

the Methodology section I expand and develop a feminist methodology based on an *ethics of friendship*, which I define as the guiding principles that steer our actions towards and around our friends. The thesis is divided in three analytical chapters: the first two engage with case studies of virtual feminist spaces used to disseminate knowledge and shape feminism's boundaries; the final chapter develops a feminist theory of friendship that pushes those boundaries. Chapter One situates the gender debate in Mexican feminist studies by analyzing a virtual forum organized by the largest university in Mexico, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The speakers, four prominent Spanish-speaking feminists, framed trans identities as a form of violence against women (VAW) and defined feminism as a movement with no need for intersectionality. Prior to and after the event, many people protested against the transphobic discourses shared in the forum. Through an analysis of the emotional dimensions of the speaker's arguments as well as the responses to it, I show how the boundaries of feminist movements in CDMX are currently being contested. In Chapter Two, I extend my analysis of how feminist theory shapes community building and organizing through an ethnographic analysis of the 2022 Feminist School (FS). The FS, a virtual school organized by a feminist collective, is an important case study that shows how Mexican feminist collectives use virtual spaces for knowledge sharing. The FS was an opportunity to experience a sample of the feminist theory that inspires praxis in CDMX and how it shapes feminist identities. I analyze the connections between the politics of belonging and feminist knowledge to show sisterhood can be used to create un/welcoming feminist spaces.

The final chapter is built upon the in-depth interviews that I conducted with six members of collectives and organizations based in CDMX organizing around SGBV. During the interviews we conversed about their understandings of feminism, sisterhood, and friendship as well as their experiences with feminist movements in CDMX. Our conversations revealed the deep feelings of pain, rage, and fear that people in CDMX live with as well as their hopes for a different future. In the time we shared, I learned about what they value in friendship and the places in which they have healed from violence and injury. Following the definition of friendship in the Literature Review and my development of friendship as method, in Chapter Three I draw from my interviews to articulate what a feminist movement built on the ethics of friendship would look like. In this thesis I show how emotions have shaped some CDMX's feminisms to reject intersectionality. However, I propose that the existing recognition of friendships as primary care networks and the emphasis

on joy in the face of fear make CDMX an excellent case study on the potential of friendship for feminist movements.

This thesis, like most things in my life, is an exercise in translation. I was born in CDMX and I have often tried to describe it in a language that is not my own. After six years of Gender Studies education in English, I have developed methods to translate what I have learned into Spanish and adapt it to my context. As such, I recognize meaning gets lost in translation. Throughout the thesis there will be some words in Spanish (see *Glosario*), the language in which I first learned how to be a friend and the language in which my practical research took place. I resist colonial translation (Lugones, 2010, p. 750) practices that pretend words and theories can be smoothly carried over from one language to another. This thesis is meant to speak to the Mexican context by reflecting on the language that is already being used around feminist movements. Thus, I use Spanish words when I think meaningful definitions would be left behind by replacing them with the English word and explain accordingly. It has taken effort to translate different theories to the CDMX context; a lot of nuances have been lost in the travel, and the theory and praxis I propose would take effort to translate elsewhere. I believe this exercise in translation is worth it; it is similar to the effort it takes to get to know another person and adapt our behaviors in the interest of their wellbeing. It takes effort to be good friends, but I wholeheartedly believe in the value of friendship and its potential for collective healing.

Literature Review: Ties That Bind

In this thesis I question who is invited to heal in feminist spaces and how we can make feminist movements more welcoming and accommodating. In the analytical chapters, I argue the drawing of feminist boundaries as a process of self-defense is tied to a politics of in/exclusion which often utilizes the language of sisterhood and solidarity. This chapter outlines literature on sisterhood and identity-based politics, feminist critiques and alternatives to sisterhood, affective solidarity, and friendship. Furthermore, I situate my thesis in conversation with other feminist theories on violence and injury, while showing why the particularities of CDMX make it a place where the healing potential of friendship can be explored.

In addition to my translation politics, it is important to make note of the theories I translate and transplant to the CDMX context. Since the goal of the theory I develop is collective healing, I begin with a note on the intersections of my citation policy with a commitment to self and collective care (Clare, 2017, p. xx). My thesis presents a political alternative to feminist movements taking place in CDMX; a new path requires acknowledgement of an old path that I refuse to follow (Ahmed, 2017, p. 15). In this case, an acknowledgment of the old path requires trigger warnings. In the following pages, I cite violent literature I refuse to build upon; some of it is trans-exclusive, racist, colonial, and overall discriminatory. It was painful and disappointing for me to read these theories, especially when they self-described as feminist. To minimize harm, I wish to be fully transparent in how and when I engage with it. I do not cite violent theory in the Methodology sections — the theories cited are my feminist tools and I will not use the Master's (Lorde, 2007). However, I must also acknowledge my feminist tools were chosen by my hands, their handles have been shaped by my grasp and technique, which in this case is informed by an upbringing in Mexico and a feminist education in Austria and the United States (U.S.); I am biased when reading and adopting theory (see Methodology). Finally, in the analytical chapters, I share and analyze arguments that deliberately misgender people and exclude certain identities. Those statements are difficult to read and write about; I advise readers to take care when engaging with my thesis. I try to differentiate as clearly as possible when it is my voice and when I am quoting/referring to others. And if my voice is ever hurtful, I take full responsibility for that.

Sisterhood & Feminist Solidarities

Feminist sisterhood is an example of identity-based politics, framing feminism as a social movement that draws strength from shared experience as *women* to build community, define goals, and work towards political change (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241). The social bond between "the political and autochthonous consanguinity" comes from Greek aristo-democracy (Derrida, 2020, p. 169) and was solidified by the French Revolution's motto which equated fraternity to equality and freedom (Derrida, 2020, p. 12). Due to the link between fraternity and democracy, 'sister' as a blood-transcendent identifier has been used by feminists to resist women's exclusion from politics on the basis of sex (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 124). Spanish feminist philosophers argue that the resistance to the "patriarchal pact" (Amorós, 1992, p. 42) necessitates a Modern and Enlightened feminist movement which is rooted on similar democratic values (Valcárcel, 2016, p. 125). In other words, the only rival to fraternity is sisterhood.

In Mexico, the use of sisterhood as a feminist value is tied to its geopolitical proximity to the U.S. and sisterhood's prominence in Spanish feminisms. Since the early 20th century, U.S. feminist theory and praxis has inspired hegemonic Mexican movements (Tuñón Pablos and Martínez Ortega, 2017, p. 13) — particularly those that mobilize against violence — while indigenous and decolonial feminisms tend to draw inspiration from Latin America (Cuero Montenegro, 2019, p. 24). However, while in the 1960 and 1970s Mexican feminists were largely associated with leftist student movements (Lamas, 2018, p. 269), in the U.S. the Women's Liberation Movement solidified an alliance between sisterhood and feminism (Morgan, 1970, p. xxvi). Through consciousness-raising groups, U.S. feminists invited women to *see* their own oppression and "[go] *beyond friendship* to connect to other women as women (...) in a way that was political, organized and formalized" (Zaytoun and Ezekiel, 2016, p. 198; emphasis in original). This statement suggests an understanding of sisterhood as inherently political, in line with democracy's fraternity. Additionally, it depoliticizes friendship amongst women.

Despite the popularity of sisterhood as a feminist value in the U.S., in 1995, María Lugones wrote the term *hermana* (sister) was not used politically among Latina feminists (1995, p. 139). This is no longer the case; today, Latin American feminists mobilize around *sororidad* (sisterhood), a phenomenon that in Mexico is traced to the work of Marcela Lagarde (Mora Flores, 2021, p. 327). Lagarde defines sisterhood as a "political and gendered pact between women that recognize each other as interlocutors" (Lagarde, 2009) in direct response to the "patriarchal pact" that Celia

Amorós theorized (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 124). Lagarde emphasizes the importance of sisterhood in the face of fragmentary identities designed to keep women isolated from politics and from each other (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 125, 2009). Lagarde proposes sisterhood as the "axis of contemporary feminist ethics, politics, and praxis" (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 126). Contemporary feminist movements, Lagarde argues, should make use of the internet to revive a global sisterhood (2009). In Chapter Two I provide a snapshot of Mexican virtual feminisms and how they use sisterhood to build community.

Due to the exclusion of and violence against women worldwide, in the 1980s a global community of feminists was proposed as the antidote to universal patriarchy (Narain, 2004, p. 241). The concept of global sisterhood, although it aimed at a more inclusive definition of feminist movements, has been critiqued as it not only suggests that all women are equally oppressed by patriarchy, but further, absolves women of any complicity in dominant power structures (Narain, 2004, p. 241). Generally, feminist critiques against sisterhood as a political strategy revolve around three main themes: its erasure of difference, its alignment with the traditional family, and its basis in biology. I detail each of these critiques with an emphasis on the Mexican context.

Sisterhood, as it builds on a common identity as women, leaves little room for difference. Rather than fostering unity, dismissing the role of difference "weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political" (Lorde, 2007, p. 110). In the U.S., the use of "sister" as a term that establishes a sense of community, status, and affection ought to be traced back to the slave experience where creating family in the face of forced separation became a political act (Rosezelle in Lugones, 1995, p. 139). White feminists saw potential in sisterhood "and so they took it. [Not] as thieves [, they] took it to try and connect. But at the same time there was something oppressive" (Rosezelle in Lugones, 1995, p. 140). By taking a term that arose out of resistance to enslavement and resignifying it as a white women's tool in the resistance against patriarchy, white feminism began to erase Black women under the pretense that all women are alike (Rosezelle in Lugones, 1995, p. 141). In Mexico, unconditional sisterhood obscures an assemblage (see Methodology) of differences in race, class, nationality, and gender identity, to name a few. This is a process that resonates with colonial cultural and political processes to embrace *mestizaje* and flatten indigenous and regional identities in pursuit of an "authentic Mexican identity" (Ferro Vidal, 2021, p. 5). The erasure of differences in Mexico is a colonial legacy that white feminism facilitates in the name of sisterhood.

Erasure of differences through sisterhood can also be seen in a dismissal of differences in "cultural codes" which may hinder interaction between diverse groups of people (hooks, 1986, p. 134). Behavioral patterns may be misunderstood without a shared background, an issue that, in theory, is not present amongst sisters raised together. The lack of space for difference in cultural codes contributes to feminist movements not developing tools to respect differences. However, the claim of biological sisterhood as an inherently egalitarian relationship must also be contested. Not only are there contradictions in the idealization of sisterhood in light of feminist critiques of the traditional family as a harmful patriarchal institution (Hill Collins, 1998, p. 78), but presenting sisterhood as an egalitarian relationship negates any power imbalances between older and younger sisters and obscures the gendered labor for which sisters are often responsible. Furthermore, sisterhood as a political strategy reaffirms the supremacy of blood relations over chosen bonds such as friendship. In Mexico, this discourse is particularly powerful due to the strength of the family as a social institution. Due to the Catholic Church's influence, in Mexico movements that use the language of family to mobilize people or create community are largely successful (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 542). As Mexican feminist movements mobilize against SGBV, using the language of the family to mourn victims and establish alliances plays into the supremacy of biology.

The biological root of sisterhood lends itself to exclusion not only in terms of race but also gender identity. In the 1970s, trans-exclusionary radical feminists[2] argued that since "no trans-sexual woman has had the full experience of socialization as a woman," trans women could not be accepted as women nor feminists, let alone sisters (Riddell, 2006, p. 147). Feminisms defined in binary terms leave out trans people and to a greater extent non-binary people that cannot fit in a brother/sister dynamic. The reduction of feminism to cis women makes for exclusive feminist movements that replicate patriarchal violence (Riddell, 2006, p. 156). Trans-exclusion not only dehumanizes transgender people but it reduces feminist culture to hatred, uses trans people as scapegoats to deflect from intersectional problems, and utilizes "ideological dogmatism and anti-experiential viewpoints" which are patriarchal methods (Riddell, 2006, p. 154). Sisterhood, in short, weakens feminism. Today, most feminist movements in Mexico argue only cis women can

[2] Trans-exclusive feminist movements can be traced back to the radical feminisms in the U.S. during the 1970s and 80s (Ferré Pavia and Zaldívar, 2022, p. 4). The acronym TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) was coined around 2008 and is often used to refer to women with these views (Ferré Pavia and Zaldívar, 2022, p. 5). Nowadays, few feminists claim the label even if they have trans-exclusionary views as it is considered offensive. Although I strongly disagree with trans-exclusive feminism, my intention with this thesis is not to cause harm, I do not use the acronym to describe people.

be feminists, as I expand on in Chapters Two and Three, which largely obscures the violence trans and non-binary people in Mexico face, often at the hands of feminists. The critiques of sisterhood I have outlined show how the concept has taken root in Mexican feminisms but also how it fails to create inclusive movements.

In addition to critiques of sisterhood, feminists around the world have proposed different alternatives. I briefly summarize three alternatives: *dororidade*, *affidamento*[3], and *compañerismo*. The concept of *affidamento* was coined by the Italian feminist collective *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* (Milanese Women's Library) in 1983 (Sales Salvador, 2006; Herrera, 2010). *Affidamento* is the practice of trusting, supporting, and following the lead of other women; a feminine mediation based on the inherent inequality of resources, knowledge, and strength that women have (Sales Salvador, 2006, p. 24). The *Libreria* aligns itself with "the feminism of difference," which challenges occidental, masculine, and neutral uniformity on behalf of "feminine difference" (Herrera, 2010, p. 141). *Affidamento*'s ultimate proposal is for women to trust and recognize each other as authorities to work together toward common goals (Sales Salvador, 2006, p. 24). Like sisterhood, as an identity-based strategy, *affidamento* is built in women's mutual recognition of their value *as women* (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 126). Similarly, *dororidade* is an intersectional take on sisterhood. With a play on words combining sorority and the Portuguese word for pain, Vilma Piedade proposed *dororidade* as a way in which Brazilian Black women unite through pain and learn from each other (Cassol, 2022, p. 8; Zagal and Edwin, 2023, p. 152). *Dororidade* "contains the shadows, the emptiness, the absence, the silenced speech, the pain caused by Racism" (Piedade in Cassol, 2022, p. 8). The concept of *dororidade* mobilizes politically the pain suffered by Black women who find strength in resisting together.

Affidamento and dororidade were suggested to me as alternatives by my interlocutors both during and after our interviews. This is an example of how our conversations shaped this thesis in its entirety, even outside of the analytical chapters; I am indebted to their generosity in sharing their knowledge. Learning about *affidamento* and *dororidade* expanded my understanding of alternatives to sisterhood, although I find shortcomings in both. To my knowledge, *dororidade* is not used by Afro-Mexican feminists; however, its root in pain is similar to how white Mexican

[3] As mentioned before, this thesis was an exercise in translations. The articles I read for *affidamento* were in Spanish but had been translated from sources in Italian, similarly the sources I found on *dororidade* were either in English or Spanish translated from the original Portuguese. Although I was as careful as possible, I acknowledge some things must have been lost in translation.

feminists define sisterhood as a bond between women *because they have been hurt as women*. I explore the link between injury and sisterhood in Chapters Two and Three. *Affidamento'*s travel from Italy to Latin America, where it is used widely, has erased the term's association with a power imbalance: its legal origins refer to an *affidato,* a minor entrusted to a legal adult (Herrera, 2010, p. 145). Despite its potential and the success with which it has entered the vocabulary of Mexican feminists (see Chapter Two), *affidamento* promotes a hierarchy while reaffirming feminism as a women-only space.

The most popular form of solidarity amongst feminists and activists in Latin America is *compañerismo,* a conditional relation that "consists of joining forces and efforts and imagination in common political struggles" (Lugones, 1995, p. 138). Due to friendship's demanding nature as a political ideal, Lugones suggested *compañera* (female companion) "for the political relation that can carry women through the destruction of racism and racist ethnocentrism" (Lugones, 1995, p. 143). *Compañerismo* is not a gendered relationship nor is it exclusively used by feminist movements — in Mexico, the *Zapatistas*[4] emphasize *compañerismo* as a strategy to collectively "build a world full of equality, peace, justice, freedom, and democracy" (Soriano González, 2013, p. 143). Likewise, in Spanish the term is used in non-political contexts, for example between classmates or coworkers. In a way, the companionship aspect echoes Sara Ahmed's "*withness*" as a form of relationality similar to when one *sticks by* a friend (Ahmed, 2004, p. 91); in Spanish that would translate to *acompañar,* to keep each other company. I find value in *compañerismo* as a form of solidarity, and in Chapter Three I play with *acompañamiento* and *withness* as values for a feminist theory of friendship. However, I argue *compañerismo* as a feminist strategy falls short because, unlike friendship, it does not require emotional attachment.

Solidarity, to be understood as "sustained, ongoing commitment" (hooks, 1986, p. 138), is key to meaningful social movements without depending on a shared identity. In the case of feminism, Clare Hemmings proposed *affective solidarity* as a concept that draws on "a broader range of affects — rage, frustration and the desire for connection — as necessary for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation" (2012, p. 148). Hemmings's proposal follows the feminist

[4] The *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (*Zapatista* Army for National Liberation) began in 1994 as a military movement against the Mexican government and in 2006 it transitioned into a political movement. Mostly composed of *Chiapaneco* indigenous peoples, the movement is named after Emiliano Zapata, an icon of agrarian and peasant resistance in Mexico. To learn more, refer to María Luisa Soriano González's (2013) "*Organización y Filosofía Política de la Revolución Zapatista de Chiapas*" [Organization and Political Philosophy of the Zapatista Revolution of Chiapas.]

tradition of questioning knowledge as objective (2012, p. 149). The basis for affective solidarity is the practice of feminist reflexivity, or standpoint epistemology (see Methodology), inspired by individual experience, situating knowledges as subjective and plural as opposed to objective and identity-based. I argue that friendship as a metaphor for affective solidarity across gendered borders is a useful tool to relate, understand, and desire difference (Niyogi De, 2016, p. 145). The potential of friendship as feminist methodology, theory, and praxis lies in its affective nature and its rejection of identity-based politics. In the following section I review literature to provide a working definition of friendship.

Friendship and its Potential

Michel Foucault proposed friendship as a *tabula rasa,* a "still formless" relation, as a place previously free of politics where they could start a friendship-based movement for gay liberation (1997, p. 136). In the same interview, Foucault dismissed the possibility of a female politics of friendship, as (he claimed) women had always had access to a life with one another (1997, p. 139), which not only meant female friendship was not a blank slate but, I argue, dismissed the political potential of women's relationships. I find two main issues with Foucault's argument. First, under patriarchy women are isolated from each other by being taught that "relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience," women are taught to see each other as natural enemies (hooks, 1986, p. 127). Secondly, far from being a *tabula rasa,* there is a significant and historical connection between friendship and politics (Devere, 2005; Devere and Smith, 2010; Derrida, 2020). Jacques Derrida explored the political implications of friendship and how it has, through its associations with fraternity and enmity, become associated with male politics — neutralizing and invisibilizing female politics (Devere, 2005, p. 76; Derrida, 2020, p. 100). Derrida argued steadfast, constant, reciprocal, and faithful friendship (*βέβαιος* in Greek) has the ability to "defy or destroy tyrannical power" (Derrida, 2020, p. 32), an argument I share. This kind of firm friendship requires decision, reflection, and commitment for it takes time to strengthen. Derrida proposes that *hesitancy* rather than *certainty* (Devere, 2005, p. 71) about friendship ought to be explored — friendship should not be taken for granted nor at face value.

In this thesis I develop a feminist theory that shows the potential of friendship to function as the basis for feminist movements. I define friendship as a voluntary and conditional relationship built on mutual trust, affection, and respect that is guided by an understanding of each other's

particularities and the genuine desire for their wellbeing. The core features of friendship I have outlined — voluntariness, reciprocity, affection, conditionality — can be translated to an understanding of affective solidarity in feminist movements, in other words a feminist theory of friendship. The feminist friendship I propose is based on the disruptive possibility of *βέβαιος* to resist oppressive power through *amistad* (friendship), a word that has its etymological roots in *amare* (to love). To participate in feminist theorizing *out of friendship* is to have a stake in understanding yourself and others (Lugones and Spelman, 1983, p. 577) so that you can co-create knowledge through dialogue, affection, and a genuine interest in working collectively towards liberation.

Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman propose *intimacy* as a way of creating "useful feminist theories" that are in dialogue with diverse women's experiences (1983, p. 578). Their work is an example of epistemic feminist friendship, where knowledge is co-created through "a decentering of the self, collaboration across difference[s …], and reflexive processes invested in our responsibility to each other as feminist academics and activists" (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016, p. 14). Friendship is to *know* someone *in particular*, to understand each other's needs, desires, fears, histories, and particularities through an unraveling of our assumptions (Chowdhury and Philipose, 2016, p. 2). This understanding of the other requires an individual understanding of our selves and reflexivity about our social position, an example of how feminist methodologies are compatible with friendship. Similarly, by understanding the patriarchal dismissal of non-male friendship, we can read the divisions amongst feminists as tools of the patriarchy — tools we can choose not to use. After all, friendship is a relationship built on *choice* (Friedman, 1989, p. 286). The voluntariness of friendship is a key aspect of a feminist theory of friendship; unlike automatic sisterhood, friendship is a deliberate choice, an emotional and political commitment. Friendship requires an intentional iteration of our commitment to each other and our common cause, which makes friendship a "very demanding feminist ideal" (Lugones, 1995, p. 136). However demanding the conditionality of friendship might be, unconditional bonds, such as sisterhood, are burdensome when they are not based on a truly equal relationship (Lugones, 1995, p. 138). Friendship is built on the premise that people are different but through respect and commitment can work together towards common goals, while sisterhood necessitates leaving differences at the door.

Another core difference between sisterhood and friendship is the latter's affective component. Mexican feminist movements are shaped by affects, particularly an *affective*

dissonance, or an awareness of injustice and the desire to rectify it, thus creating "a connection to others and desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognizant of power and privilege" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154). Affective dissonance, I argue, ought to be canalized through affective solidarities to create meaningful change. In the following sections I outline the context of CDMX as a city with high numbers of SGBV which has translated in feminist movements driven by affects, specifically the fear, pain, and outrage around shared injuries. While I believe in the potential of feminist friendship worldwide, I argue that the CDMX context, as well as the role friendship and playful resistance play in Mexican feminisms, make the city conducive to the creation of more inclusive movements that could be a source of inspiration for feminist movements globally. In this thesis, parting from the definition of friendship I articulated, I utilize a feminist methodology based on the ethics of friendship to develop a proposal for feminist movements guided by friendship values in Chapter Three.

Gendered Injuries: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

While it is a fact that gendered violence in Mexico has been steadily on the rise for the last four decades (Valencia, 2019, p. 185), there is often disagreement on the language used to speak about this violence. In this thesis, I chose not to utilize the term VAW for two main reasons: first it implies that only *women* are at the receiving end of gendered violence and secondly it essentializes womanhood to victimhood. Instead, I utilize the umbrella term SGBV. I acknowledge that this is a loaded decision and I do not claim SGBV to be an unproblematic term; it can be co-opted into a "worryingly gender-neutral term which flattens important differences in terms of who is doing what to whom, in which contexts, to which effects and to whose overall benefit" (Boyle, 2019, p. 32). While gender-neutral language may not be as nuanced, "gender-specific language cannot easily capture or account for violence in same-sex relationships or violence experienced by nonbinary and transgender people" (Brubaker, 2021, p. 721). Feminist theories of violence locate violence "within an analysis of patriarchy" (Boyle, 2019, p. 21). Thus, I understand "gender-based violence" as violence that is enacted to preserve an unequal gender system. The "sexual" dimension is equally important, especially when in Mexico the physical violence and murdering of women and LGBTQIA+ people tend to happen in parallel and in addition to gruesome sexual abuse (Valencia, 2019, p. 182). The decision to use SGBV came after reflection about the "conceptual,

political, practical work" it enables me to do (Boyle, 2019, p. 32). I believe SGBV best encapsulates the violence people live with in Mexico.

The use of SGBV as a term is also a political statement considering the rise of "anti-gender" movements that aim to combat "gender ideology." The construction of gender ideology as a threat to womanhood and the family is linked to early 2000s discourses by the Catholic Church; emerging in the Vatican and traveling worldwide, religious and right-wing organizations[5] have mobilized against feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements and their "ideologies" (Corredor, 2019, p. 615; Hemmings, 2020, p. 28). Anti-gender mobilizations are most prevalent in Europe and Latin America, where conservative and nationalist movements are financially and ideologically supported by the Church and political parties in power (Fassin, 2020, p. 68). Anti-gender movements frame gender as a made-up concept which erodes binary sex definitions and family roles (Hemmings, 2020, p. 33), a strategy that exploits collective vulnerabilities and mobilizes fear, resentment, and pain (Hemmings, 2020, p. 27). This compelling narrative has led to some feminist movements adopting anti-gender arguments to present womanhood as at risk of being eroded by LGBTQIA+ movements.

An example of how trans-exclusive feminist movements frame their arguments around anti-gender rhetoric is the term *borrado de mujeres* (women erasure), which denounces the ways in which women are excluded from politics and history but also frames the inclusion of trans women as an "erasure" of "real" women (Ferré Pavia and Zaldívar, 2022, p. 17). The *borrado de mujeres* has its origins in Spain, where feminists have been mobilizing since 2007 when a sex-change law was introduced (Contra el Borrado de las Mujeres, n.d.). Amelia Valcárcel has been a strong voice against the "trans law" and "queer doctrine, a bad copy of feminism" (Becerra, 2021) in her roles as feminist scholar and a government official. Due to the shared Spanish language, the *borrado de mujeres* has been quickly adopted in Mexico where trans people are being framed as part of the ongoing crisis of security (Chávez, 2016, p. 61). To put this strategy in context, in a 2019 survey more than two thirds of the population listed safety as their main concern (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 544). By drawing on the public's concern for their safety and declaring womanhood at risk, anti-

[5] In this thesis I focus on the way feminist movements have adopted anti-gender rhetoric for their trans-exclusive arguments. For a more in-depth look at anti-gender movements from the far right, and their connection to the traditional family, in Mexico see "Gender as death threat to the family: how the "security frame" shapes anti-gender activism in Mexico" (2021) by Annie Wilkinson.

gender feminists strategically use the threat of gender ideology to define feminism as a movement for cis women only.

When over 10 women are murdered every day in Mexico (Infobae, 2023b), claiming womanhood is at risk is a powerful strategy. By "reaffirming 'sex' as real and 'gender' as a duplicitous fiction" trans-exclusive feminists capitalize on a shared identity as "authentic women" while not only excluding trans women and non-binary people from the movement but marking them as dangerous (Hemmings, 2020, p. 33). In Mexico, 54 percent of the violent murders of LGBTQIA+ people are those of trans women, making it the second deadliest country for trans people in the world (Letra S, Sida, Cultura y Vida Cotidiana A.C., 2021, p. 11). Furthermore, trans and non-binary people are killed with overflowing sexual brutality "for disobeying the biologist mandate of conforming to live in a body whose gender has been assigned medically and with which they do not identify" (Valencia, 2019, p. 182). LGBTQIA+ people in Mexico resist a particularly gruesome assemblage of violence, for that reason in this thesis I use the word *disidencias* to refer to them. The term roughly translates to "dissidents," in reference to the ways people queer definitions of love and community as well as categories such as sex and gender. Mexican people have adopted the term *disidencias* to best represent their collective movements and identities in light of the violence they resist. Although in Mexico the violence and discrimination *disidencias* experience is high, there is strong backlash to include it under the existing legal instruments that prevent SGBV (see Chapter One). Trans-exclusive feminists consider a transition from VAW to gender-neutral language would "dilute" the law.

In Mexico, the main legal instrument that seeks to prevent, sanction, and eradicate VAW is the General Law of Women's Access to a life Free of Violence (LGAMVLV). The law was first introduced in 2007 after a government mandated diagnostic study of feminicide violence carried out by Lagarde (Órden Jurídico, 2020, p. 1). Two elements were instrumental to the ratification of the LGAMVLV: international instruments on VAW such as CEDAW, the Belém do Pará Convention, and the Palermo Protocol[6] (Órden Jurídico, 2020, p. 8); and Lagarde's theorization of

[6] Although not a comprehensive list of the international legal instruments written on SGBV, these three documents have been influential to Mexican policy. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a 1979 treaty by the United Nations which requires signing countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls (UN Women, 2016). The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (referred to as the Belém do Pará Convention) was adopted in 1994 by the Organization of American States; it establishes that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms (OAS, 2009). Finally, the Palermo Protocol was adopted by the United

feminicidio (feminicide). Lagarde translated Diana Russell's 'femicide' to the Mexican context to bring specific attention to the systemic and often state-sanctioned murder of women (Lagarde, 2006a). However, as Lagarde is aligned with the anti-gender movement, she excludes trans women from protection as potential victims of feminicide.

Furthermore, the LGAMVLV defines "victim" as "a *woman* of any age that experiences any kind of violence" (Órden Jurídico, 2020, p. 1; emphasis my own). Considering it is only legal to change your legal gender identity in CDMX and 13 out of the 32 Mexican states (López Pérez, 2021), and the law protects only those legally considered 'female,' most trans women, men, and non-binary people in Mexico are left unprotected from SGBV. The reduction of the people vulnerable to SGBV to only cis women is harmful for everyone; it excludes men and *disidencias* from conversations and movements against gendered violence and it essentializes womanhood to victimhood. Through an attachment of injury to identity, feminist groups are able to create a sense of affinity amongst those who share the same injury (Brown, 1995, p. 70). In CDMX, due to its political position as the capital of a federal republic, feminist movements mobilize around *shared injuries* to influence policy.

CDMX's Feminisms: From Zoom to *Zócalo*

Not only is it the capital of Mexico, but CDMX is inextricably connected to the history of transnational feminisms. In 1975, the city hosted the United Nations (U.N.) first International Women's Conference, which drew thousands of women across the world for the "greatest consciousness-raising event in history" (Olcott, 2010, p. 735). In the 1970s, CDMX feminisms were largely influenced by the *Movimiento Estudiantil* of 1968[7], which led them to distrust the U.N. conference as a government-orchestrated publicity stunt (Olcott, 2010, p. 742; Lamas, 2018, p. 268). Marta Lamas argues that the '68 movement not only catalyzed women's political participation but also constituted an affective turn that continues to shape the city's feminisms (Lamas, 2018, p. 271). Using the term "affective temporality," Lamas argues that the increased strength and visibility of feminist movements in Mexico, but specifically in CDMX, is due to the accumulation of collective feelings of rage and pain at the rampant violence going by unpunished

Nations in 2000 to prevent, suppress and punish human trafficking, with an emphasis on women and children (OHCHR, 2000).

[7] The movement is best known for the government-sponsored massacre at Tlatelolco ahead of the 1968 Olympic Games. For more information on the student movement refer to Juan Rojo's *Revisiting the Mexican Student Movement of 1968* (2016) and Elena Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico: Oral Histories* (1991).

(2021, pp. 134–135). Over the past eight years, along with SGBV statistics (Valencia, 2019, p. 185), CDMX's feminisms have escalated in visibility largely due to the painful reality of living surrounded by violence. It is this affective context that inspired my pursuit of friendship as a political alternative to sisterhood and solidarity.

Starting in 2015, online feminist spaces became grounds for connecting, communicating, and organizing in large numbers (Lamas, 2021, p. 25). Prior to 2016, public demonstrations against SGBV had been linked to specific dates such as November 25, the U.N. International Day for the Elimination of VAW (Lamas, 2021, p. 25). However, after almost a year of virtual calls to action, on March 8, 2016 (International Women's Day, from now on 8M) thousands of people decked in purple congregated at the monument to Independence and marched to CDMX's main square, the *Zócalo,*[8] to demand a stop to SGBV (Lamas, 2021, p. 25-26). 8M had been traditionally limited to celebrations of womanhood or women's labor movements, the 2016 march represented a shift in focus. This shift was made possible by feminist collectives taking to social media to mobilize thousands of women, a practice I have noticed year after year since then. A month later, over 10 thousand people across 25 Mexican cities mobilized on April 24 on the first National March Against *Machista* Violence — the two events are nicknamed the *Primavera Violeta* (Violet Spring) and are representative of the new era of CDMX's feminisms (Lamas, 2018, p. 26; Nagel-Vega, 2020). The desire of Mexican women to live free of violence and the frustration at the impossibility to do so is an example of *affective dissonance* (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154). The overflowing collective feelings of pain and outrage that constitute CDMX's affective temporality continue to shape feminist movements.

Three recent events have affectively shaped CDMX's feminisms: the feminicide of Lesvy in 2017, the glitter incident of 2019, and the 2020 8M march. In May 2017, 22-year-old student Lesvy Berlín Osorio was found strangled in a telephone booth inside CDMX's largest university, the UNAM (see Chapter One). Lesvy's case resonated strongly with the public due to the location it took place in as well as the government and UNAM authorities' blatant disregard for justice, as

[8] Both of these places are important locations in the social geography of CDMX. The monument to Independence, often referred to as the *Ángel*, is located on the main avenue of the city and ever since the 1986 CDMX World Cup has been associated with male appropriation of the public space to celebrate their sports teams' triumphs. The choice of the *Ángel* as a point of departure for the feminist march thus should be read as a re-appropriation of public space and a framing of feminist resistance as joyous (Nagel-Vega, 2020). The *Zócalo* is located in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral and the *Palacio Nacional*, where the Mexican President works and also the site for every year's Independence celebration. Almost all major protests in CDMX converge at the *Zócalo.*

the government tampered with the evidence and ruled the feminicide as a suicide to protect the perpetrator: Lesvy's boyfriend, the son of a UNAM union leader (Lamas, 2021, p. 29). Large protests inside and outside of the UNAM followed the case. Two years later, in August 2019, a 17-year-old girl pressed charges after being raped by four police officers (Animal Político, 2019a, 2021). Feminists organized online and gathered outside of the CDMX Prosecutor's Office chanting "*no me cuidan, me violan*" and "*la policía no me cuida, me cuidan mis amigas*" (they do not take care of me, they rape me; the police do not look after me, my friends do). The emphasis on friendship, I argue, is linked to the high numbers of internal migration to CDMX — every year over 300 thousand people move to the capital from across Mexico (INEGI, 2021) — as people presumably leave their families behind, the city opens up "possibilities of supplanting communities of place with relationships and communities of choice" such as friendships, which become primary support networks (Friedman, 1989, p. 289). The protest was fueled by pent-up frustration although it included what Lamas called a "playful dimension" as the feminists showered the Prosecutor and Chief of Police with pink glitter as they walked out of the building (Lamas, 2021, p. 32). The combination of playful resistance, overflowing pain and outrage, and a focus on friendship are constitutive of the affective temporality of CDMX's feminisms.

Not only was the 2020 8M march the largest feminist protest recorded in Mexican history with over 80 thousand people taking to the streets — 90 thousand people were recorded in the 2023 edition (Infobae, 2023a) — but it reframed the future of feminist mobilizations in the city, specifically in terms of feminism's relationship to womanhood and remembrance (Lamas, 2021, pp. 37–38). The 2020 8M march was the first time organizing feminist collectives sent men "to the back," which manifested in men, trans and non-binary people being aggressively shoved out of the march (Lamas, 2021, pp. 37–38). To this day, different collectives have conflicting arguments on whether 8M protests (and feminism by extension) should include people other than cis women. On a more positive turn, the 2020 8M march shifted the focus on remembrance: by chanting out the names of disappeared and murdered women and girls, feminist remembrance became tied to the playful ambiance associated with chanting, dancing, and singing. The protest was framed as being "organized through rage in defense of joy" (Lamas, 2021, p. 38). I see in this defense of joy the potential to organize not around shared injuries but towards collective healing.

In conclusion, the literature on friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity shows the importance of terms of affinity in drawing the boundaries of in/exclusion and articulating the goals of feminist

movements. Using CDMX as an example, I showed the shortcomings of sisterhood and its alternatives in creating an ethical basis for inclusive and transformative feminist theory and praxis. Likewise, by outlining the affective temporality of CDMX due to the high levels of SGBV and the increased use of friendship and playful resistance when organizing against violence, I have shown the city to be a case study where feminist theory and praxis can be born out of friendship.

Metodología Disidente: Doing Feminism Out of Friendship

As a Mexican lesbian, the core values guiding my feminism are firmly grounded in decolonial and anti-imperialist theory. I argue that feminicide and other forms of gender-based violence in Mexico originated and are perpetuated by an assemblage of neo-imperial heteropatriarchal capitalism. Through assemblage theory, Jasbir Puar (2012) complicates intersectionality to focus on the ways sex, gender, race, nation, class, and other categories are co-constituted in "relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning" (Puar, 2012, p. 57). The only way to heal colonial wounds and unlearn what has been imposed is through an equally animated approach to social justice (Puar, 2012, p. 63; Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 131). In this section I propose a new feminist *metodología* based on the ethics of friendship. I use the term "methodology" intentionally, as I describe the "methods" I used to collect and analyze my data, but I also engage with the theory behind the research process (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016, pp. 100–101). Theory and praxis are inseparable to me, in this section I reject binaries and strict boundaries — my theoretical framework is laced through my reflections on my positionality, injury, and healing. My queer interdisciplinary methodology is an echo of what Jack Halberstam calls a "scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies" (Halberstam in Dahl, 2016, p. 149). My queer feminist *metodología disidente* refuses disciplinary coherence but allows me to make sense of the emotions and affects present in CDMX's feminisms and what this means for friendship and its potential.

The Stained Glass Windows of My Mind

I grew up under Mexico's sun. With my light brown skin, I was considered white no matter how much I tanned over the summer; my pierced ears granted me an easy entrance into the world of womanhood. Ever since I came out as queer, I have been aware of the ways my life is shaped by borders of in/exclusion (Anzaldúa, 1987). I negotiated my racial privilege by moving abroad, where I found community in LGBTQIA+ spaces but had to come to terms with my identity as a woman of color. Now, I find myself studying at a Western European[9] institution in an unfriendly

[9] Growing up in Mexico I was taught to understand "European" as a hegemonic category. Due to our colonial relationship, I was taught to assume Europe to be homogeneously powerful and unified. Through my experiences living in Austria, as well as my conversations with friends from different parts of Europe, I have learned about

country (Previdelli, 2022) — my experience as a student has been shaped by racism and xenophobia; it is no coincidence that I turned to the healing potential of friendship to survive it. I am indebted to feminist thinkers' concepts of border thinking, standpoint theory, and Chicana epistemologies (Anzaldúa, 1987; Haraway, 1988; Saavedra and Nymark, 2008; Calderón *et al.*, 2012; Pérez and Saavedra, 2020), that I expand upon in this chapter, as I make sense of my experiences and the possibility of healing at the border.

I "center and sew together mind and body" to resist the colonial bifurcation of mind and body in a quest for impartial research (Saavedra and Nymark, 2008, p. 265). My theorizing about friendship comes as much from academic readings as it does from my experiences of loving, supporting, and being loved and supported by my friends. It comes from feelings of exclusion — from brotherhoods, from academia, from sisterhoods, from countries — and inclusion — homemade meals, flexibility, sticking around. By inviting emotion and personal experience into my research and methodology, I "[resist] the *dis*embodied nature of research" (Saavedra and Nymark, 2008, p. 266) on behalf of theorizing and researching from the flesh (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80). Having spent most of the past six years abroad, I am an insider/outsider (Dahl, 2016) doing research in/about CDMX. My privilege lies partly in access to formal gender studies education and distance from the SGBV in Mexico.

As I reflect on my experiences as a Mexican woman in academia, I have found the figure of the anchoress[10] helpful in defining both the limits and the opportunities of my research and vision. A feminist education has given me autonomy and freedom, even if the distance from Mexico and deeper immersion in academia sometimes feels like the building of a wall between myself and "the real world." Similarly, the anchoress participated in a public ceremony where a bishop sealed her into the cell; the ritual was reminiscent of burial rituals through which the anchoress was "rendered dead to the surrounding world" and reborn as a prophet (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022, p. 386). In many ways, this scenario is an exaggerated parallel to the life of a researcher, so I now stretch the metaphor with recovering-Catholic glee. Sometimes, it feels as if with every

Europe's internal histories with in/exclusion and identity. I try to be as specific as possible when referring to European feminist traditions and how they are related to Mexican feminisms.

[10] The anchoress was a woman who chose to live her life within four walls, usually attached to a church (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022, p. 368). The practice of anchoritism saw a rise in England during the 12th and 13th centuries, a time at which women – especially those unmarried – had few legal rights; "[b]ecoming an anchoress was essentially the only way that a woman could pursue a solitary ascetic life with benefits such as personal autonomy, privacy, and avoidance of lifelong domesticity and unwanted or forced marriage" (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022, p. 386). My use of this term comes from conversations with a friend, thank you Ro.

theoretical text I decipher, I separate myself from those who have not made themselves a home in academia. So, I like to remind myself that anchoress cells had windows; knowledge should not be created in isolation.

An anchoress cell shared a wall with the Church and through a window she was allowed to take part in religious life (Wellesley, 2018). I think of this as an allegory for my relationship to academia. As a researcher from the Global South, I have access to academic life, education, and resources that are mediated through my own background and structural inequalities. The second window was meant for the anchoress to receive food and remove waste (Wellesley, 2018); with this metaphor I think of the books, journals, and other resources that I receive and all the ones that I choose not to keep in my home based on my politics of citation (see Literature Review). Finally, the window to the outside world allowed for the anchoress to receive visitors and mediated her relationship with nature (Wellesley, 2018; McIntyre *et al.*, 2022, p. 388). This cell is not only the place from which I write, but a positionality I carry with me — when I returned to Mexico in December of 2022, I felt simultaneously connected to the environment I grew up in and separated from it by my role as researcher. The fourth wall of the anchoress cell had no windows: in my own adaptation, this wall is a board on which I can muse on my findings and reflect on what comes in through the windows. It is also my blind spot, it reminds me to beware the God-trick of "seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 781). Writing this thesis is a responsibility I do not take lightly; I am concerned about misrepresenting the movements taking place in Mexico and of unintentionally creating harm where I have been meaning to heal.

To minimize harm, I reflected on my positionality as a person and a researcher during every step of the research process. As a woman, I am intimately familiar with the violence about which I theorize in my thesis. My arguments and emotions are rooted in my experiences as a survivor of sexual abuse and a friend of disappeared women. My injuries and my fear of being injured further inform the ways I approach, and/or avoid, feminist mobilizations against SGBV. That being said, I try to be mindful of my privileges, three of which I find most salient in terms of this research: my race, the safety to observe rising feminicide statistics in Mexico from afar, and my uncomplicated relationship with my gender. As a white Mexican,[11] who is considered brown elsewhere, my

[11] Whiteness is complicated in Mexico. Through Spanish colonization, people were divided in *castas* depending on how much of their lineage was pure-Spanish. Following independence, the *casta*-system was abolished although violence against indigenous peoples did not disappear, and "whiter" people inherited political power in the creation of a new country. Nowadays, social, class, and political privilege is still associated with whiteness in Mexico,

privilege blinded me until my interlocutors highlighted the importance of race to these debates. This is only one example of how their contributions not only made my thesis not only possible but also held me accountable.

While reflecting on my identity as a cis woman researching trans in/exclusion in feminist movements, Austin Johnson's (2015) transfeminist methodology and Sayak Valencia's (2019) research as a "Mexicanx *fronteriza cuir* cis-gender woman, who participates actively both in academia and in transnational transfeminist activisms" (p. 180) have been invaluable. To the best of my ability, I resist cissexist power structures in my research with humility. I do not claim to be an expert on trans and nonbinary experiences of in/exclusion (Johnson, 2015, p. 24), but rather I am grateful to the people that have opened my eyes to different ways of being friendly. Most feminist doors are open to me as a cis woman; my pain and outrage are valid in the eyes of most feminist activists. This privilege allowed me to have conversations with women that actively work to create trans-exclusive feminist movements. However, digesting so much fear and hatred was not easy, especially when hate speech came from women I had previously admired like Marcela Lagarde (see Chapter One). I share this not to shame the voices that hurt me, but to be as transparent as possible about my research experience. The negative feelings that I experienced were valid but the hatred was never directed at me; I had and continue to have the privilege of living separately from it should I choose. Most importantly, I do not want to negate the kindness and support I received from all my interlocutors, even the ones I disagree with. I aim not to invalidate the affects that shape exclusionary strategies but to create collective healing alternatives.

I believe that feminism should be a liberatory movement for trans and non-binary people, as well as cis women and men. Transfeminist epistemology, as a theory of knowledge and power, expands the subject of feminism and favors "nonidentitarian networks of care and transnational dialogue, where [it is possible] to build communities of emotional support and survival" (Valencia, 2019, p. 181). Patriarchy oppresses us all, most painfully in dividing us (Lorde, 2007, p. 112). When I use the word 'women' without an adjective, I include trans and cis women, racialized and white women, all women un/like me. When thinking about definitions of 'sex', Susan Stryker's words echo in my mind: "'sex' is a mash-up, a story we mix about *how* the body means, which parts matter most, and how they register in our consciousness" (2006, p. 9). I reject the idea that

although conversations on race and racism are relatively new and lack common theoretical terms. For more information read "*La blanquitud en México según* Cosas de Whitexicans" [Whiteness in Mexico according to *Cosas de Whitexicans*] (2022) by Gerardo Mejía Núñez.

sex exists in a binary and people outside it do not matter as well as the gravitation towards sex as a "stable" anchor. Moving away from an expansive definition of womanhood to the "safety" of femaleness is reminiscent to me of colonization processes through which certain peoples were denied humanity (Lugones, 2010, p. 748). I understand gender to be a colonial imposition, but I find in decolonial feminisms the *possibility* to resist and overcome the coloniality of gender without using people as scapegoats (Riddell, 2006, p. 154; Lugones, 2010, p. 747). I believe that women can achieve collective healing not through identification to injury but a dismantling of essentializing categories.

Injury and Healing: A Feminist Aid Kit

Like bell hooks, I arrived at feminism because I had been hurt, desperate to make the pain go away (1991, p. 1). I found healing in a discipline that is not one (Lykke, 2011). For this reason, I follow Judith Stacey's advice and reclaim the roots of academic feminism by becoming "undisciplined" (1995, p. 313). Especially after encountering efforts to gatekeep the purity of feminist theory (see Chapters One and Two), it would feel traitorous to retreat into a single discipline. Disciplinarity borders are designed to keep out undesirable and foreign ideas, often ideas from marginalized communities. The stakes are high, "rigidity means death" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). Only through challenging the power dynamics of disciplinary knowledge production can we create feminist research that is inclusive, critical, and healing.

A commitment to collective healing is crucial in effective theorizing and organizing in the context of violence. However, my exploration of healing strategies is informed by an analysis of shared injuries. I argue that social and political injuries have shaped feminist identities in Mexico (Brown, 1995, p. 7). Through an attachment of injury to identity, feminist groups are able to not only ground their activism in a healing promise but to create a sense of affinity amongst those who share the same injury (Brown, 1995, p. 70). My intention is not to turn a blind eye to violence, as that would be a repetition of the injury (Ahmed, 2004, p. 33), I do not mean to invalidate the pain and fear from where exclusion comes, but to consider the role of hate in generating a defense against injury (Ahmed, 2004, p. 42). Amidst the high numbers of SGBV (see Literature Review), which is vastly perpetrated at the hands of cis men, discourses of all masculinities and/or perceived masculinities as dangerous may be understandable but do not justify exclusion. When analyzing these defenses to real and imagined injuries, Marta Lamas's work in pulling apart the "signification

spirals" present in contemporary Mexican feminisms is invaluable (Lamas, 2021, p. 47). Lamas argues signification spirals take place when one or two events are fused in a signification process that implies an amplification not of the event but its *potential threat to society;* for example "in Mexico all sex work is equated to human trafficking through arguing all sexual transactions imply violence" (Lamas, 2021, p. 47). Similarly, I argue that trans and non-binary identities have been spiraled to signify a threat to "real" women or a form of VAW. Due to the systemic violence that Mexican women face, trans-exclusionary feminists can easily foster moral panic of womanhood being threatened.

Processes of in/exclusion allow for discourses in which protecting some people from injury translates into justifying or ignoring intersectional injuries of those who do not fit the definition of valid injured subjects; this echoes narratives of necropolitics (Valencia, 2019, p. 181) in which some lives are considered grievable and some are not (Butler, 2004, 2009). When Mexican people mobilize against violence, protesting the state's impunity as some people go missing and are murdered, it is important to highlight which lives are *not* being grieved and who's grieving does not matter. We grieve friends, the lives that matter to us (Basarudin and Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 44). Through friendship we can bring awareness to lost lives that have not being mourned and make feminism into a movement that values all lives. I believe the emphasis on friendship in feminist discourses (see Literature Review) suggests there is already an interest in pushing the boundaries of solidarity into something more meaningful and intentional. The disruptive promise of friendship (Friedman, 1989, p. 286) is the possibility to recognize when "violence is passed off as kinship" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 36) as well as the violence that comes with erasing difference.

For this purpose, it is also essential to re-center the radical origins of intersectionality. Neoliberal efforts to reduce intersectionality to a performative buzzword jeopardizes the quality of our theory and praxis and puts feminist solidarity (see Literature Review) at stake (Salem, 2018, p. 411). It is important to locate feminism at the site where categories assemble and intersect rather than turning our backs on difference (Puar, 2012). It is the recognition and valuing of difference that allows for pluralist friendship, the kind of love that commits one to understanding the other (Lugones, 1995, p. 141). María Lugones clearly stated that friendship is a "very demanding feminist ideal" (Lugones, 1995, p. 136); I argue this demanding commitment to feminism and to each other is needed so that we can collectively heal.

When it comes to healing, I defer to the *curandera de la conquista,* Gloria Anzaldúa, whose writing offers tools for healing from the *herida abierta,* the open wound of neocolonialism's borders and categories (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 129). Anzaldúa's poetry described the experience of wallowing in one's grief and loss until we become a creature of darkness, a creature identified with injury:

> I want not to think
> that stirs up the pain
> opens the wound
> starts the healing
>
> I don't want it to stop
> I want to sit here and pick at the scabs
> watch the blood flow
> lick the salt from my face
> while all the time
> a part of me cries Stop Stop (1987, p. 186)

Healing is painful, but it is a different kind of pain. Sometimes, it feels safer to stay nestled in the familiarity of our known injuries rather than risk healing aches. And yet, Anzaldúa finds within herself the *Coyolxauhqui*[12] imperative, the urge to heal and achieve integration (2018, p. 122). Anzaldúa saw in *Coyolxauhqui* a symbol for the "necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you're embroiled in differently[, … a] symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way" (2018, p. 122). The *Coyolxauhqui* imperative refers to healing as an ongoing process of un/making, there is no resolution but the process itself is the healing. Healing thus requires not only an awareness of our injuries and fragmentations but our disidentification from them, it involves radical forgiveness that allows us to shed the victim/perpetrator binary (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 133) and start building community. I believe this is a difficult process we can only embark on collectively if we do it out of friendship.

[12] *Coyolxauhqui* is the goddess of the moon in Mexica mythology. According to the myth, *Coyolxauhqui* plotted with her brothers to murder her pregnant mother *Coatlicue*, whom they suspected of treason. Coyolxauhqui and her brothers were murdered by the newborn god of war, *Huitzilopochtli*, who dismembered the siblings and banished them to the skies. *Coyolxauhqui's* head is said to have become the moon (Anzaldúa, 2018, p. 122; Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 130).

Friendship as Method

This thesis was theoretically and methodologically born *out of friendship.* Throughout the research and writing processes, Johnson's transfeminist methodology helped me theorize feminism that is trans-inclusive, trans-friendly even. However, I do not claim to speak for trans and non-binary people and whether they wish to belong in feminist spaces. Inclusion is not forced. Much like in friendship, judging our allyship is not up to us. The responsibility to keep each other accountable is one of the key aspects of friendship. Other friendship values, such as intentionality, care, flexibility, and a meaningful recognition of difference are also centered in the *metodología* that I outline in the following section. In Chapter Three I reflect on this methodology and friendship values that I propose as part of a feminist theory of friendship.

In Chapter One, through feminist qualitative methods of discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007; Almanssori and Stanley, 2022), I consider the content of a forum hosted by the UNAM and the debate around it. Starting from the definition of discourse as "language in context" (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 44), this case study contextualizes the "gender debate" in CDMX and frames discussions of in/exclusion in Mexican feminisms. I draw from Sara Ahmed's sociality of emotions, through which she claims boundaries are shaped by affects (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). As discussed in the Literature Review and Chapter Three, it is the intentional affective dimension that separates friendship from other feminist solidarities. The intentional centering of emotions in my thesis was present at emotion coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 15) transcripts, and practicing reflexivity and journaling (Almanssori and Stanley, 2022; Nau *et al.*, 2022) as research and self-care strategies. A reading of the emotions present in the forum and the response to it informs my analysis of friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity in the other two analytical chapters.

In Chapter Two I analyze the data obtained through my participant observation of the 2022 "Feminist School" (FS). Drawing from feminist ethnographic methods (Fay, 2007; Dahl, 2016), my research positions "the production of feminist knowledge as a project inseparable from praxis" (Davis and Craven, 2011, p. 193). Feminist epistemology as a liberatory practice (hooks, 1991) is especially relevant in CDMX, where some feminist collectives mobilize to exclude men, trans and non-binary people from feminism. Feminist ethnographic approaches allow for complex conceptualizations of power that shape how feminist knowledge is shared and co-constructed (Meyerhoff, 2003, p. 203; Davis and Craven, 2011, p. 201). In addition to my analysis of my participant observation at the 2022 FS, this chapter builds on my interviews with five members of

the organizing collective. In this chapter I reflect on my experience learning from the FS and my interviews, an experience that resonates with knowledge-sharing as a friendship value.

Finally, in Chapter Three I draw from my interviews to design a feminist theory of friendship. From November 2022 to March 2023, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 people from six different collectives and organizations based in CDMX. Due to the diverse nature of the movements in Mexico, I acknowledge it is a limitation of this study to focus solely on people mobilizing in the capital. However, I believe that theorizing about CDMX, a place with which I am intimately familiar and that has a diverse population and rich political history (see Literature Review), is a first step in mapping the causes and strategies currently guiding social movements as well the political use of affinity terminology such as friendship. The interviews took place on Zoom, a resource that proved compatible with my ethical commitment to flexibility (Tungohan and Catungal, 2022, p. 4); some of the people I interviewed have full time jobs in addition to their unpaid organizing labor — meeting virtually eased some of the toll timewise for them. While I was concerned about the difficulty of establishing trust through Zoom (Tungohan and Catungal, 2022, p. 4), especially due to the sensitive nature of my interview questions, I found the answer was to intentionally center "compassion, emotionality and empathy" during the entire interview cycle (Leurs, 2017, p. 138), exercising care both for the interlocutors and myself.

In my interview process, I centered two important concepts that greatly shape social interactions in Mexican culture: *chisme* (VanHaitsma, 2016; Gonzalez, Orozco and Gonzalez, 2023) and *pláticas* (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016; Gonzalez, Orozco and Gonzalez, 2023). *Plática* eludes translation, "a talk" does not convey the friendliness necessary to ensure a *plática* goes both ways (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 103). My interviews demanded time and vulnerability from my interlocutors; through framing the interview as an opportunity to *platicar* with one another, I offered to be vulnerable and honest in return (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 114; Gonzalez, Orozco and Gonzalez, 2023, p. 6). *Chisme* is easily translated but using "gossip" erases the significance and gendered implications of *chisme* in Mexican culture. Often, *chisme* is dismissed as feminine menial chatting and *chismosa* women are demonized for their behavior. However, through trust-building, *chisme* allows people to "speak truth to power and expose oppressive social, political, and cultural structures" (Gonzalez, Orozco and Gonzalez, 2023, p. 5). For this to be possible in my *pláticas*, it was important to be as transparent as possible about the

power structures within which we interacted. This was especially true when interviewing non-binary interlocutors who are often on the receiving end of violence from cis women like me.

Care is a key feature of friendship. Out of an abundance of caution, I decided to anonymize my interlocutors as well as the speakers of the FS to the best of my abilities. Being an activist in Mexico is very dangerous.[13] I sought to minimize harm through the use of pseudonyms (see Appendix I for a breakdown of my interlocutors and their organizations). These measures were made clear to all interlocutors prior to the interview in a conversation where I offered them the option to stop the interviews or withdraw their data up to the point of data processing. Once they consented to the interview and a date was set, I sent an informed consent form for their review and obtained oral consent during the Zoom meeting. As a final step, I practiced Kathleen Rager's "member checking" (Rager, 2005, p. 24), a process in which interlocutors review their transcripts for accuracy before returning them. In January of 2023 I was able to meet in person with two of my interlocutors that I had already interviewed for an off-record conversation during which they provided feedback on their experiences during the *pláticas*. We brainstormed ideas of how I could give back to my interlocutors, and they provided me with a myriad of resources, people, and organizations to look into as I continued with my research. In a real-life exercise of friendly research, we all reflected on how our minds and ideas had been changed since our initial conversations and what that meant for our work in the future. The exercise of member-checking came with minor corrections, which serves as a reminder that it is human to change our minds, I know that mine did as I learned through this thesis.

In writing this thesis I enjoyed breaking the rules and writing new ones, it was a joyful resistance against painful and divisive feminist theory and praxis. My *metodología disidente* does not offer unbiased analyses, if those even exist, but it is aimed to unveil the role of affect in creating boundaries and how we can heal from these divisions. The methodological contribution of this thesis shows the potential of doing feminism out of friendship and cements my commitment to creating welcoming, violence-free, and inclusive feminist spaces in CDMX.

[13] Human rights activists in Mexico, and all throughout Latin America, face threats of stigmatization, harassment, and criminalization often at the hands of the government; these threats often pile up on top of their precarious and non-remunerated activist work. From 2019 to 2020 45 activists, mostly involved in environmental causes, were murdered (Olivares Alonso, 2021). Additionally, in the virtual era (as I expand on in later chapters) feminist activists online face threats of doxxing, *funas* (canceling), and harassment.

Chapter One: Debates in the City Within the City

In this chapter, I analyze the forum "Necessary Clarifications on the Categories of Sex and Gender," which took place on March 24, 2022. The event was hosted by the Center of Interdisciplinary Research in Sciences and Humanities (CEIICH) at the UNAM. This forum contextualized one of the largest debates of contemporary Mexican feminisms: the definition of gender and its connection to the mission of feminist movements. The gender debate brings to surface conversations regarding the political subject of feminism, in/exclusion in feminist movements, and the relationship between feminism and violence. My analysis of the forum reveals not only the arguments of white trans-exclusive feminism in CDMX, but also the fears and anxieties that create and validate feminism as a "safe space" for cis women only.

Guided by Sara Ahmed's theory on the sociality of emotions (2004) and María Lugones's coloniality of gender (2010), I analyze the forum and its response as a case study in understanding the current debates on sex/gender and the political subject of Mexican feminisms. As part of the close reading of the arguments articulated in the forum I practiced emotion coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 105) and identified the following feelings as present in the speakers' contributions: fear/pain, sadness, hatred/disgust, joy, hope, and love/affection. My research is, at its core, about the affects of re/drawing of the boundaries of feminism: in this chapter I offer a reading of affects as contributing to the drawing of borders and surfaces (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 24–25) as well as a reflection on my own feelings which I recorded through journaling (Almanssori and Stanley, 2022, p. 263). Finally, I offer a reading of the response to the forum through Lugones' conceptualization of resistance (2010), showing how the current social movements in Mexico are already contesting the boundaries of feminism.

The forum took place (virtually) in a public university[14] that has political significance as it has historically been the birthplace and site of social movements. Notably, the *Movimiento Estudiantil* of 1968 (see Literature Review) led to a military occupation of UNAM's main campus[15]

[14] In Mexico public education, even at the higher level, is often designed by the government. The UNAM was originally funded in 1551 under Spanish rule and became a public institution after independence. It is currently administered independently from the government. The autonomy to organize itself and design its curricula was achieved through student strikes and protests in 1929 (UNAM, n.d. a) which cemented the University's mission to establish itself as a beacon of freedom of expression.

[15] The UNAM has 36 different campuses across Mexico. The main campus in CDMX is often referred to as *Ciudad Universitaria* (University City) because of its size, I chose the title for this chapter in reference to that. The 176.5

in CDMX (UNAM, n.d. b). To this day, UNAM students have the reputation of being rebellious and anti-establishment (Lamas, 2018, 2021). A recent example of student demonstrations at the UNAM were the protests after Lesvy's feminicide (see Literature Review). Due to its long history and power as a social institution, the UNAM plays an important role in shaping the politics of CDMX. Additionally, across Mexico and the world it is a recognizable institution with a powerful platform. The event was watched live through Facebook and YouTube by over 3500 people worldwide (CEIICH UNAM, 2022) and as of May 2023 the YouTube video has over 66 thousand views. The forum was quite polemic. To some, the event was a much-needed "feminist concert" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Others saw the forum as transphobic which spurred the creation of the viral hashtag *#UNAMsinTransfobia* (UNAM without transphobia) (La-Lista, 2022). The response is indicative of the tensions in CDMX's feminisms.

The UNAM also hosts one of the few Gender Studies PhD programs in Mexico. Furthermore, the CEIICH has a center on feminist research. Aimée Vega — a coordinator at the CEIICH's feminist center — organized the forum, which was co-moderated by herself and Angélica de la Peña — a Mexican politician who was involved in the ratification of the LGAMVLV. The event brought together four of the biggest names in Spanish-speaking feminist studies: Marcela Lagarde, Amelia Valcárcel, Alda Facio, and Andrea Medina. Lagarde's contributions to Mexican feminisms and legal framework on VAW cannot be understated (see Literature Review), it is largely due to her influence that the forum had the impact and emotional response it did. Likewise, the presence of Valcárcel (see Literature Review) was framed as an example of how Mexican feminisms can be "elevated" to Western- European standards. Due to the limited availability of Gender Studies programs in Mexico, this forum taking place at the UNAM with such powerful speakers is an important factor to consider when analyzing the impact and consequences of the arguments shared at the event.

Sex/Gender

> *"The gender system is not just hierarchical but racially differentiated, and the racial differentiation denies humanity and thus gender to the colonized"* (Lugones, 2010, p. 748).

hectares that make up the campus are considered National Heritage and include public areas such as botanical gardens, museums, and sporting centers (INAH, 2007). I grew up in CDMX, the UNAM was my second home.

The concepts of sex and gender, although far from having stable definitions, have been key in the development of feminist theory. While debate surrounding the use and definitions of categories such as "gender" and "women" is central to feminist history,[16] the forum lacked dialogue and instead claimed to protect the political density of the "true" definitions of sex and gender. I argue the speakers' definitions of sex and gender are reminiscent of Lugones's (2010) definition of gender as a colonial imposition that allows for the marginalization of racialized women and *disidencias.*

The speakers legitimized their definitions of sex and gender through a genealogy of white and Western-European feminisms. Lagarde used Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) as a departure point for the construction of gender as a category of analysis (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), which she defined as "the result of the interaction of subjective, symbolic, social, economic, cultural, and political components attributed [...] to people based on their sex" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Not only are sex and gender inseparable to Lagarde, but in an echoing of "earlier feminist analysis" (Lugones, 2010, p. 744), these categories are deeply related to the definition of "human." Lagarde continued: "sex is defined under the framework of the sexuality of this species, a species that we still call *homo sapiens sapiens* and maybe one day we will call *gineco-homo sapiens sapiens*" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Lugones argues that through colonization, "a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonized in the service of Western man" (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). By making sex a defining characteristic of the human species, Lagarde drew a line that excludes those outside of the gender binary from humanity. Valcárcel then defined sex as "nature's reproductive strategy for various sexual animal groups [… like] us" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022) and denied the existence of sexual variations by claiming "'intersex [people]' do not exist, there is a sex that presents anomalies" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). This statement resonates with how bodies outside of the fe/male binary were colonially constructed as aberrations of white male perfection (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). Valcárcel asserted

[16] See, for example, Gayle Rubin's (2012) *Deviations*; Kate Millet (2016) *Sexual Politics;* and Judith Butler's (2006) *Gender Trouble.* Lugones and Spelman (1983), among others, criticized the essentialism of "woman" as a category without taking into account intersections of race, class, etc. Other critiques to Western feminist theories on sex and gender include Teresita De Barbieri's (1993) "*Sobre la categoría género: una introducción teórico-metodológica*" [On the Category of Gender: A Theoretical and Methodological Introduction;] Sonia Montecino's (1996) "*Identidades de género en América Latina: mestizajes, sacrificios, y simultaneidades*" [Gender Identities in Latin America: *Mestizajes*, Sacrifices and Simultaneities;] and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's (2002) "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies."

that sex does not need to be complicated as it is "immediately observable" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). However, "feminism's triumphs," in complicating gender dynamics, have rendered sex "confusing" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). In her arguments, Valcárcel appealed to the audience's "common sense" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022) to dismiss the need for a gender debate, as the definitions she offered were to be understood as stable and undisputable.

In her opening statement, to underscore the stability of 'sex,' Valcárcel used an emotional device when she lamented Afghanistan's Taliban government's last-minute decision to rescind their promise that girls would return to school:

> [Online there are] images of girls crying (...). I wonder, if 'sex' has become so problematic, how is it that in Afghanistan they know exactly who to ban from school? Do they have special lights that allow them to see these things? (...) Because no one would say that Afghanistan is, or has ever been, a leader in human epistemology (...). Afghanistan is not a leader in the waves of history, and yet they perfectly can recognize someone's sex and treat them accordingly (CEIICH UNAM, 2022).

In addition to the derogatory tone used to talk about Afghanistan, I argue this statement utilizes the emotions of sadness and hatred/disgust to incite empathy from the public. Valcárcel juxtaposed the "real problems" of women and girls suffering with a seemingly absurd confusion on the definition of sex. She circled to this example in her closing statement, in which she suggested gender non-conforming people and their agendas are, unlike feminists, incapable of empathy. "Have you ever seen the people who are so interested in what they call their 'gender' protest whenever there is a murder? When women are forbidden from going to school in Afghanistan?" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). The essentialist claim of women as inherently empathetic is not new, as Ahmed suggests, love and the "capacity to touch and be touched by others" are constructed as characteristics of femininity (2004, p. 124). In Valcárcel's argument, the ideal of empathetic femininity defines women and becomes a specifically feminist trait (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154). Furthermore, it invisibilizes and dismisses transfeminist movements that *do* mobilize when there is violence and injustice (Valencia, 2019, p. 186). Through this emotional device, the audience is invited to put things into perspective and remember that feminism is designed to combat injustices against *cis* women.

The argument of women's — and *only* women's — suffering as feminism's *raison d'etre* serves to draw clear boundaries between its agenda and LGBTQIA+ movements. Valcárcel proposed that, despite the success in implementing gender mainstreaming, the term has ceased to

be beneficial for women's rights and so: "Dear *amigas* let 'gender' get some sleep. (...) Let us not contribute to the disappearance of women, because it is women and their rights that are the principal object of feminism" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). The language of friendship has a double effect: for those who agree with her, it creates a sense of community in shared agendas; but for those of us who disagree, it creates a painful distance between us and feminism. By invoking fear for the disappearance of women as political subjects, Valcárcel's argument gains strength in the Mexican context where women's lives are literally being erased through violence.

Violence and the Law

> *"Construction of the human is vitiated through and through by its intimate relation with violence"* (Lugones, 2010, p. 752).

Vulnerability to violence is a compelling argument around which to organize and mobilize. Lagarde argued that "[we are] human bodies constituted by the different oppressions that pass through them, including feminicide violence" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). This co-constitution of body and violence is reminiscent of the intimate connection Lugones saw between violence and humanity (Lugones, 2010, p. 752), as well as Ahmed's reading of vulnerability as a "bodily relation to the world, in which openness itself is read as a site of potential danger" (2004, p. 69). The link that the speakers proposed between women as human bodies that are vulnerable to violence is tied to their arguments on women's rights as human rights. During her speech, Lagarde quoted Facio in claiming it was at Vienna in 1993[17] "that women became humans"[18] (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). International instruments on women's rights being in danger of being diluted by gender-neutral language was a key theme of the forum. The use of fear as a discursive device, as Ahmed points out, "involves reading such openings as dangerous, the openness of the body to the world involves

[17] In 1993 Vienna hosted the U.N. World Conference on Human Rights. Notable outcomes of the conference include the establishment of the post of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, the signing of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the creation of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (OHCHR, n.d).

[18] The "women's rights are human rights" quote is often attributed to Hillary Clinton's address at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. However, the concept had been previously used by feminist movements and theorists, notably Charlotte Bunch's (1990) "Towards a Re-Vision of Human Rights", in which she questioned the framing of women's rights as separate from human rights. Facio, however, has famously reformulated this catchphrase to signal women's humanity was not recognized until the 1993 Vienna conference, which she helped organize. For more information, refer to Facio's (2011) article "*Viena 1993, cuando las mujeres nos hicimos humanas*" [Vienna 1993, When (We) Women Became Human.] I wrote this thesis while living in Vienna, where day-to-day bureaucracy and social interactions attempted to dehumanize me for two years; I found Facio's argument ironic and out-of-touch at best.

a sense of danger, which is anticipated as a future pain or injury" (2004, p. 69). It is this fear and anticipation of pain that I found most prevalent in Facio's speech.

Facio, a Costa Rican lawyer, accentuated the importance of feminist movements to the international (read: Western) recognition of women's rights by repeatedly mentioning CEDAW, Belém do Para, Vienna 1993,[19] and other documents that protect "women of female sex" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Facio's main argument was the need to protect the integrity of those legal documents. Although Facio recognized that trans and non-binary people also face violence, she insisted VAW ought to be differentiated due to its different characteristics and consequences (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), and echoed Valcárcel's argument on the need to keep feminist and queer agendas separate.

Facio cited the 2021 case of *Vicky Hernandez v Honduras* at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The ruling of this case was that the torture and murder of Vicky Hernández — a Honduran trans woman, sex worker, and activist — "constituted a situation of prejudice-based violence owing to her gender identity and expression" ('Vicky Hernández et al. v. Honduras', 2021, p. 4). Before the hearing, Facio and others petitioned the court not to allow the Belém do Para Convention to apply to Hernández as it would open the instrument's protection to not-women (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Facio extensively quoted the case as a precedent on the difference between VAW and prejudice-based violence. According to Facio, "Hernández was not murdered because they thought she was a woman but because she was trans" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022); thus, the ruling of the court distinctly marked Hernández as "not a woman" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). By reducing feminism's goal to combating violence against cis *women,* Facio excluded trans and non-binary people from participating in or being protected by feminism.

Facio invited the audience to reflect on the consequences of including "transfeminine people in all the spaces that have been conquered by women" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), utilizing the language of coloniality to turn feminism into a mission of conquering spaces. These are arguments that I found painful and alienating as a queer woman from a previously colonized

[19] As expanded upon in the Literature Review, CEDAW and the Belém do Para Convention are watershed instruments that target VAW. Since these instruments do not use the expansive language of "gender-based violence" their inclusion of trans and non-binary people is often contested. Additionally, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993 represented a UN commitment to include women's rights in the agenda through "the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex" (OHCHR, 1993).

country. Later, Facio further demarcated the emotional boundaries of what feminism should stand for by asking:

> What happens when trans and non-binary people are included in the *very few* legal instruments women have access to in terms of human rights? Which, by the way, are even less than the ones the LGBT population has. It dilutes the protection. (CEIICH UNAM, 2022).

The argument of the inclusion of trans and non-binary people as "diluting" women's rights can be interpreted as fear of vulnerability to injury. Ahmed argues the "fear of degeneration, decline and disintegration" can be used as a mechanism for preserving what, in this case, women have achieved (2004, p. 78). Facio's speech created an illusion that including trans women and non-binary people would equate an increased risk for women. This implication is dangerous, as fear of injury can easily be "converted into hatred for others, who become read as causing 'our injury'" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 15). Additionally, she claimed that "heterosexual men call themselves women so they can be protected (...) and in reality it isn't even to be protected but to erase women" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), a false claim that increases the fear of the "trans other." Facio utilized *ressentiment* to produce an affect of fear and produce a culprit for potential injuries that may befall upon women (Brown, 1995, p. 68). Furthermore, the emphasis on international legal instruments as a mechanism of protection for women's rights spoke not only of an adherence to neoliberal Western ways of conceptualizing violence, but also highlighted the nature of rights as a motion to push away from, in this case, violence. The concerning implication of this conceptualization of rights is best explained by Brown, who argues that "insofar as rights operate to distance and demarcate, they are a means of socially organizing us by separating us" (Brown, 1995, p. 158). In this light, the protection of the purity of women's rights becomes a mechanism for boundary making as opposed to a tool of liberation.

Feminism

> *"Contemporary women of color and third-world women's critique of feminist universalism centers the claim that the intersection of race, class, sexuality, and gender exceeds the [homogeneous] categories of modernity"* (Lugones, 2010, p. 742).

The epistemological influence of the forum speakers in Spanish-speaking feminist movements cannot be understated; analyzing the arguments in a forum of this caliber thus is essential to understanding the gender debate currently dividing CDMX's feminisms. This section discusses citation politics and the centrality of women's potential and real injuries and their implications in shaping feminist boundaries.

The forum established a "canon" of feminist thinking without critiquing or addressing how dominant feminist paradigms might not resonate with the Mexican context. Lagarde's contribution was an un-critical genealogy of feminism without offering any Latin American contributions to feminism. Valcárcel for the most part agreed with Lagarde's genealogy of the "Enlightened political tradition" of feminism (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), the "ally and twin brother of democracy" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Additionally, by exclusively referring to biology, they neglected embodied experiences of sex and gender. Alternative sources of knowledge, such as lived experiences and emotions, "disrupt binary thinking and confront the tensions" in academia (Calderón *et al.*, 2012, p. 515). Chicana feminists have actively advocated for theorizing that resists the binaries and alleged objectivity of Western feminisms (Anzaldúa, 2007; Saavedra and Nymark, 2008; Calderón *et al.*, 2012; Pérez and Saavedra, 2020). Despite their emphasis on the sexed body, the speakers disregarded people's relationships with their own bodies and how they might trouble sex/gender binaries. Through only sharing cissexist arguments — without any reflexivity on their positionality as cis white women — as the basis of feminism, the speakers alienated queer and trans epistemologies.

The exclusion of queer and trans theory was not only implied by their citations but made explicit. When Lagarde said "Gayle Rubin is to gender as Newton is to physics" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), Valcárcel used the Zoom chat function to warn Lagarde of "giving credit to someone who does not deserve it" — a criticism shared by Facio, who explicitly said not to cite Rubin as "she supports transgenderism" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). This exercise in "canceling" is ironic, as Facio and de la Peña went on to complain about having been "canceled" on account of being trans-exclusive (CEIICH UNAM, 2022), with Facio going as far as saying being called a "TERF" (see Literature Review) should qualify as a hate crime (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). The concept of ciscentricity, defined by Austin Johnson as "a reconstruction of the social from a cisgender perspective" (Johnson, 2015, p. 26), is helpful in describing how the forum centered cis understandings of sex, gender, and "valid feminist theory." In her speech, Valcárcel dismissed

"queer doctrine" as a false discipline that has created a dangerous definition of gender that allowed the emergence of trans and non-binary identities (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Ciscentric claims to the distinction and incompatibility of feminist and queer theory are dangerous, as they can justify the kind of exclusions that I will discuss next.

The speakers justified their ciscentric definition of womanhood and essentialized cis women as *the* political subject of feminism through formulating their identities as feminists as rooted in injury. This "wounded attachment" (Brown, 1995, p. xii) not only forms the basis for the ontological essentialism of womanhood, but also fuels the justification for feminism's existence. Lagarde's opening statement utilized an emotional device that not only asserts the need for feminism but demarcates the movement's boundaries and surfaces.

> I would like to start by invoking three feminists who died during the pandemic, and (...) today preside [the forum] in their absence. If they were alive, I am sure they would be here. (...) Diana Russell (...) an extraordinary radical feminist (...). María Elena Chapa, a most beloved and respected *compañera* (...). Martha Sánchez Néstor, our beloved young indigenous *compañera* (...) And I would like to announce the fact that the case of Ernestina Ascencio is being reopened, the poor indigenous elder woman who was raped, violated, destroyed, and murdered by the tumultuary sexual attack of three soldiers (...). I mention her in the name of all the victims that have not had access to justice (CEIICH UNAM, 2022).

This statement functioned as an exercise in mourning. Additionally, considering the statements that followed, it can also be seen as a delineation of which lives deserve to be mourned and/or protected by feminism. Mourning is about sadness, but also about affection and the creation of boundaries that keep those we love safe from injury.

Framed by Lagarde's exercise in mourning, Valcárcel's claim to the monopoly of empathy, and Facio's refusal of trans women being women, there was a discourse of trans and non-binary lives as not being grievable or even recognized as human lives (Ahmed, 2004, p. 156). As Butler argued, the differential distribution of humanity and grievability is an operation of power (2009, p. 1). In Mexican society, there is a "social anesthesia around (trans)femicide, since society has become used to daily counting dead cis and trans women at the hands of necropatriarchal violence" (Valencia, 2019, pp. 187–188). Displays of public mourning and protests against the lack of justice often fall to loved ones and activists, although in the UNAM forum the speakers argued cis women's grief is more valid than others'. Through her position as an established scholar, Lagarde's mourning exercise served as a eulogy for grievable lives *and* a dismissal of not-lives. The forum

was also a mourning occasion for me, as I used to look up to Lagarde as an influential feminist thinker. To hear her supporting trans-exclusive rhetoric and anti-queer feminism in an event organized by a university I am personally connected to was painfully disappointing.

The speakers effectively used emotion and sensibilities to convey their message. For example, Medina — a feminist lawyer whose contributions were essential to the passing of the LGAMVLV (CEIICH UNAM, 2022) — expressed "profound sadness that in her pursuit of defending women's rights she [and others] are said to be hateful or have a phobia of someone" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). The injury of being called a hateful/phobic subject or having their freedom of expression being called hate speech, becomes a valid injury that feminism must address, while the injuries of those excluded are negated. Similarly, the speakers praised Vega for the "courage to [organize the forum] and the courage it would take to defend having done the right thing" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). These praises came after Vega broke down crying while delivering her closing remarks. Despite the emotionality of their discourses, all the speakers made calls to protect the objectivity of feminist theory, even when the forum was held at the UNAM's center for *interdisciplinary* studies.

Medina's main contribution to the forum was a discussion on the need for concrete definitions of sex and gender for legal purposes. According to Medina, in the legal realm, there is no room for "theoretical debates" or queer theory's "fluidity" because the structure of the discipline must be respected (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). This notion of disciplines needing to be pure goes against not only the CEIICH's values but also the foundation of Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary field (see Methodology). The speakers not only defined the feminist and *disidencias*'s agendas as separate and incompatible, but also explicitly disregarded intersectional feminisms. During the Q&A segment, the speakers were asked to expand on black, indigenous, and other feminisms. Valcárcel, Medina, and Lagarde strongly motioned to not "adjectivize" feminism. Facio dismissed critiques on feminism's lack of intersectionality as "feminism has *always* talked about [diverse women] (...) I have never heard of a feminist that said 'this is only for white women or European women'" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022; emphasis hers). Medina agreed, "feminism has always included all women (...) by adjectivizing feminism we create separations" (CEIICH UNAM, 2022). Coming from a forum of three Latin American women and one Spanish woman, all white and cis gender, these delimitations on what feminism should be and who it should include replicate colonial epistemic violence.

Dissent and Resistance

"One does not resist the coloniality of gender alone." (Lugones, 2010, p. 754).

Prior to and following the forum, a document shared on social media compiled 743 signatures against the forum's "transphobic voices" and its "concerning hate speech against trans people" ('Posicionamiento frente al Foro: "Aclaraciones necesarias sobre las categorías Sexo y Género"', 2022). The UNAM'S Gender Studies department published a statement in support of the rights of trans and non-binary people, but did not directly address the forum's trans-exclusive arguments (CIGU UNAM, 2022). Instead, it expressed concern at the fact that its "spaces of dialogue give room to reactions that do not contribute to constructive processes or respectful debate of dissenting ideas" (CIGU UNAM, 2022). I agree with the UNAM, and even Medina to an extent: debate and dialogue are necessary to resist dehumanization (Lugones, 2010, p. 752). However, space for dialogue was not provided. Instead, the UNAM and feminist movements tend to create separate spaces for trans in/exclusive voices to talk amongst themselves without disagreement or respectful debate. I am wary of that strategy as it establishes certain "feminist ideals" that others must embody in order to be allowed in, "such a reification of political ideals would position some feminists as 'hosts', who would decide which others would receive the hospitality of love and recognition" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 178). Hospitality in feminist spaces, I argue, should be extended even to those that do not share our political ideas so that meaningful conversations can take place. This means "we may need to stay uncomfortable within feminism, even when we feel it provides us with a home," a discomfort that means constantly questioning our own investments (Ahmed, 2004, p. 178). Comfort with discomfort aligns with the friendship values of trust and responsibility I outline in Chapter Three. I argue that, due to the lack of tools for working with disagreement, the critiques to the forum were read as hostile attacks against feminism and freedom of expression.

CDMX's Council on the Prevention and Eradication of Discrimination (COPRED)'s released a statement on March 24, 2022. Although the statement did not specifically reference the forum, it condemned transphobic discourses (COPRED CDMX, 2022). This statement was met with fierce opposition, including calls for the resignation of the COPRED's director (Berman, 2022). According to an op-ed in the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, feminism is in dire need "to debate in order to decide its relationship with trans women. A debate that, at last, was given a space by the UNAM" (Berman, 2022). While I agree that dialogue on how to make feminism trans-

inclusive is much-needed, I find it problematic to frame the forum as a "debate" as opposed to a conversation of women in agreement with each other. The op-ed continued: "a section of the trans community was offended by the mere announcement of the debate. (...) They insulted the speakers and called to burn their books (...). During the forum the comment sections were riddled with insults and threats" (Berman, 2022). Through this discourse, white ciscentric feminism can be framed as the victim of the injury of being silenced and persecuted.

CDMX's *disidencias* reacted to the forum in many ways, most of which showed an affective resistance to trans-exclusionary arguments. For example, on Twitter, critiques of the forum were tagged *#MeQuieroTrans* ("I love my trans self" or "I want to be trans"). This emphasis on self-love is important as it shows resistance to hatred not through hate but *through love*. Four days after the forum, around 150 people came together outside the UNAM to protest "the transphobic, racist, homophobic and misogynist discourses financed by the university" (Antipatriarkas de Oriente, 2022; García and Bazán, 2022). An article in a UNAM student newspaper quoted a non-binary student who said the speakers brought on "insults and hate not only against trans people but all *disidencias* (...). But maybe that was the push we needed to be brave and organize" (García and Bazán, 2022). This was echoed by one of the chants they used: "*¡No se hagan de lado: hay que incomodar!*" (Do not step aside, make them uncomfortable). Another student said "I am here for me, my *amigas*, my *amigues*, and also for those that cannot be here" (García and Bazán, 2022). "I need to be with my *amigas*, they are my emotional support," they continued. The protest included music, dancing, and joy. This act of playful resistance, reminiscent of 8M demonstrations and the glitter incident of 2019 (see Literature Review), is an example of *sticking* together and showing up for each other even when the protest was broken up by the campus police upon their approach to the University Rector's office. I argue the community-led responses and centering of the strength of friendship in the *disidencias*' resistance to the forum show the potential for alternative spaces in Mexican feminisms where true dialogue can occur.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the forum effectively used the virtual platform of Mexico's largest university to broadcast the opinions of established scholars on the boundaries of feminism to thousands of people around the world. At the center of their proposal is the reification of cis women as the *only* political subject of feminism. Although the language of sisterhood was absent in the speaker's

statements, the key features of sisterhood that were discussed in the Literature Review were present in their arguments: an egalitarian recognition of each other regardless of difference (Lagarde, 2006b, p. 126), and an identity based on a shared injury at the hands of patriarchy. The speakers proposed "true" feminism, without adjectives, ought to move past debates that de-center cis women and focus on the "real" suffering of "real" women. Through powerful emotional devices they emphasized the boundaries of their feminism and framed disagreement as an injury — since, as cis women, they are the valid political subjects of feminism, causing them emotional harm by disagreeing with them would be anti-feminist. The logic of trans-exclusive feminisms is not difficult to trace, but as shown in this chapter it does not go without dissent.

Through publicly creating discomfort with their presence and, most importantly, their joy, *disidencias* contest the argument that the only feelings and safety that matter are those of cis women. In the interviews with UNAM student protesters, the language of friendship, of showing up for each other, was everywhere, just as love was a central piece of dissenting online. When love, friendship, and joy are prioritized in feminist praxis there is a potential for collective healing. The UNAM forum and the organization of the protest against it are examples of how feminist theorizing and organizing take place online. In the following chapter, I engage deeper with virtual conversations around feminism and the connection between feminist knowledge and education in the processes of community building and mobilizing.

Chapter Two: Al Sororo Rugir del Amor

This chapter's title comes from the song *Canción sin Miedo* (Fearless Song). Vivir Quintana, a Mexican singer-songwriter, wrote *Canción sin Miedo* after a conversation about feminicide with Chilean singer Mon Laferte (Escobar Mejía, 2020).[20] The two singers performed the song together at CDMX's *Zócalo* on March 7, 2020, and ever since it has become an "anthem" in Latin American feminist marches (Telemundo, 2021). Three years later, the line "*A cada minuto de cada semana, nos roban amigas nos matan hermanas"*[21] is enough to bring tears to my eyes. The most powerful line, in my opinion, wraps up the song: "*Y retiemble en sus ciembros la tierra, al sororo rugir del amor*," which is a play on the Mexican National Anthem.[22] Growing up in Mexico, I sang the national anthem every Monday morning before school. In my very Catholic family, Mexican Independence Day is as important as Christmas; every year we get together for a big party that includes the signing of a book in which we pledge allegiance to our family and our nation. It was not until much later in life that I learned to critique family and nation (Olivera Córdoba, 2015). *Canción sin Miedo* takes words of violent border protection and reframes the feminist struggle as one of love. The song also serves as a reminder of how sisterhood shapes definitions of belonging which I explore in this chapter.

When *Canción Sin Miedo* was released, I lived in the U.S. From 2016 I had relied on social media, newspapers, and blogs to stay informed about Mexican feminist movements. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to relocate to Mexico, I was more grateful than ever for these virtual connections: they helped me breach distances during isolation. This was also the time in which I began to think about friendship and its healing role in my life, reflections that gave birth to this thesis. For that reason, it felt imperative to me to pay close attention to the role of virtual spaces in feminist community building and organizing.

[20] For more information on the song, read Verónica Escobar Mejía's (2020) discourse analysis of the lyrics.

[21] "Every minute of every week they steal our friends [from us], they kill our sisters," the song includes a list of names of women we have lost to SGBV. The mourning exercise of naming people, as mentioned in the Literature Review, is a strategy to call attention to the lives that matter.

[22] Vivir Quintana's song says "Let the Earth quake at its core through love's sisterly roar", while the Mexican National anthem says "Let the Earth quake at its core through the cannon's loud roar." The significance of this song's first live performance, taking place at the same spot where every year the Mexican president performs a re-enactment of the beginning of the Independence War and leads the country in a rendition of the national anthem, cannot be understated.

I argue that through the use of virtual platforms, feminist practices of sharing and co-creating knowledge are intimately tied to the politics of belonging. This argument is based on virtual ethnographic research (Fay, 2007; Davis and Craven, 2011; Dahl, 2016) I conducted of an online feminist school (FS) during the summer of 2022. The school was advertised as a "feminist space of learning and shared experiences" for women (and only women) (FS 1, 2022). The FS is organized by Colectivo Violeta (see Appendix I) and takes place every summer. Although in 2022 the school was completely virtual, the FS started in 2016 with 40 in-person students in CDMX. With 1,500 participants in 2022 and approximately 3,000 alumni in total (FS 1, 2022), the FS is the largest example of grassroot feminist education I have encountered. Since it was a virtual opportunity free of charge, participants were located in all Mexican states and over 15 countries. Colectivo Violeta uses the FS not only to participate in the sharing and dissemination of feminist information but also to actively recruit new members for the collective. It is through this strategy that the collective moved from being based in CDMX to being a country-wide collective. Following my participation in the 2022 FS, I contacted the organizers and interviewed five members of the collective, all of whom joined after being students of a previous FS and are not originally from CDMX. Through my analysis of the content taught at the school and our *pláticas*, I realized that CDMX is still seen as the center from which feminist knowledge comes from before it "travels" to the other states and provinces. In fact, I had trouble scheduling some interviews with my interlocutors because they were getting ready to travel to CDMX to take place in the Colectivo Violeta's seventh anniversary. In this chapter, I first contextualize Mexican virtual feminisms and my experience as a participant of the FS; I then engage with the theoretical content of the FS and reflect on the effects and affects of feminist education; finally, I analyze how the FS used sisterhood for the purposes of community-building and organizing to show how it contributes to the reification of feminism as a cis-women-only space.

Virtual Feminisms: Feeling (Dis)Connected

Virtual spaces are key in understanding contemporary Mexican feminist movements. From 2015, new and creative uses of social media have contributed to feminist organizing and theorizing in Mexico, which include moving to the internet to hold spaces of mutual support, encourage consciousness-raising, share resources, and organize events (Lamas, 2021, p. 25; Portillo and Beltrán, 2021, p. 10). Feminist collectives are described as the actors that best represent feminist

political organization across the world, and in Mexico specifically, the collectives' work of recruitment, raising awareness, and organizing mostly takes place online (García-González, 2021, pp. 46–47; Portillo and Beltrán, 2021, p. 11), especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned before, digital spaces have allowed me to stay connected with Mexican feminisms despite living abroad. In different platforms, I have been able to see how collectives share safety tips to protect themselves from police brutality ahead of every protest as well as displays of solidarity that speak to the dangerous nature of activism in Mexico (Olivares Alonso, 2021). Moreso, through hashtags I have mourned friends, I have denounced abusers on Twitter, and shared my feelings and experiences on Instagram and Facebook.

The phenomenon of virtual feminisms is not new nor specific to Mexico, in fact "cyberfeminism" has been around at least since the 1980s (Schulte, 2011, p. 731). A recent example of a global scale feminist movement in social media is the #MeToo movement.[23] In Latin America, the *#NiUnaMenos* (Not One Woman Less) catchphrase has been used transnationally to denounce feminicides.[24] Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people in the world had to turn online to connect. Quickly after the landmark 2020 8M march (see Literature Review), the government launched a social distancing campaign as a response to the coronavirus; the pandemic largely influenced the goals and strategies of CDMX's feminisms to the point that virtual spaces have become constitutive of the movement (Portillo and Beltrán, 2021, p. 29). While my research showed this to be true, in my *pláticas* people spoke about the virtual violence associated with feminist movements, which I will expand on in this chapter. Virtual spaces may be constitutive of the movements, but they have also allowed for distant violence and reduced efforts to physically come together to dialogue.

I argue that an emphasis on care — largely inspired by the gendered effects of the COVID-19 lockdown such as an increase in domestic violence and additional care work for women (Portillo

[23] For more information on the Me Too Movement, see Nau et al.'s (2022) "Vernacular practices in digital feminist activism on twitter: deconstructing affect and emotion in the #MeToo movement". In Mexico the #MeTooMX campaign was largely led by students, the hashtag #MeTooUNAM was trending widely for weeks. For an analysis on the affective component of the #MeTooMX campaign see Guiomar Rovira-Sancho's (2023) "Activism and affective labor for digital direct action: the Mexican #MeToo campaign."

[24] *Ni Una Menos* is an excerpt from a 1995 poem by the Mexican author Susana Chavez. Chavez wrote: "*Ni una mujer menos, ni una muerte más*" (Not one woman less, not one more death) to protest the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, and in 2011, she herself was lost to feminicide at the hands of three young men (Sáenz, 2022). The creation of the feminist tagline that became a hashtag is often traced back to an Argentinian feminist protest in 2015. For more information, see Adriana Piatti-Crocker's (2021) "Diffusion of #NiUnaMenos in Latin America: Social Protests Amid a Pandemic."

and Beltrán, 2021, p. 30) — has contributed to virtual feminisms centering the goal of shaping shared feminist identities through a sense of belonging to a larger movement. For example, the first thing that caught my attention when the Instagram post advertising the 2022 FS appeared on my feed was the word "sisterhood" on the poster. Using the language of sisterhood, Colectivo Violeta sought to establish a connection with their intended audience, presenting themselves as trustworthy educators. Sisterhood was present at almost every moment of the FS; notably, as a bullet point in the code of ethics (see Appendix II): "Sisterly communication: We promote respect and acknowledgment of all [women], of plurality and diversity of ideas, and freedom of expression" (FS Facebook, 2022). This sentence equates sisterhood with inclusivity, however that was not how I experienced the FS.

The 2022 FS consisted of 10 weekly sessions of approximately two hours each. It took place in a closed Facebook group in which only members of the Colectivo Violeta's admin team had, most of the time, permission to post. Ahead of most sessions, the speakers shared a link to a Google folder that included the recommended readings relevant to week's lectures (See Appendix II). In every session, the speakers and moderators were in a private Zoom call that was broadcasted live on Facebook for the participants. After the speaker's lecture, there was a Q&A of only five minutes in which members of the admin team would select questions and comments from the Facebook comments for the lecturer to answer. Additionally, each session required participants to complete an attendance form, write their full name in the Facebook live comments, and complete a feedback form within a couple hours of the end of the session to record their attendance; participants that attended 8 out of 10 live sessions and timely filled out all the attendance forms received a participation diploma.

I watched most of the sessions live, but as the weeks went on, I found it increasingly harder to attend as it became clear that the FS was incompatible with my feminist values. I not only believe that collective healing should be one of feminism's goals but also that it can only be achieved through inclusive and intersectional frameworks that meaningfully incorporate queer and trans theory and praxis (see Methodology); since the FS went against these values, I had to intentionally think about my self-care while participating in it. I also found that my lack of willingness to participate in the comments came from the school's setup, which left little room for interaction. Even when the participants were asked to share, for example, their definitions of feminism, since the speakers were on a separate Zoom call they did not have access to the answers, commenting on

the Facebook livestream felt pointless. My "fieldnotes" thus were more aligned with "observing participation" than they were with "participant observation" (Fay, 2007, p. 8). I took notes on the topics of the lectures, how participants did or did not react, and my own experience.

As a student in feminist classrooms, both virtual and in-person, I was taught to consider my education an "ethical and intellectual contract" between myself and my teachers (Rich, 1977, p. 608). During the FS, trust did not feel like a two-way street. Although Colectivo Violeta members and lecturers repeatedly thanked participants for trusting them with our education, they made no commitment to trusting us — either to watch the sessions in our own time, to meaningfully participate and debate, or to disagree with the content of the school. I do not claim to speak for all participants. All my interlocutors had meaningful experiences during their FS and afterwards chose to join Colectivo Violeta; additionally, I saw comments of women saying it was their second time participating in the school. However, I am wary of feminist education that requires passive participation from students. The difference between receiving and claiming an education is that of acting versus being acted upon, at times this is the difference between life and death (Rich, 1977, p. 608). When Mexican feminisms are intimately tied to organizing and lobbying against SGBV, the way feminist education shapes praxis to in/exclude certain people cannot go without critique.

Notes on (Not) Claiming (This) Education

> *Feminism is a historical movement, it has a background (...). It is not something recent or contemporary, we can see centuries of women fighting for their human, political, and civil rights (...). More recently we have seen branches of feminisms, but to me it is only* one feminism. — Karime (2023)

> *To me, [feminism] is just that: a movement that combines theory and praxis on behalf of women. (...) Women without adjectives, (...) we do not think we should have to say "cis" women.* — Joanna (2023)

Part of the reason I was excited to participate in the FS was that most of my feminist education has taken place outside of Mexico and in English. Reading decolonial theory and epistemologies from the Global South, such as the literature that shaped this thesis, has been mostly an extracurricular assignment throughout my degrees. While I have enjoyed and learned from the writings of white and Western feminists, as I expanded on my citation policy (see Literature Review), the process of applying their theories to my experiences and context has not been easy. It is a violent process, to make sense of things, it is "a dry birth, a breech birth, a screaming birth,

one that fights [me] every inch of the way" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 49). I did not anticipate this pain would come from a school based in the city in which I was born, ran by women organizing in the country I missed. But, similarly to the UNAM forum, I found the FS to be a very disappointing journey — in addition to the trans-exclusionary tone of the FS, I did not find myself or the Mexican context represented in the theory they highlighted.

During the first two sessions, the FS defined feminism through a whitewashed genealogy that resembled that of Marcela Lagarde's (see Chapter One). One of the lecturers even started their contribution by praising the UNAM forum, which I recorded in my fieldnotes as the first moment of discomfort in my experience at the FS. The second session featured a one-hour session on the history of Western feminist waves. I find the periodization of feminist waves problematic as it "favors the belief that internal disagreements in feminism are a product of the historical moment instead of seeing the ways in which they continue to be relevant and woven in contemporary activism, theory, and praxis" (Lamas, 2021, p. 7). Additionally, I found off-putting how the FS grounded itself in outdated foreign genealogies to approach contemporary Mexican issues, such as when they spoke of feminist successes taking place in Western Europe and the U.S. without acknowledging the independence and anti-imperialist movements in Mexico happening simultaneously.[25] The lack of contextualization of "landmark" events or acknowledgement of how they are embedded in imperialist and colonial structures was a disappointing repetition of how I have felt in classrooms abroad as the only Latinx student. Following the lecture on feminist waves, only one question from the participants was taken: "Can we study Latin American feminists?" To which the speaker responded by saying: "due to the historical period we focus on France, Britain and North America… but there are Latin American feminisms" (FS 2, 2022), but did not offer any names or resources. In the Google Drive folders with recommended readings (see Appendix II) there were Latin American and decolonial texts which were not referenced in the lectures. Instead, the school presented feminism as a singular movement with a singular genealogy and without space for disagreement or need to adapt to different contexts.

[25] For example, while the speaker highlighted the impact of Olympe de Gouges's 1791 "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen" in French and Western European feminisms (FS 2, 2022) it should have been noted that what is now considered Mexico was under Spanish rule until 1821 (Salvucci and Salvucci, 1993, p. 36). Likewise, the Seneca Falls Convention, which the speaker called "foundational to North American feminism" (FS 2, 2022) took place in 1848, the year that marked the end of the Mexican-American war (Salvucci and Salvucci, 1993, p. 49).

During the lecture on feminist epistemologies, the speaker, a professor in sociology, argued that the goal of feminist epistemology is to debunk androcentrism in processes of knowledge production (FS 2, 2022). While I agree on the importance of feminist critiques of epistemic violence that marginalizes certain practices of knowledge production, reducing feminism to debunking androcentrism "re-center[s] gender and sexual difference as foundational and primary (...) at the cost" of racialized women, trans and non-binary people, and other marginalized communities (Puar, 2012, p. 63). Moreover, the speaker focused on how women's exclusion from knowledge production has been justified through a construction of women as purely emotional beings incapable of rational thinking (FS 2, 2022), an argument that led me to reflect on how the FS and the UNAM forum proposed feminism as a *rational* way of thinking, separate from emotion. This rejection of feelings as part of feminism to assert its legitimacy is entirely a white feminist tradition (Calderón *et al.*, 2012); the importance of emotions is key to Chicana feminist epistemologies (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2018; Saavedra and Nymark, 2008; Pérez and Saavedra, 2020). Furthermore, in my fieldnotes, I mused about the hashtag *#SerMujerNoEsUnSentimiento* (Being a Woman is not a Feeling) which is commonly used when sharing trans-exclusive content online. The hashtag seeks to invalidate gender identity as subjective and inferior to biological reality by marking emotions as less valid. This connection became stronger for me during my interviews, as Esmeralda, Mayela, and Noemi all noted that biology and sex were valid arguments for separatism even if they hurt people's feelings (Esmeralda, 2023; Mayela, 2023; Noemi, 2023). Such disregard for others' feelings, I argue, should be inadmissible in a feminism shaped by an ethics of friendship.

The conversation about separatist feminisms in Mexico is very heated, although I agree with Marta Lamas in that the term is used irresponsibly and in conflation with "radical" and "anarchist" both by the media to discredit the movements and by feminists themselves (Lamas, 2021, pp. 60–62). Separatism as a political strategy is a legacy of lesbofeminism,[26] I think it is important to recognize the historical origins of political strategies to avoid co-optation and appropriation such as with the abolitionist movement as I will discuss in this chapter. In her online essay "Separatism, the Mayonnaise of Feminism," Dahlia de la Cerda criticizes Mexican feminist movements' appropriation of separatism, betraying lesbofeminist strategies by creating spaces that

[26] Estelle Freedman argues that lesbofeminism, through the affirmation of women's relationship with each other, provided "an alternative feminist culture [and] forced many non-lesbians to re-evaluate their relationships with men, male institutions, and male values" (Freedman, 1995). Although I do not align with separatist strategies, the work of lesbian feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, have shaped me and helped me heal as a lesbian woman myself.

exclude men, trans, and non-binary people but then returning home to their male partners — "that praxis is called separate spaces not separatism" (de la Cerda, 2020). Most importantly, de la Cerda criticizes separatism's lack of intersectionality, as it operates within an analysis that "considers patriarchy THE system of oppression, the kraken, and class and race are some of its tentacles, it is not like that. Patriarchy is one of the kraken's tentacles and it is not more important than racist or classist oppression" (de la Cerda, 2020). In alignment with radical feminist tradition,[27] the FS presented, for the most part, patriarchy as separate from other systems of oppression unless they could be used to position women as the most oppressed group. For example, during our *plática* Esmeralda stressed protecting women's rights from the *borrado de mujeres* does not erase other people's rights: "[LGBTQIA+ people] also face violence due to sexual orientation (...) but women *additionally* face other kinds of violence" (2023). This kind of biased intersectional analysis always centers white cis women, which is okay *as long as* you recognize separatism is "as white as mayonnaise" (de la Cerda, 2020). As I explore in Chapter Three, this is a common critique from the *disidencias* and trans-inclusive feminists I interviewed.

While separate spaces that are violence-free and trans-inclusive spaces allow women to have relatively horizontal conversations and consciousness raising exercises, organizing exclusively in separate spaces prevents us from hearing different perspectives and engaging in healthy dialogue and debate. It is a difficult line to navigate. For example, while I disagree with the position that only women can be feminists, as a survivor of violence I understand the reluctance of opening feminist spaces to men. Noemi spoke about originally wanting to bring her boyfriend to the FS because "[men] also need to educate themselves" (Noemi, 2023). However, the FS and Colectivo Violeta taught her that "men have already taken over the entire history of humanity, we rightfully deserve and need spaces [of our own]" (Noemi, 2023). Furthermore, she said that when women had brought their male partners to the FS in the past the men turned out to be aggressors and/or intimidated women into not sharing their opinions by their presence alone. Although this criticism makes sense for in-person spaces, as the FS used to be, I believe virtual tools make it possible to include men and masculine-presenting people in feminist conversations — especially in spaces like the FS where interaction amongst participants is minimal.

[27] See, for example, Catharine MacKinnon's (1991) *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* and Andrea Dworkin's (1974) *Woman Hating.*

Platicar with Noemi was enlightening to me. She explained that she had arrived at feminism thinking that men should be a part of the movement, but through her interactions with "separatist" feminism, she came to think of this as a "huge mistake" (Noemi, 2023). Noemi even said that she used to utilize inclusive language and chose not to voice trans-exclusive views at the risk of "making someone feel bad or excluded" until she heard other people speak against trans identities (2023). Noemi felt emboldened to self-identify as a TERF, a label she only stopped using when her *compañeras* "told her it was a slur" (2023). Noemi's case is an example of how feminist collectives have the resources and ability to shape people's beliefs on the definition of feminism and its boundaries.

Colectivo Violeta is part of a self-described "abolitionist feminism" which has the goal of "exterminating all structures, hierarchies and forms of organization that justify and support women's subordination to men" (FS 3, 2022). I find neo-abolitionism[28] unsettling as it uses the language of abolitionism without addressing its origins in the fight to abolish the enslavement of black and indigenous people. The FS was my first introduction to neo-abolitionism and prior to finding other reflections on it, I recorded uncomfortable feelings in my fieldnotes: "this session [on neo-abolitionism] left an awful aftertaste. Trans-exclusion aside, I never thought I would have such a visceral reaction against a feminist denouncing violence against women" (Fieldnotes, July 23, 2023). Through my reading, I pinpointed my uncomfortable feelings as reminiscent of the experience of reading Catharine MacKinnon's reduction of womanhood to sexual vulnerability (Brown, 1995, p. 91; Lamas, 2021, p. 48). According to de la Cerda, "the word 'slavery'[29] has been constantly banalized by hegemonic feminism," a banalization that she argues is made possible by the coloniality of epistemology through which political words from racialized movements can be "whitened and appropriated" (de la Cerda, 2020). Due to the lack of substantial engagement with decolonial or intersectional perspectives, the neo-abolitionist approach proposed by Colectivo Violeta at the FS can be seen as a co-optation of language from the Black community. This appropriation is similar to the way "sisterhood" was co-opted (Rosezelle in Lugones, 1995, p. 45).

[28] In Mexico, the link between abolitionism and sexual subordination originated in the 1930s when feminists lobbied for the government to stop intervening in sex work, which led to the end of a national registry of sex workers in 1940 (Lamas, 2021, p. 102). For this reason, I refer to current movements as neo-abolitionist for clarity. For a genealogy of abolitionist feminist movements in regard to sex work refer to Lamas (2016) "*Feminismo y Prostitución*" [Feminism and Prostitution].

[29] The woman-slave analogy has been a compelling argument for feminist activists since the early 1800s (Stevenson, 2019). Some feminist movements have argued all women are born slaves while others equate slavery to patriarchal social institutions, such as marriage (Offen, 2017).

This parallel taking place in a school that claims an ethical code based on sisterhood is no coincidence.

The FS lecture on neo-abolitionism followed a lecture on VAW that included jarring statistics of the prevalence of violence in Mexico (see Literature Review). The neo-abolitionist promise of eradicating "all types of violence and exploitation" is a compelling one, and through signification spirals (Lamas, 2021, p. 47), the FS is able to frame prostitution, surrogacy, pornography, and gender as examples of VAW. In my fieldnotes I noted the session on "abolitionism" was when I became fully demoralized about the possibility of enjoying my learning in the FS. Every week I tried to give each individual speaker the benefit of the doubt but knowing that the organizing collective aligned politically with neo-abolitionism and "separatism", and that the speakers *chose* to give their unpaid time and labor to the promotion of this kind of feminism, made me extremely wary of their lectures.

My feelings of uneasiness carried over to my *pláticas* with the members of Colectivo Violeta. From the moment I was put in contact with them, all five women were nothing but incredibly kind and helpful in the processes of setting up the interview, talking, and revising their transcripts. Their contributions to my thesis are invaluable and I am grateful for their time and kindness. However, I struggled with the implication that by being a cis woman I would agree with their trans-exclusive arguments, in fact they never asked me if I agreed but simply assumed I did. Despite their kindness and efforts to make me feel included, I never felt welcomed or like I *belonged* in the FS or these conversations, which led me to think further about belonging.

The Road to *Feministlán*

> *"Sisterhood is more objective [than friendship]. I may not know her, not have love for that woman, and I will be in solidarity with her and we will defend and support each other. Simply because we are women. We are exposed to the same kinds of attacks, discriminations, and oppressions."* — Mayela (2023)

Belonging, Nira Yuval-Davis writes, is an emotional attachment, an on-going project built on hope, a dynamic process; in contrast, the *politics of belonging* are the "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp. 4–5). This distinction is key in understanding belonging in relation to feminism. The

politics of belonging are the collective dirty work of boundary maintenance that concerns "physical or symbolic boundaries that separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'" (Miño-Puigcercós, Rivera-Vargas and Cobo Romaní, 2019, p. 133), or in this case, feminist and not-feminist/-enough. The boundaries of Mexican feminisms are not stable, but certain people have epistemic privilege when it comes to drawing lines of in/exclusion. I began this chapter with a brief discussion of a song that is often described as an anthem, yet the similarities between feminism and citizenship do not stop there. The work of hegemonic feminisms in CDMX, which are exemplified in my thesis by Colectivo Violeta and the speakers at UNAM's forum (see Chapter One), is intimately tied to processes of lobbying and lawmaking (see Literature Review). Even in their valid critique of the state, they operate under the premise that the goal is a feminist democratic nation rather than critiquing the concepts of "nation" and "democracy." In the FS, a non-negligible amount of time was spent advocating for "critical feminist citizenship" (FS 9, 2022). If the FS can be understood as an example of feminist *and* civic education, the link to the politics of belonging becomes more salient. In this section, I use Yuval-Davis's framework of belonging as constructed by three major facets: social locations, people's identifications and emotional attachments to collectives, and the ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and other's belonging/s (2011, p. 5). Two key terms for Mexican feminisms are also important to note in this section that will carry over to Chapter Three as I proceed to discuss people's relationships to belonging and belonging in feminist spaces: *Feministlán*[30] and *feministómetro.* I understand *Feministlán* to be an imagined nation of feminists and the *feministómetro* a tool for measuring an individual worthiness of belonging in it. Through my experience in the FS and my conversations with Colectivo Violeta's members, it seems that being a cis woman is the first filter to *Feministlán.*

The FS is an example of identity-based politics centered around biological female sex. One of my interview questions was "who can be a feminist?" to which all five Colectivo Violeta members responded with a variation of "only women." Karime expanded: "All women can be feminists. It is, in the end, a social movement, a political movement and academic education through which we are politically trained" (2023). This narrative is a false pretense for the inclusion of "all women." Additionally, it implies that the *potential* of becoming a feminist is present in all

[30] The suffix "-tlán" comes from Nahuatl, the language of the Mexicas or Aztecs. It is a preposition that may mean "together, between, under, or in." Due to its role in defining location it is a popular ending for towns and cities, for example *Tenochtitlán,* the Mexica name of what is now considered CDMX (UNAM, n.d c). Or perhaps a better connection is that of *Aztlán,* the mythical paradise the Mexicas called home before embarking on their quest for a new heart for their empire (Smith, 1984).

women, and with enough self-reflection and education, a feminist identity can be achieved. This is where places like the FS come in. Joanna, reflecting on her experiences with feminism, said that she used to struggle with imposter syndrome which pushed her to find places to learn, and "when [she] saw the FS [she] thought 'that is where I belong!'" (2023). Not only is it concerning that feminist culture has made it so that people feel an "imposter syndrome" at not being "feminist enough," but constructing a feminist identity through a shared cis womanhood produces feminist theory that is "irreconcilable with the diverse and multiple vectors of power constructing and diversifying identity" (Brown, 1995, p. 166). This is not a reconciliation for which the lecturers of the FS advocated. Instead, they proposed the political project of a "feministocracy", "with women at the lead and our rights at the center " (FS 9, 2022). While, to me, a feministocracy felt like a terrifying erasure of several identities; for the participants in the comments it seemed to be an appealing goal.

Another session during the 2022 FS that seemed to resonate with the participants in the comments was the Marxist-Lesbian "analysis of the [*borrado de mujeres*], a new global order characterized by the domination and eradication of women" (FS 8, 2022). The speaker criticized the "lack of critical thinking" from LGBTQIA+ movements, who "do not question anything and passively accept what is imposed onto them by transnational sexual corporations" (FS 8, 2022). This sentiment was echoed by Karime during our *plática,* in which she accused people with "trans agendas" of turning to violence.[31] When I asked why she thought the division between trans in/exclusive feminist movements in Mexico is currently so violent, Karime answered: "I believe there is some agency, in the end they are the ones doing it and they have turned to violent means… but I believe they mostly obey higher-up discourses" (2023). In the FS lecture, the speaker traced *disidencias*'s agendas to foreign neoliberal powers that — based on the writings of Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and other members of the "Inqueersition"[32] — are conspiring to

[31] Sharing political opinions in virtual spaces is never risk-free. Virtual feminist spaces often face harassment and threats from people that disagree with their beliefs (García-González, 2021). In addition to doxxing and harassment, in Latin America the threat of a *funa* (a public "canceling" of a person due to their opinions or political alignment) is also a concern. During our *pláticas,* Karime and Joanna shared they have been on the receiving end of virtual and in-person harassment due to the expression of trans-exclusive views as well as their involvement with Colectivo Violeta and neo-abolitionist feminism (Karime, 2023; Joanna, 2023). Joanna said in the past some of her events have been boycotted and had to be canceled due to online harassment (2023) while Karime mentioned she was at risk of losing her job due to the accusations against her (2023).

[32] Under Spanish Colonial rule, the colony of New Spain (Modern day Mexico and Central America, including a portion of U.S. territory as well) was overseen by a branch of the Spanish Inquisition responsible for the conversion of the colonies to Catholicism (Peña, 2000, p. 8). Since the Mexican Inquisition largely functioned as a book banning institution (Peña, 2000), the speaker's allusion of queer and trans theorists as being part of an 'Inqueersition' while

achieve a totalitarian robotic dictatorship that, thanks to technology, has no need for women (FS 8, 2022). Participants in the comments praised the lecture as "eye-opening" and "reassuring for explaining the uneasy feelings towards [LGBTQIA+] movements as a distraction of women's hard work" (FS Facebook, 2022). During the Q&A participants condemned the UNAM for taking part of this agenda, and the lecturer took the opportunity to invite participants to organize a national protest against the UNAM conferring an *honoris causa* doctorate to Butler in 2021 (FS 8, 2022). According to the speaker, this act was reflective of academia's role in distracting society from the fight against imperialism, an argument that I found to be at odds with the FS's lack of critiquing of white feminism's own imperialist roots. By selectively choosing when to apply feminist critical thinking and centering cis womanhood as an anchor for social location**,** the FS made no room for difference or dissenting agendas within feminisms. Additionally, moderators consistently choose complimentary questions for the Q&As as opposed to selecting the few comments that implied disagreement. There is no war in *Feministlán.*

The resistance to disagreement, I argue, is tied to the need for emotional attachments in political processes of belonging. Disagreement is uncomfortable, but "'flattening' out differences" is dangerous (Ahmed, 2004, p. 31), especially when centering identities rooted in injury. Noemi defined sisterhood as "solidarity between women because we face the same discrimination, oppression, and negative experiences just by being women, and by being women I mean having female biology" (2023). By creating feminist spaces for cis women only, hegemonic feminisms in Mexico promote the idea that what makes one a woman is being oppressed. This is dangerous for two reasons: it makes feminist movements invested in their own subjection (Brown, 1995, p. 70); and anyone who disagrees is not only not a feminist but can be accused of denying that VAW even exists. To bond as female victims, feminists cannot engage in intersectional analysis lest they "assume responsibility for confronting the complexity of their own experience" (hooks, 1986, p. 128). By centering cis womanhood and its oppression, hegemonic feminisms can abdicate responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of other systems of oppression. Anyone that confronts them on this becomes an aggressive enemy of the "true" movement. This can be seen in the way the term TERF has been resignified as a "slur" as opposed to a descriptor, or the way speakers at the UNAM forum (see Chapter One) and Karen in our interview found it

attempting to cancel and ban their writings using anti-gender arguments that came from the Catholic Church is incongruous.

hurtful to be called *"transodiante"* (2023). The word *transodiante* is more than a synonym for transphobic (see Chapter Three), as it directly translates to trans-*hating*. In Spanish, the word for hate comes from the Latin *odium* which implies not only hatred but *disgust,* a feeling that implies a necessary separation or the establishment of a boundary between the hater and the disgusting object (Ahmed, 2004, p. 87). It is not pleasant to be called hateful, especially when advocating for empathy as a feminist value or when claiming not to be excluding people from your activism. Making spaces free of difference resolves this problem by not having to confront disagreement.

In all my interviews with members of Colectivo Violeta, the difference between sisterhood and friendship was summarized in two key points: friendship, unlike sisterhood, is based on affection, and friendship is a relationship with people that may be different from us. I see in our *pláticas* the potential to bring friendship values into feminist theory and praxis. The connections they saw between friendship and feminism were about the meaningful friendships they have made through feminist organizing (Joanna, 2023; Karime, 2023) and feminism making it possible for women to be friends once they unlearn the patriarchal idea that women are always in competition (Noemi, Mayela). When asked to reflect on the phrase *"la policía no me cuida, me cuidan mis amigas*" (see Literature Review), all but Joanna agreed wholeheartedly with the sentiment that when the State fails to protect people, friends step up to take care of each other. Although Joanna agreed with the importance of friendship, she said she does not agree with the phrase because it generalizes and blames female police officers. Using the language of sisterhood, she argued "we cannot forget they are women and they [experience the same] violence we do. However, male police officers can get fucked" (Joanna, 2023). This is reminiscent of how sisterhood as a solidarity strategy necessitates an erasure of women's complicity in oppressive assemblages (Narain, 2004, p. 241). Noemi, on the other hand, shared her story of formally denouncing sexual harassment and being supported by her friends after being dismissed by police officers and ignored when she asked for advice in the Colectivo Violeta group chat. "Unfortunately it seems that, for certain things, you need to be friends for people to support you" (Noemi, 2023). Nearing the end of our *plática*, Noemi said that our conversation had made her realize that "sisterhood is still on the to-do list for feminism" (2023), meaning that there is still work to be done in achieving solidarity. I propose we as feminists take the next step, moving beyond sisterhood to achieve pluralistic feminist friendship.

Conclusion

In Mexican feminisms, sisterhood is already upheld as an ethical and political value, the last of Yuval-Davis's (2011) analytical facets of the politics of belonging. In our interviews, Esmeralda and Karime talked about *affidamento* (see Literature Review) as either a first step or an alternative to sisterhood: "[I]n feminism I prefer to do *affidamento* agreements with women that may disagree with me or have different agendas. We may not agree, we may not love each other, we may not be sisters, but we are doing something towards the common good" (Karime, 2023). While I see the potential in *affidamento* as a first step to bridge differences between women, I still find it lacking in terms of emotion and exclusive in terms of gender. The potential of friendship is the affective dimension it brings to theory and praxis. As Yuval-Davis writes: "a feminist political project of belonging, therefore, should be based on transversal 'rooting', shifting', mutual respect and mutual trust. It should be caring" (2011, p. 14). Further, it should be about caring *enough* to go through the uncomfortable process of disagreeing with one another (see Chapter Three) so that we can find collective solutions that work for different people.

Through their use of virtual and sisterly tools, Colectivo Violeta claimed the role of feminist experts while fostering an environment where disagreement was not welcome. Despite the importance of virtual channels to promote and share information, my participation at this online school clearly allowed me to see how these tools can be used to uphold existing power structures. My experience with the 2022 FS was very difficult. I found it very taxing to listen to trans-exclusive feminist rhetoric and hear feminism be reduced to an illustrated movement imported from Western Europe and the U.S. that, without need to be adapted, perfectly fits in with the Mexican context. Through the *pláticas* with Colectivo Violeta members I understood how their claims to shared injury are validated by "separatist" neo-abolitionist feminisms. Said feminisms, as I have argued above, are invested in their own victimization and therefore no genuine investment in collective healing. However, my interlocutors found value in friendship and acknowledged existing connections between friendship and Mexican feminisms. In the next chapter I return to my *pláticas* to show how friendship can be a driving force for feminist theory that contributes to imagining shared futures where collective healing is possible.

Chapter Three: Blooming Friendships and *Pláticas* Across Differences

In a Gender Studies classroom, years ago, my professor invited us to think of feminist theory as an exercise in world-building. I often revert back to this strategy when reading theory to understand the author's main points and from where they are writing. What kind of problems do they identify in our world? What are the strategies they propose to fix it? What kind of world do they advocate for? This approach resonates with the way I arrived at theorizing, where I found a sanctuary to make sense of things, "I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently" (hooks, 1991, p. 2). I arrived at feminist and queer theory desperate to understand my pain so that I could make it go away; I arrived at friendship the same way. I have found both in theory and in friendship locations for healing, it stands to reason that a feminist theory of friendship would serve as a way of healing from different kinds of injuries. A lot of the pain that I have felt in my life has been from threats and experiences of gendered and sexual violence, as well as the exclusion I have faced for being different. In this thesis I propose feminist friendship as a healing and liberatory practice for different people who experience, define, and resist violence differently. I am very fortunate to have friends that have healed me and healed with me throughout the years. My personal experiences with the intentional and iterative nature of friendship, as well as the pain I have felt in careless feminist spaces, brought me to the hypothesis that friendship as a political alternative to sisterhood and solidarity can bring liberation and healing to feminist movements — particularly in the CDMX context with which I am most familiar. In this chapter I analyze my *pláticas* with people organizing against SGBV in CDMX to articulate the different injuries present in and around feminist movements, as well as outline the ways in which friendship can provide a way towards collective healing.

A tenet of friendship is not to speak *for* each other but *with* one another. Dialogue does not have use for a universal voice but for each of us to speak with a voice of our own (Lugones and Spelman, 1983, p. 573). As I expanded in my Methodology, I decided to have *pláticas* with people to learn about them individually and hear their definitions of feminism, sisterhood, and friendship; I asked them to open up about the ways in which they have been hurt, and the ways in which they hope to heal. In this chapter I hold space for these conversations, making room for opinions that I disagree with, instances in which we agreed but we expressed the thought differently, and times in which our voices spoke in amity and unison while remaining two separate voices (Lugones and

Spelman, 1983, p. 573). The voices that join mine in this chapter are those of seven people based in CDMX (see Appendix I). Some of them identify as feminists and some do not, some of them identify as activists and others do not. I am grateful to them for making this thesis possible.

In this chapter, I reflect on the experience of implementing friendship values in the form of *pláticas, chisme,* and member-checking in my interview process (see Methodology). This chapter will be divided in two sections. First, I identify in the conversations with my interlocutors the places where pain resides. It is important to note "it is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that location" (hooks, 1991, p. 11), but through collective theorizing there is liberation in naming our injuries and finding ways of healing from them. After, I identify ways in which friendship — in theory, method, and praxis — can help us achieve collective healing from the pain we named together. Audre Lorde wrote that "without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression" (2007, p. 112). I agree with this sentiment wholeheartedly. Collective healing, which I understand as "putting ourselves back together" (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 130) rather than pitting ourselves against each other, is not temporary but an ongoing process. One that might never be completed but will heal us gradually as we "extend our hand to others" so that we can *desparramar* (spread) our *conocimientos* (knowledge) (Anzaldúa, 2018, p. 122). Gloria Anzaldúa believed that when wounded we face two paths, an easy path of *desconocimiento* which leads "human consciousness into ignorance fear and hatred" and a more challenging path of *conocimiento* which, through the acknowledgement of our injuries, has the "potential to bring us into compassionate interactions" (Anzaldúa, 2018, p. 121). In this chapter, *acompañada* by the voices of my interlocutors, I choose the path of *conocimiento.*

Open Wounds: CDMX's Affective Temporality

"As women we have not only suffered violence from partners, ex-partners, at work… but also by the authorities. We have terrible examples of the police being aggressors, of the judicial system revictimizing, disappearing, killing, hurting, and lying." — Cecilia (2023)

"In trying to unite we divide. Because which women? Which feminisms? 'Do not follow her, she is a bad feminist' [they say], and then the feministómetro*… it makes feminism inaccessible to more women."* — Helena (2023)

Throughout the course of my very privileged life, I have noticed the increase of violence in Mexico and especially in CDMX. The violence from wars against drugs stopped being something

I heard about on the news and became a daily concern for my family's safety. Feminicide went from a tragic epidemic taking place at the U.S. border to an omnipresent threat. I have lost friends to SGBV and experienced the toll it takes to ask for justice as a survivor; like most people in Mexico I am no stranger to violence. With rising levels of SGBV (see Literature Review) it hardly feels necessary to name our injuries, the numbers ought to speak for themselves. But *it is* necessary. Naming our pain, theorizing from that location, "charges and challenges us to renew our commitment to an active, inclusive feminist struggle" (hooks, 1991, p. 11). In this section I first briefly touch on the structural violence that shapes the "affective temporality" of CDMX (see Literature Review) before showing how these structural violences permeate feminist movements and manifest in a lack of intersectionality. Finally, I return to the topic of the politics of belonging in feminism and how they frame and are framed by injury and sisterhood.

Sometimes, if I think too much about the assemblages of violence (Puar, 2012, p. 50) in my home country, I feel sick to my stomach. As Marta Lamas describes it: "sick of impunity surrounding all of the violence that has been surrounding women for a long time in a context of multiple precarities (...) and along with news of atrocious and non-stop feminicides," activists feel pain and outrage and demand political change (Lamas, 2021, p. 50). All of my interlocutors echoed this feeling when describing the experience of organizing in CDMX. Lamas refers to this context as affective temporality (Lamas, 2021, p. 8) which creates emotionally charged feminisms. In our *plática*, Olivia shared her feelings as an activist: "It never stops being *desesperante* the rampant violence in the country. One always feels like things will never get better, even if you try. I mean, no one cares, right? In the end no one cares about women" (2023). *Desesperante* is often translated to "exasperating" and although it is true, I want to highlight in Spanish the word comes from *desesperanza*, hopelessness or despair. Despite the *desesperante* experience of being an activist, Olivia continues to do her work: "I think that, at least within feminism, we have to stick together. If no one else will take care of us, we will take care of each other and keep going" (2023). Maintaining hope is in and of itself an exhausting task, especially when faced with impunity and the structural violence built into the Mexican government. The taxing nature of feminist work often leads to burnout and exhaustion.

A valuable insight in my *plática* with Eliza was her sharing the term her feminist organization, Cinia, uses when speaking of violence: *lethal violences*. Cinia's theorizing comes from speaking "not only [about] VAW but against all vulnerable populations (...) through a critical

lens of the types of violence that are lethal to one's dignity of life" (Eliza, 2023). It is a powerful term, as it accurately represents how even violence that is not usually seen as life-threatening has lethal repercussions for people's wellbeing. Furthermore, the term speaks of the tension between VAW and GBV (see Literature Review) and goes beyond: "we believe it is fundamental to talk about violences as something that brings together more definitions than the ones liberal feminism is reduced to, such as GBV" (Eliza, 2023). In contrast, lethal violences include verbal, psychological, economic, and environmental violence against women, *disidencias*, and all vulnerable people regardless of their gender identity — "often the lenses of GBV or VAW fall short and do not take into account the political/economic dimension of the situation" (Eliza, 2023). This exercise in naming violence and injury is important, as it shapes the boundaries of the movements that seek to eradicate them.

Because most feminist movements in CDMX narrow their focus to SGBV and VAW (see Chapter One), some people may feel excluded from their political vision. For example, Sol shared their frustration at the lack of intersectionality in mainstream feminisms:

> The world is literally ending and we are in a country that is increasingly becoming militarized and there is a climate crisis and… there are so many issues and none is more important than the other. But there are many systemic issues taking place at once and if we focus on gender and we narrow it down to cis gender white women… (...) I think that feminism is *estancado.* (Sol, 2022)

The word that Sol used to describe feminism can be translated to *stuck* but in Spanish it references a stagnant body of water — without motion, water can easily accumulate bacteria until it becomes toxic. Sol's disappointment with feminist movements reminds us that feminist struggles do not exist in a vacuum. For people in marginalized communities, oppressive assemblages can be deadly (Puar, 2012; Mikdashi and Puar, 2016); just as the feminist movements' reluctance to address or even acknowledge these intersections can be inherently hurtful. For instance, Sol and Fer spoke about experiences of *transodiante* violence in terms of exclusion from feminist spaces as well as police brutality during different marches, such as the Trans Day of Remembrance. As stated in Chapters One and Two, discrimination and violence against trans and non-binary people in Mexico (particularly coming from feminists) cannot fully be conveyed using the word "transphobic." Although it is true that, to a degree, trans-exclusive feminism experiences a "phobia" of the *borrado de mujeres* and what the inclusion of trans and non-binary people into feminism might look like, the direct translation of homo/transphobia is a "homogenizing and flattening discourse"

that erases "the ordinariness of [the] assemblages of racial and classed violence" (Mikdashi and Puar, 2016, p. 219). Currently, in Mexico only 5 percent of trans people are formally employed (Infobae, 2022). In our *plática,* Helena and I reflected on our privilege as cis women and the intersections between debates on trans-inclusivity and sex work. As Helena said: "talking about trans people means talking of issues of poverty and unmet needs and the regulation of sex work" (2023). The assemblage of class and gender, a misguided understanding of sex work, and a reduction of trans identities to sex work contributes to *transodiante* exclusion. "The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house," Lorde reminds us (2007, p. 112). The solution to patriarchal violence and exclusion is not to enforce feminism through violence and exclusion.

Belonging, however, is more than just being "allowed in." In addition to experiencing violence in the form of exclusion, Fer spoke to the experience of being tokenized as a non-binary person in self-proclaimed "inclusive" feminist spaces. "I did not feel like my voice was heard equally… it was heard, but always at the end" (Fer, 2022). Tokenization is a burden on marginalized people, as they are often put in the position in which they have to educate those more privileged on their existence, differences, and "roles in our joint survival" (Lorde, 2007, p. 113). Lorde described this burden as an echo of the ways in which women have been tasked with teaching men how not to be sexist; by keeping oppressed people preoccupied with the Master's education energy is diverted from liberation efforts (2007, p. 113) — I argue that we cannot replicate this within feminist movements. Sol spoke of the term "trans-inclusive" and how it brought them discomfort, both because feminism *should* be trans-inclusive but also because the term has been co-opted as a badge cis feminists wear to make themselves look better. "A space that calls itself 'trans-inclusive' means nothing to me. It does not guarantee that you will not use your tears to say we are exercising violence against you," Sol said, speaking to us cis women. They continued: "I know people [benefit from calling themselves inclusive], it is only performative" (Sol, 2022). As I stated in the reflexivity section of my methodology, I aim to go beyond inclusivity (Johnson, 2015) in my thesis, however this does not make me exempt from perpetrating the kind of violence Sol describes. Our *plática* allowed me to rethink what I mean by inclusivity, whether or not I continue to use the term, and how I benefit from it. As a cis woman who identifies as a feminist, advocating for trans-friendliness in feminism closes certain doors to me, but in other circles the mere claim to the "badge" might bring me praise. It is not other cis people who can judge whether or not my feminism is trans-inclusive/friendly or not, and the self-claim of being an ally to trans and non-

binary people should be understood not as a credential but as a first step in the unlearning and deconstruction process.

Feminism's credentialism, which sometimes in the Mexican context is said to be measured by a *feministómetro,* was a frequent theme in my *pláticas.* It goes to show that, even for cis women, "entry" into feminism is not easy. For example, here is an excerpt of my *plática* with Cecilia, who works at Organización Iris, which focuses on alternative masculinities to eradicate VAW through working primarily with men. We touched on the question of "who *can* be a feminist?" which led her to tell me that she is unsure of cis men can claim the label. In return, I shared that when I had learned about feminist theory I was always taught that anyone could, and in fact *everyone should,* be a feminist, only to be surprised when I returned to Mexico and read about men, even the friends and family of feminicide victims, being violently thrown out of feminist marches against SGBV.

> **Me:** When I started getting more informed about Mexican feminist movements I was surprised. "*Woah*," I thought. "When did they write the memo about who can and cannot be a feminist? They didn't ask for my input" You know? And, like you said, some people are so focused on this discussion and this debate that all other conversations fall behind and… really, who benefits from us fighting over who can and cannot be a feminist?
>
> **Cecilia:** Exactly. In the end we are doing patriarchy a favor. What are we doing, fighting about something that in the end will not help and is only tearing us apart? (...) Now that you spoke of the memo, we [as feminists] are always evaluated under the *feministómetro*. So we have to start asking why and where it came from. Like, where did I sign my [feminist] membership?
>
> **Me:** Right! And how often do I have to renew it and who has the authority to do so? For better or worse, it reflects the way in which the feminist movement has advanced but also how they are trying to stop it. (2023)

Credentialism can be extremely exhausting, and in many ways, as Helena said in the opening quote to this section, it makes feminism feel inaccessible. Even if entry was not the problem, the conversation excerpt between Cecilia and I shows the "maintenance labor" that it takes to stay safely within *Feministlán.* Our lighthearted critique of feminist credentialism is an example of how the emphasis on *pláticas* and *chisme* as methods allowed me to establish a dynamic of trust with my interlocutors. With Celia I also briefly discussed the example of Lamas, who after more than 40 years leading feminist movements, was publicly attacked in feminist marches for being an ally and voice of "neo-patriarchy, neo-slavery of women" (Lamas, 2021, p. 114) because of her support

of the rights of sex workers. Neo-abolitionist feminists in Mexico have adopted the term *Lamismo* to describe feminism that, following the theory written by Lamas, continues to use gender as a category, accusing her and her "followers" of supporting the *borrado de mujeres* (Lamas, 2021, p. 114). In my experience, even if one is able to fly under the radar as I was with my cis privilege in the FS and conversations with Colectivo Violeta members (see Chapter Two), the drawing of feminist boundaries can be painful. As a cis woman, other women seemed to inherently assume that I shared their trans-exclusive views, while trans and non-binary people understandably saw me as a potential threat. The policing of *Feministlán*, as well as who does and does not belong inside its borders, is harmful to everyone.

In/exclusion, after all, has two sides. Noemi in our *plática* talked about not feeling welcome in feminist spaces where "men can be considered women because they wear skirts and a pink ribbon," and so she has chosen to stay separate to stay true to her position against the *borrado de mujeres* (Noemi, 2023). Her decision to do this comes from having experienced aggressiveness when expressing trans-exclusive arguments, echoing some of the experiences other members of Colectivo Violeta voiced (see Chapter Two). Only engaging in feminism built on exclusion lends to people being targeted as hateful subjects, *transodiantes* for example, which contributes to their identification with injury. Identity-based movements structured by *ressentiment* become invested not only in their own subjection, but in a sustained creation of a "hostile external world" (Brown, 1995, p. 70). Noemi's definition of sisterhood (see Chapter Two) as solidarity between women *because* women face the same violence is an example of injury-shaped identity. What will happen to sisterhood if feminism succeeds in eradicating VAW? If one of the goals of feminism is to create a sisterly world, and sisterhood depends on women sharing an identity as victims, then feminism is indeed, as Sol said, *estancado.*

With this thesis my intention was to learn if and how feminist movements could use an ethics of friendship to bridge differences in political opinions; again and again, trans and non-binary in/exclusion in feminism came up as *the* hot topic in Mexican feminisms, and so I decided to focus on how to make feminism trans-friendly. My conversations with Sol and Fer revealed my own cis privilege regarding that goal as Sol mentioned "at this point I don't even know if the fight should be for trans people to enter feminism (...) it's exhausting" (2022). Although Sol believes that feminism *should* be inclusive of men, trans and non-binary people, that fight can no longer be a priority for trans and non-binary people. Not only are there other struggles that require their

energy but it is not safe. Sol, Fer, and many trans and non-binary people have had "terrible experiences" with feminism, to the point that Fer said they are "really scared" of anyone that will call themself a feminist (Fer, 2022; Sol, 2022). After our *pláticas,* I went back to check the messages I had sent to different transfeminist collectives and was no longer surprised by the fact that I received so few responses, in the current context of CDMX (see Literature Review) a cis woman reaching out to talk about feminism is a dangerous proposal. While it is important to learn how to extend our hands to each other so that we can work together, the first step should be for feminist movements to acknowledge the injuries we have allowed to shape our movements and political positions, as well as the violence and harm for which they are responsible. Once we have committed to no longer turn a blind eye to our mistakes, we can begin to pave the road to making feminism that is more inclusive and committed to the dismantling of systems of oppression. Much like collective healing, inclusivity is a process that will involve painful fragmentation and reconstruction, but the dissolution of boundaries depends on it.

Scars and Bridges: A Feminist Theory of Friendship

"I would like for movements to work to demand action in the face of death, yes. But also to celebrate that we are alive." — Sol (2023)

"When I saw the word for the first time I felt welcome, it is rare to hear 'amigue' *being used. (...) It shows that there is resistance but coming from love, I do not know how to explain it. It comes from friendship, and that is beautiful."* — Fer (2023)

Theorizing from a location of injury means to believe in the possibility of healing. I have experienced a lot of pain and disappointment in feminist movements, and through my *pláticas* with people I have come to realize the ways in which sisterhood and feminism have injured others. I believe in the possibility of friendship as a means for collective healing. As discussed in the Methodology, I arrived at feminism and friendship because I was hurting, *but that is not why I stay*. My bonds with my friends are not built upon shared suffering. Even when we have supported each other in our healing processes, this is not what makes us friends. In Chapter Two I shared how my interlocutors seemed to locate the main difference between sisterhood and friendship in affection — I think there, in love,[33] lies the answer. bell hooks suggested that "living by a love ethic we learn

[33] Like many other words in this thesis, 'love' eludes a literal translation. In Spanish there are different words — *cariño* and *ternura,* for example — that are often directly translated to 'love,' losing their specificity. For that reason,

to value loyalty and a commitment to sustained bonds" (2022, p. 88) such as friendship. However, one must not take "love" or "friendship" at face value. Sara Ahmed warns us of politics that mobilize "in the name of love" as they can co-opt the term to excuse violence born from hate (2004, p. 139). We must be critical of movements that utilize "love" as a way to mobilize people, but at the same time we must remember that "a politics of love is necessary in the sense that how one loves matters" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 139) — we *must* love the political visions we have, otherwise there is no point to them, there would be no investment in their realization. Ahmed suggests love "might come to matter as a way of describing the very affect of solidarity with others in the work that is done to create a different world" (2004, p. 141). Similarly, María Lugones speaks of practical love as a "commitment to make decisions or act in ways that take the well-being of the other person into account," (1995, p. 141). These sentiments resonate with the ways in which I personally understand friendship but also how my interlocutors defined it. In this section, I am aided by some of the dimensions of love — care, commitment, respect, knowledge, trust, and responsibility (hooks, 2022, p. 94) — to organize friendship values into a feminist theory of friendship.

A Commitment to Care

Friendship is not guaranteed nor automatic but an intentional iteration of *care* and *commitment* to one another and to ourselves. Doing feminism out of friendship involves an acknowledgement of the taxing nature of fighting oppression and recognizing the injuries from which we need to heal. Eliza confessed to her experience in learning how to rest being a difficult but fundamental one, as it saves her from reaching burnout. To learn how to rest is, according to Eliza, to have "*ternura* for ourselves, [to understand] that sometimes we can but sometimes we cannot take action and sometimes we will have to say no when people ask for help" (Eliza, 2023). Cecilia also spoke of the need for self-care as a feminist, a process through which she learned to take a step back when faced with people spewing discrimination or hatred. "I have to pick my battles," she said. "You want to react and you want to change the world, or at least change the person saying those things. But you need to think how far it would go and how it would affect you" (Cecilia, 2023). A feminist praxis of friendship is built on affect, and so we must acknowledge how affect *affects* us. Research can break your heart (Rager, 2005); on many occasions, I had my heart

I use the words for love my interlocutors used in our *pláticas* in the original Spanish and include a definition in the Spanish Glossary.

broken by this thesis. It was difficult to listen to stories of pain and fear that echoed mine. Even when I followed suggestions on how to take care of myself as a researcher — a good therapist, journaling, being open with my supervisor, colleagues, and friends (Rager, 2005, p. 23) — it was difficult to not only cope with the emotions this thesis brought to surface but to then make them part of my analysis. My commitment in caring for myself and my interlocutors, and above all the support from my friends, kept me afloat.

Doing feminism out of friendship is seeking space and time to come together to work for a better world; whether that is setting a time for a thesis interview, organizing an event, collaborating at a non-profit, or taking care of one another when the work gets too difficult, collective care is key in the path to collective healing. Sol said "friendship is seeking spaces to come together and *platicar* (...), the time you choose to give away is super valuable, the relationships you tend to, *that* is friendship" (2022). Neglecting to care for one another is giving in to the different structures of oppression that are designed to keep us separate in our hurt. Olivia reflected on the role of friends as our primary care networks: "If there is someone that knows when something is off it is your friends. That is why aggressors are smart in isolating women from their friends" (Olivia, 2023). Feminist friendship is a political commitment to resist the "divide and conquer" mentality and embrace that we are stronger together in all of our diverse individuality (Lorde, 2007, p. 2). It would be impossible to list the rules of friendship, there is no specifying "the duties and rights of friends. Rather, in friendship, one is guided by a concern for the friend in her particularity" (Lugones, 1995, p. 142). Mutual care is being open and honest about our own needs and making a mutual agreement to respect and care for each other. This balancing of everyone's individual and particular needs requires work, work that often results in a "beautiful chaos" (Cecilia, 2023). Cecilia used the example of going to the 8M march with friends and colleagues; being part of different friend groups and organizations it is difficult to coordinate with each other when and where to meet so that they can march together (2023). This balancing act requires meeting each other halfway, acknowledging that people come (literally, in this case) from different places. Lugones argues that friendships across positions of inequality, as we are to understand *all* friendships since no two people are the same, have to be *worked for* rather than simply found (1995, p. 143). In feminism we need to be aware of the very demanding epistemic task that is "dislodging of the centrality of one's position in the racist, ethnocentric, capitalist, patriarchal state in one's own self-concept" so that we can genuinely meet each other halfway (Lugones, 1995, p. 143). This

is difficult work, like all feminist work, that is only possible if we intentionally create friendly spaces to work together.

At the end of the day, friendship is a choice (Friedman, 1989, p. 284). I believe Cecilia said it best when she defined friendship as "deciding to bond with someone affectively and co-responsibly" (2023). Friendship is a bond that is elastic enough to allow for change while still demanding a mutual commitment. When reflecting about the differences between sisterhood and friendship, commitment was also an important point for Fer. "Sisterhood is literally saying 'I like you and I will support you because of your gender' and I think that if something is based on your gender… tomorrow my gender identity might change and then that means tomorrow you will stop loving me" (Fer, 2022). Although friendship is not unconditional, its conditionality does not tie people's worth to their gender identity. Fer reflected on his experience undergoing HRT, which has made them value friendship more. Unlike the fickleness of sisterhood relying on the stability of gender, "Friendship is about who you are, what you do" (Fer, 2022). Friendship is about who we commit to take care of.

The Bridge of Conocimiento

Bridging differences in political opinions through an ethics of friendship starts with *respect*, only in respectful and violence-free spaces can we co-create and share *knowledge*. Through the creation of these spaces, Anzaldúa argues that *conocimiento* is not only a path but it can build bridges across the abyss of self-righteousness (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). In my *pláticas* I asked people to reflect on what makes a place feel welcoming. Unsurprisingly, most of my interlocutors found it easier to talk about places they have experienced as violent and unwelcoming, it takes effort to create, or even imagine, welcoming feminist spaces. Helena and Noemi thought welcoming spaces "respect your choices and your time, people take the time to understand your position" (Helena, 2023), the spaces *must* have "enough time so that everyone is heard" (Noemi, 2023). Showing respect for everybody's time and opinions was critical in my approach to *pláticas* (see Methodology), the invitation to converse with me was "grounded in *respeto* for the contributor as a holder and creator of knowledge" (Fierros and Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 111). This included an acknowledgement of the power imbalance of my role as researcher and an intentional iteration of my gratitude. Cecilia's definition of a welcoming space resonated with my intentions, as she said "[a space where] people recognize what I am doing, it makes me feel… embraced (...). Recognition, embrace, mutual admiration [make me feel welcome]" (2023). A feminist movement

built on the ethics of friendship must create spaces for people's contributions to be valued, which includes fostering an environment where people feel empowered to speak "without fear" in the first place (Eliza, 2023). Helena's reflection echoed with this, and it spoke to the credentialism present in feminist movements:

> I really value the spaces where you can feel like the worst feminist and you are not judged. I think that understanding that [feminism] is not linear and you are in a process, that you can mess up while you are deconstructing yourself and that is okay as long as you own up to your mistakes. Those are the places I feel safe in. (Helena, 2023)

Acknowledging that unlearning sexism and reflecting on our past and present prejudices is a process, much like collective healing is also a process, means to respect each other's paths of *conocimiento.* In friendship, we keep each other company as we un/learn together.

I was taught not to pick at my scabs as a way of respecting my body. When my body begins to heal by covering a wound with a scab, it would be disrespectful to undo its hard work by re-exposing the wound. I was reminded of this as I read Anzaldúa's theorizing about scars as bridges "that can link people split apart" (2015, p. 21) — we can only build those bridges if we respectfully allow the wound to be closed, rather than exposing it again and again to claim victimhood. "To bridge the fissures among us, to connect with each other, to move beyond us/them binaries," we must dismantle the identity markers that promote divisions (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 77). Showing respect for our individual and collective healing processes means "we must sometimes put certain aspects of our identities backstage; otherwise we'll be so busy asserting and protecting those identities that we'll (...) miss the opportunity to become or gain allies" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 77). By showing respect for people's contributions and valuing their *conocimientos*, we can co-create knowledge and write feminist theory out of friendship by coming together and considering what it would mean to theorize in a respectful way (Lugones and Spelman, 1983, p. 579). In my *pláticas* with people, and also in the process of member-checking (Rager, 2005, p. 24), the sharing of resources, knowledge and information came across as important friendship values. My interlocutors often saw the connection between friendship and feminism in exchanges of information, for example giving each other a heads up about upcoming events or planning picnics to catch up, teach each other yoga, and learn together (Cecilia, 2023). The spread of information also helps ease some of the burden of feminist work, as Eliza offered: "we should aim to make sure as many people as possible have the tools and information," (2023). By being generous with our resources we can all embark on the journey to collective healing. Through the exercise of keeping

in touch with my interlocutors in sending them back the transcript of our *pláticas*, I found many of them were keen to send me their thoughts. The work of friendship does not end with this thesis, nurturing relationships through friendly mechanisms builds fire-proof bridges.

Count on Me, Hold Me Accountable

Creating places and building bridges based on respect is always laborious; however, only inviting people that we agree with is a harmful short-cut. In this thesis, I have reiterated dialogue and debate are necessary for inclusive, healing, and transformative feminist movements. Nevertheless, dialogue and debate are not values; in fact, dialogue and debate do not have value *unless* they are built upon respect for disagreement. It is okay to practice respect in places that we already consider friendly, but we must not stay *estancades* in our comfort zone.

In addition to reflecting on the ways in which patriarchy has taught women not to be with each other, Cecilia spoke of an idea that I also grew up with: as women it is less complicated to be friends with men. Cecilia "felt friendship with women was very demanding, and men did not care so it was easier to fit in (...). After I got involved in feminism, I realized I wasted a lot of time by avoiding conflict" (2023). Following this realization, Cecilia said to have started to put in the work to build genuine friendships with other women. In our *pláticas*, I was pleasantly surprised by how often my interlocutors turned to conflict and disagreement as important parts of friendship. After all, part of what makes friendship demanding is accountability. Fer mentioned "friendship is being able to tell someone 'Dude, you are fucking up. You are crossing the line and you have to take responsibility for it'" (Fer, 2022). This type of dynamic requires *trusting* the other person will keep you accountable and owning *responsibility* for amending your actions if necessary. Fer continued: "The trans-friendly spaces I have been in come from a genuine *cariño* and understanding for each other. And so you can fuck up and you can talk about it and you can keep going from there" (2022). These safe learning spaces, similar to the ones Helena called for, are necessary for transformative social movements. Avoiding conflict is not the answer. Sol added that "sometimes only through conflict can you get to agreement and different dynamics. Not challenging people because they are close to you only makes for fragile relationships. I would not be able to trust someone that sees me fuck up and does not say anything, and vice versa" (Sol, 2022). We must trust each other to disagree in feminist spaces.

Dialogue and debate built on mutual trust and respect are useful tools to work within oppositional tensions (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 135). It is a controversial practice, to offer to

do feminist work out of friendship with people that, in the past, have not been friendly towards us and/or our friends. Such interactions are uncomfortable at best, but if they are intentionally created with the space to voice uncomfortable feelings and move from them together, they have the possibility of creating real change. In the case of trans in/exclusion in CDMX's feminisms, first it is importance to acknowledge the dangers that such encounters could pose for trans and non-binary people entering oppositional spaces; it is the work of those of us with social privilege to do everything in our power to ensure their safety (Pérez and Saavedra, 2020, p. 134). While the creation of separate violence-free, horizontal spaces for trans and non-binary people to come together and talk about their shared experiences is important, not all spaces should be segregated. Similarly, cis people must create spaces for us to unlearn our cis-centric beliefs without burdening or tokenizing trans and non-binary people to act as our teachers. Above all, we all must make time to come together.

The vision I proposed in the last paragraph is idyllic but not impossible. A realistic dimension that needs to be addressed to make it effective is the fact that entry to such a space, a relationship of friendship, cannot be understood as unconditional. I agree with Lugones in that "we cannot propose unconditional love among women as a model at a time when there is so much abuse among women," (Lugones, 1995, p. 142); although I would substitute the word 'women' with 'feminists.' Unconditionality is not a good thing, instead "friendship means having the judgment to say (...) '*Te quiero*, but you are making a mistake'" (Sol, 2023). The conditional nature of friendship is one of the reasons Lugones believes friendship is the feminist ideal, a betrayal of the ethics of friendship would terminate the relationship (Lugones, 1995, p. 142). Often in our *pláticas*, my interlocutors said that although they saw a strong connection between friendship and feminism, we should not advocate to be friends with everyone. I agree. My proposal is not to forgive and forget, to make friends with people who are unfriendly, but to engage in conversations *out of friendship* so that we can heal together.

Have Fun, Stick Around

My friendships in and out of feminism are not built on shared pain or injury, they are built on love, companionship, and fun. As much as I believe in the importance of resistance and the role that friendship can play in forging a path to collective healing, the path cannot be a dreary one. It must have as many joyful moments as possible, just like friendship. The only thing we have in

common cannot be pain, otherwise even in the best case scenario of our healing, our friendships are doomed to fail. One of the reasons I framed my interviews as an opportunity for me and my interlocutors to *chismear* with each other was to bring a dimension of levity to an otherwise heavy conversation. Simply put, *chisme* is fun, it is a way of sharing your burdens with others. During a *chisme* session we can speak *en confianza* (with trust and comfort) with one another (Gonzalez, Orozco and Gonzalez, 2023, p. 9) and find joy and relief when confessing to something. For example, when Sol and I *chismeamos* about the UNAM forum hearing someone else having a strong emotional response to the forum (see Chapter One), was a very validating experience. In regards with the controversial *borrado de mujeres*, I found in my *pláticas* with other cis women a safe space to *chismear* about how incompatible we found it with our feminist values:

> **Me:** What do you think about the *borrado de mujeres?*
>
> **Helena:** *Ew!* [Laughter from both]. It is ridiculous. I mean I know what it means, it means [mockingly] "the second we stop talking about women with vulvas and we accept that people born with penises can join the movement they are erasing us, the women that have suffered violence from the moment we were born." (2023)

> **Me:** What do you think about the *borrado de mujeres?*
>
> **Olivia:** [She laughs] I love the *borrado de mujeres!* It is so controversial I also have had to learn, you know, [a while ago] I signed a letter in support of the abolitionist movement and turns out it was no abolitionist feminism, it was the TERFs! (...)
>
> **Me:** I had the same thing happen to me! [I laugh] With the abolitionists, they fooled me, then I was like "oh no, what do these people want to abolish?" (2023).

When transcribing my *pláticas*, I noticed that laughter was present in all of them. This aspect of conviviality in our time together was important to me. I not only wanted to create a safe space for them to be vulnerable about their experiences with violence and in/exclusion, but for us to imagine what having fun and working together could look like.

The final value that I believe is important for a feminism based on the ethics of friendship is a play on what Ahmed called "*withness"* (2004, p. 91). When Ahmed talks about people sticking by each other, of *being with* one another, she speaks of a with-ness. This concept resonates with the Spanish verb *convivir,* to live with others. However, to me both terms lack something.

Reflecting upon the ways in which my friends and I stick by each other — shared Google Calendars, memorizing coffee orders, video tours of new apartments, tracking flights, calling each other from the grocery store, videos of shopping hauls — I realized what was missing: a simple "-ing." Through this suffix not only do I emphasize the reiterative commitment that is constitutive of friendship, but *withnessing* includes both the *acompañamiento* of sticking by each other through the good and the bad as well as the *witnessing* of each other's mistakes we must learn from and the accomplishments we should celebrate. We are not meant to live in isolation. Friendship is a key part of collective life "it highlights lived experience, emotions, love, intimacy, and caring, all of which are central to creating life-enhancing communities" (Chowdhury and Philipose, 2016, p. 2). If the road to collective healing is nothing but a road, then we must walk with one another.

Conclusion

During our *plática,* Fer said that he believes "you can build more from *cariño* than from theory" (2022). I think feminist theory should be built from *cariño* through *ternura,* parting from a commitment to caring for each other and a tenderness to heal our injuries. In my conversations with people, even those I disagreed with, I recognized a shared sense of disappointment in how feminism has separated us. Thinking through our definitions of feminism, friendship, and inclusivity I believe that there are ways in which we can do the work of putting ourselves back together, even if it does require painful processes of deconstruction and disidentification. Through a careful and intentional reflection of what belonging and inclusion means we learn to distinguish "between a friendly feeling that drives toward institutionalized patterns of bonding and hostility and another, dissident form of friendliness" (Niyogi De, 2016, p. 145). In this chapter, I outlined the injuries that shape those institutionalized patterns as well as the tools we have to design new and creative ways of working and living with one another.

With constant news of trans-exclusive arguments from feminists and lawmakers it is easy to get demoralized about the potential of feminism in re-shaping the world. However, my conversations with other feminists were overflowing with radical hope to make the world safer. better, and friendlier. Our shared *pláticas* showed there is already an understanding of the demanding nature of friendship and its potential for creating meaningful relationships across differences.

Conclusion

While living away from Mexico, I often daydream of what my life would have been like if I had stayed. The skies would have been bluer, the food would have been better, the people would have been friendlier. When dealing with exclusion from different feminist movements and education, I used to imagine Mexican feminisms to be friendlier too. The disappointment and affective dissonance (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154) of finding out how unfriendly Mexican feminisms can be was painful, but also functioned as a catalyst for the feminisms that I think are possible. This thesis is an exercise in world building. I believe that through friendship, we can "transform our world by imagining it differently, dreaming it passionately via all our senses, and willing it into creation" (Anzaldúa, 2018, p. 122). The *pláticas* and reflections that make up this thesis further prove that in CDMX people are already contesting the boundaries of feminism in pursuit of friendlier movements that are not rooted in injury. I argue the next best step is to take the connection between friendship and feminism from incidental to purposeful.

The shared injuries that shape Mexican feminisms are based on valid concerns about the loss of women's rights in a particularly violent context as well as a fear of disagreement and fragmentation. However, while rooting feminism in injury ensures that we will *always* need feminism, it also means that we will *always* be hurting. It is a process of picking at the scabs, opening wounds up to invite infection so that we can sustain a need for bandages. Bandages, as comforting as they might feel and as much sympathy as they might inspire, do not heal. I believe sisterhood is such a bandage. In this thesis I have proposed that we find it in ourselves to sit with the itchiness and the discomfort of letting scabs turn into scars, that we patiently keep each other company as we limp, however slowly, our way to collective healing. Each of my analytical chapters shows that doing feminist research out of friendship reveals the role of affect in shaping feminist boundaries of in/exclusion and how an ethics of friendship would manifest into more inclusive intersectional movements.

In Chapter One, I analyzed the arguments presented at the UNAM forum to show the fears and anxieties that validate the creation of ciscentric feminisms. Amidst a crisis of SGBV, arguing that the legal instruments that protect women from violence are at risk is an effective technique which necessitates a rejection of intersectional feminisms. In prioritizing the safety of cis women and coming together *as women* to defend such arguments, there is an erasure of differences in social

locations, particularly when it comes to gender diversity. Compelling emotional devices, such as the *borrado de mujeres*, travel quickly and take strong roots in places that are overflowing with affects. However, I argue that the joyful and love-centered resistance of the *disidencias* that protested the forum show the potential to mobilize not around injury but a genuine desire to stand up for each other and heal together.

When participating in the 2022 FS, which I analyzed in Chapter Two, I heard echoes of the arguments presented by the speakers at the UNAM forum. Thanks to the internet, feminist knowledge is largely accessible and as such it is important to understand the power dynamics of feminist education. The UNAM's power as a social institution in the Mexican context, particularly in CDMX, amplified the reach of the forum and its arguments as well as the previous work written by the speakers. In the 2022 FS I observed how queer, Latin American, and embodied epistemologies are rejected on behalf of Western, positivist, white traditions to create canons of feminist theory that go on to inform praxis in CDMX. Through an attachment of injury to identity, Colectivo Violeta and the FS are able to build and mobilize community in online spaces by proposing sisterhood as an ethical and political value. My analysis shows the harm that this rhetoric causes, not only to those of us that disagree but how it weakens their own praxis.

My thesis is not a negation of injury or an attempt to invalidate the emotions that lead to exclusion in the name of self-defense. As I show throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter Three, there is a lot of pain that mediates our relationships with each other. I propose we focus on friendship, on building those relationships instead of building ourselves in reaction to our enemies, especially when said enemies are constructed to sustain claims to victimhood. Through my *pláticas* with people organizing in CDMX I was able to better understand the affective landscape of the city's feminisms, their fears and anxieties as well as their hopes for the future of the movements they believe in. Moreover, I saw how their definitions of friendship strongly mirrored the values they thought feminist movements lacked. In this last chapter, I showed how commitment to care, respectful acknowledgment of differences, accountability, and a joyful *withnessing* of each other as friendship values can inform feminist theory and praxis.

To write this thesis I had to engage in uncomfortable conversations with people that I disagreed with, read and listen to arguments that went against my feminist values, and include my own emotions into the research process. It was a difficult process, but in the end it helped to know that I did it *out of friendship.* The methodological contribution of my thesis shows that — through

centering care for yourself and for others, intentionally reflecting on your positionality, and remaining open to making mistakes, being called out on it, and changing your mind — feminist theorizing benefits from an *ethics of friendship*. In the thesis writing process I learned as much, if not more, from the friendly *pláticas* with my interlocutors than I did from academic literature; and when I was stumped on how to move forward and no feminist methodology had a step-by-step guide, I drew from my experiences with my own friends to act in alignment with my values. Friendship, both personally and academically, is *demanding* (Lugones, 1995, p. 136), but as long as all parties are committed to the relationship I find that the effort is worth it.

My relationship with CDMX is mediated by distance, privilege, and a great deal of affection. It is disheartening to hear news of rising statistics of SGBV, it is painful to add names to the list of feminicides, and it is infuriating to hear about the violence that is perpetrated in the name of feminism. It is empowering to see the pictures of thousands of people taking to the streets lined with jacaranda trees, it is inspiring to listen to the music and see the art that is built out of love and resistance, it is heartening to hear about the work activists do on their day-to-day to make the city a little friendlier. As a person that has been shaped by the city as much as my experiences with friendship, it is easy to see CDMX as a place from which a feminist theory of friendship can emerge. Reflecting on the theories and arguments that inform my own writing — particularly those coming from the U.S. and Western Europe, places that have shaped my feminist identity but have complicated and violent relationships with Mexico — was more difficult. Filling a gap in literature that is not often about my place of origin needed the kind of flexibility and accountability that only an ethics of friendship can provide.

My thesis presents a political alternative to feminist sisterhood and solidarity and speaks to debates in the literature about the political subjects of feminism, violence, and the politics of in/exclusion. My analysis of the role and potential of friendship in CDMX's feminisms shows feminist theory, methodology, and praxis in the Mexican context would benefit from a focus on collective healing through friendship. I see potential in this strategy particularly when it comes to making feminist movements more intersectional and inclusive of gender diversity. Although this friendly theory, method, and praxis were born out of the CDMX context, I believe that they can be carefully translated to feminist movements worldwide — the path of *conocimiento* is not meant to be walked alone. If you disagree but you still made it to this point, I have to say *gracias,* thank you. If you agree, then *acompáñame,* let us take this path together.

Appendix I – Mexican Voices Against SGBV

Pseudonyms of Interlocutors, Collectives, and Organizations

Colectivo Margarita - Is a small collective for and by trans and non-binary people with an emphasis on friendship. It was founded in 2019 by **Sol** (*elle*/they/them) and is currently run by themselves and **Fer** (*elle/él/*they/he). Colectivo Margarita seeks to create convivial spaces for dialogue and to hear other opinions. The violence-free spaces are especially designed for trans and non-binary people and sometimes open to other LGBTQIA+ people. I *platiqué* with Sol and Fer and chose daisies, the friendliest of flowers, for the pseudonym of the collective.

Colectivo Violeta - Is a neo-abolitionist radical feminist collective. Colectivo Violeta was established in CDMX in 2015 and has since become a national collective with over 50 members in all states. Since 2016 they have organized an annual edition of the Feminist School (FS). I *platiqué* with **Esmeralda** (*ella/*she/her), **Joanna** (*ella/*she/her), **Karime** (*ella/*she/her), **Mayela** (*ella/*she/her), and **Noemi** (*ella/*she/her), members of the collective and organizers of the 2022 FS. None of the women were born in CDMX and only Noemi currently lives there. I chose the violet as a pseudonym both because of its association with determination and the collective's use of "violet lenses" to refer to feminist perspective.

Organización Cinia - Is an organization aligned with community-based feminism, it began in 2016 as a collective and became a non-profit in 2019. They work with migrant populations going through or settling in Mexico in terms of lethal violences and SGBV. **Eliza** (*ella/*she/her) shared with me what her experiences in the organization and in feminism have been like. I chose zinnias for the pseudonym for their associations with friendship and reunions.

Organización Hortensia - Is a feminist non-profit organization that supports people going through legal processes against different forms of SGBV. **Helena** (*ella/*she/her) founded the organization in 2021 after running an Instagram account that shared legal advice for people going through legal processes. Organización Hortensia offers legal and psychological support and work with policymakers and other organizations to prevent SGBV. I chose hydrangeas, a flower that represents gratitude and peace, for their pseudonym.

Organización Iris - Is a non-profit organization that since 2011 works with men to prevent and address violence against women. **Cecilia** (*ella*/she/her) *platicó* with me about her experiences as a woman working in the organization as well as what the role of men in feminism is in her opinion. I chose the flower iris for the pseudonym for its association with wisdom, as I believe it is wise not to exclude men from these conversations.

Organización Jacaranda - Is a feminist non-profit organization that aims to support all women in violent situations through providing therapy, legal advice, and resources. Additionally, they are involved in creating violence-free spaces for women, including trans women, to have access to sports and recreational activities. I had a *plática* with **Olivia** (*ella*/she/her), who founded the organization in 2013. For the pseudonym I chose the purple flower of the jacaranda tree, which blossoms in spring around 8M and is reminiscent of women reclaiming public spaces.

Appendix II - Sisterly Syllabus

2022 Feminist School

In Chapter Two I mentioned ahead of most of the lectures the speakers shared a Google Drive folder with the recommended readings for the session. In this appendix, I give a breakdown of the sessions and the speakers in addition to sharing their readings lists and some takeaways from the session as recorded in my fieldnotes. To contextualize the impact of the FS, I will include the number of views, reactions, and comments to the videos on Facebook. Although it is worth noting again that during each session participants were instructed to write their name in the comments to record attendance, leaving little space for participation.

Due to the set-up of the school, the references used in the thesis when citing the speakers correspond to the number of the session, for example (FS 4, 2022) refers to Session 4. I begin the breakdown of the thesis with a translation of the ethics code of the FS, which was a pinned post on the Facebook Group where the school took place.

Ethics Code of the 2022 Feminist School

- **Violence-free space:** Misogynist, *machista,* classist, racist, etc. images, videos, comments, and/or expressions that imply hate will not be permitted. There is no tolerance for violence or discrimination.
- **Sisterly communication:** We promote respect and acknowledgment of all [women], of plurality and diversity of ideas, and freedom of expression. This space is not aligned with a political party but it is not apolitical, therefore comments promoting political parties or in reference to elections will not be accepted.
- **Safety and confidentiality:** With the objective of guaranteeing the privacy and protection of all the participants of the FS we will not share sensitive or personal data that might put at risk the individual and/or collective safety of the participants. The content of the sessions will only be accessible to the participants, speakers, and organizers.[34]
- **Restricted entry:** This space was built through a registration process; therefore, it is not allowed to invite others or share logins with people who did not register on time.

[34] As mentioned in the body of the thesis, I received consent from FS organizers to analyze the contents of the school as long as I used pseudonyms for the collective, speakers, and organizers. Additionally, I have not stored any personal data (such as names, profile pictures, etc) of the participants.

Session 1

559 Reactions, 411 comments, 2.2K views

Part 1 - "Basic Concepts: Feminism, Sex and Gender" taught by a lawyer and member of Colectivo Violeta. Sisterhood and *affidamento* were discussed at length under the definition of feminism.

Part 2 - "Basic Concepts: Feminism, Sex and Gender (cont'd)" taught by a philosopher and member of Colectivo Violeta. This lecture began with praise of the UNAM forum (see Chapter One) and an invitation to watch the recording online.

- *A Vueltas con el Sujeto del Feminismo* (1999) [Again with the Subject of Feminism] by Elena Casado Aparicio. [35]
- *Autonomía de las Mujeres e Igualdad en la Agenda de Desarrollo Sostenible* (2016) [Women's Autonomy and Equality in the Sustainable Development Agenda] by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- *Breve Diccionario de Feminismo* (2020) [Brief Feminist Diccionary] by Beatriz Raena Rosa Cobo.
- *CEDAW* (2019). Also in the recommended readings for Session 4.
- *Ciudadanía de las Mujeres y Cultura Política en México* (2014) [Women's Citizenship and Political Culture in Mexico] by Estela Serret.
- Declaration on the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen (1791) by Olympe de Gouges.
- *Descolonizando el Feminismo: Teoría y Prácticas desde los Márgenes* (2008) [Decolonizing Feminism: Theory and Praxis from the Margins] edited by Liliana Suárez Navaz y Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo.
- *El Diario Violeta de Carlota* (2013) [Carlota's Violet Diary] by Gemma Lienas.
- *El Mito de Lilith: Evolución Iconográfica y Conceptual* (2013) [The Myth of Lilith: Iconographic and Conceptual Evolution] by Arantzazú González López.
- *Feminism: A Brief Introduction to the Ideas, Debates, and Politics of the Movement* (2019) by Deborah Cameron.

[35] All the readings they provided were in Spanish. I provide the title in Spanish, and a translation, when the text was originally in Spanish.

- *Feminismo para No Feministas* (2011) [Feminism for Non-Feminists] by Rosaria Hernández Catalán.
- *Feminismo Para Principiantes* (2008) [Feminism for Beginners] by Nuria Varela. Also in the recommended readings for Sessions 2 and 4.
- *Feminismos: Tres Siglos de Lucha por la Igualdad* (n.d.) [Feminisms: Three Centuries of the Struggle for Equality] by the Instituto Aragonés de la Mujer.
- *Ginopia, silencio. Género, discurso, diccionario* (2019) [*Ginopia*, silence. Gender, discourse, dictionary] by Soledad Chávez Fajardo.
- *La Declaración de los Derechos de la Mujer y la Ciudadana de Olympe de Gouges 1971: ¿Una Declaración de Segunda Clase?* (2015) [Olympe de Gouges's 1971 Declaration on the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen: A Second-Class Declaration?] by Gloria Ramírez.
- *La Guerra Contra Las Mujeres* (2016) [The War on Women] by Rita Laura Segato.
- *La Guerra Contra Las Mujeres y las Nuevas Formas de Acumulación Capitalista* (2019) [The War on Women and New Capitalist Methods of Accumulation] by Silvia Federici.
- *La Memoria Colectiva y los Retos del Feminismo* (2001) [Collective Memory and Challenges to Feminism] by Amelia Valcárcel. Also in recommended readings for Session 4.
- *La Sujeción de la Mujer: Feminidad Ideal* (2009) [Women as Subjects: Ideal Femininity] by Pilar Errázuriz.
- *Las Edades de Lulú* (1989) [Lulu's Age] by Almudena Grandes.
- *Lentes de Género: Lecturas para Desarmar el Patriarcado* (2010) [Gender Lens: Readings to Dismantle Patriarchy] by Fundación Juan Vives Suriá.
- *Mexico ante la CEDAW* (2018) [Mexico and the CEDAW] by U.N. Women Mexico.
- *Multiculturalismo y Feminismo* (2003) [Multicultural Feminism] by Teresa Maldonado Barahona.
- *Pacto Entre Mujeres: Sororidad* (2006) [Sisterhood: A Pact Between Women] by Marcela Lagarde.
- *Políticas Públicas para la Igualdad de Género* (2014) [Public Policy for Gender Equality] by María Cristina Benavente R. and Alejandra Valdés B.

- *Principales Logros y Retos del Feminismo en México* (2017) [Main Achievements and Challenges of Feminism in Mexico] by Fabiola Benítez Quintero and Graciela Vélez Bautista.
- *Qué es y para qué es la Perspectiva de Género* (2008) [What is Gender Mainstreaming and what is it for] by the Instituto de la Mujer Oaxaqueña.
- *Sobre el Concepto de Patriarcado* (2013) [On the Topic of Patriarchy] Master's Thesis by Carmelo Fernández Domingo.
- *Tejiendo de otro mundo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala* (2014) [Weaving Other Worlds: Feminism, Epistemology and Decolonial Proposals in *Abya Yala*] edited by Yuderkys Espinoza Miñoso, Diana Gómez Correal, Karina Ochoa Muñoz.
- *The Book of the City Ladies* (1405) by Christine de Pizan.
- *The Sexual Contract* (1995) by Carole Pateman.
- *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill.
- *We Should All Be Feminists* (2012) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Other Resources

- 10 min video on the history of Feminism
- A document summarizing Feminist Waves

Session 2

405 reactions, 568 comments, 1.6K views

Part 1 - "Feminism and Critical Thinking" taught by a sociologist and elementary school teacher, she is member of Colectivo Violeta. In my fieldnotes I recorded frustration at the number of male theorists cited in the session despite the school not being open to male participants.

Part 2 - "Waves of Feminism" taught by a communications specialist with various post-graduate certificates in gender studies, she is a member of Colectivo Violeta. Through her lecture on the waves of feminism — focused on Western Europe and the United States — I noted the same parallels to Enlightenment and fraternity that I noted in Amelia Valcárcel's lecture at the UNAM forum.

- *Algunas Reflecciones sobre la Filosofía Feminista* (2007) [Reflections on Feminist Philosophy] by Gloria Comesaña Santalices.
- *Feminismo 4.0* (2019) [Feminism 4.0) by Nuria Varela.
- *Feminismo: Historia y Corrientes* (2008) [Feminism: History and Branches] by Susana Gamba.
- *Filosofía Contemporánea desde una Perspectiva no Androcéntrica* (1993) [Contemporary Philosphy: A Non-Androcentric Perspective] by Amelia Valcárcel.
- *La "Cuarta Ola del Feminismo," su Agenda* (2018) [The Agenda of the Fourth Feminist Wave] by Alicia Miyares.
- *La Perspectiva de Género en la Filosofia Feminista* (2003) [Gender Mainstreaming in Feminist Philosophy] by Sonia Reverter Bañon.
- *La Tercera Ola Feminista: Cuando la Diversidad, las Particularidades y las Diferencias son lo que cuenta* (2008) [Third Feminist Wave: When Diversity, Particularities and Differences Count] by Andrea Biswas.
- *Teoría Feminista, Ética y Política* (1998) [Feminist Theory, Ethics and Politics] by Lucia Díaz Ronner.

Session 3

359 reactions, 401 comments, 1.6K views

Part 1 - "Life free of Violence and Sexual Exploitation" taught by a psychologist. The lecture gave an overview of the VAW statistics in Mexico and then ended with a presentation on the National Network of Women's Shelters. For the most part, the questions and comments shared during the session were asking for help on individual cases of violence.

Part 2 - "Abolitionist Feminism" taught by a lawyer. Prior to introducing the speaker, the Colectivo Violeta organizer opened with a quote by Kate Millet about the definition of radical feminism. Her "abolitionist" proposal was to abolish prostitution, surrogacy, queer theory, and gender, which she defined as "a patriarchal concept we must abolish on behalf of biological reality." Additionally, trans and non-binary identities were listed as examples of VAW.

- *Claves Feministas para el Poderío y la Autonomía de las Mujeres* (2023) [Feminist Keys to the Power and Autonomy of Women] by Marcela Lagarde.

- *Cometierra* (2019) [Eartheater] by Dolores Reyes.
- *Guía para Actuar Ante la Violencia de Género en el Ámbito de la Pareja* (2019) [Guide to Act Against Gender-Based Intimate Violence] by the Instituto de la Mujer de Castilla – La Mancha.
- *Más Allá de las Etiquetas: Mujeres, Hombres y Trans* (2011) [Beyond Labels: Women, Men, and Trans] by Coral Herrera Gómez.
- *Neoliberalismo Sexual: El Mito de la Libre Elección* (2015) [Sexual Neoliberalism: The Myth of Free Choice] by Ana de Miguel. Also in the recommended readings for Session 4.
- *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood.
- *The Industrial Vagina* (2008) by Sheila Jeffreys.

Session 4

299 reactions, 599 comments, 1K views

Part 1 - "Woman as the Political Subject of Feminism" taught by a lawyer with a PhD in Gender Studies from the UNAM. The lecture consisted of a review of the waves of Western feminism as well as the difference between sex and gender. The speaker said feminism's goal must be to "abolish gender" and spent time discussing "the myth of free choice," which (through gender) makes it so that women can be framed as having *chosen* to participate in sex work or surrogacy when these are always examples of VAW.

Part 2 - "Wombs for Rent (Surrogacy)" taught by a lawyer. This session took place during the international day against human trafficking and framed surrogacy as a form of child trafficking and modern slavery. After the session the organizers closed the comments.

- *Beijing Platform For Action* (1995) by the United Nations.
- *De la Diferencia como Identidad* (2006) [Difference as Identity] by Luisa Posada Kubissa
- *Feminism and Anthropology* (1987) Henrietta L. Moore.
- *Hacia una Nueva Política Sexual* (2011) [Towards a New Sexual Politics] by Rosa Cobo.
- *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1976) by the United Nations.
- *Lesbian Heresy* (1993) by Sheila Jeffreys.
- *Male Domination* (1998) by Pierre Bourdieu.
- *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millett.

- *Teoría Feminista: De la Ilustración a la Globalización* (2005) [Feminist Theory: From Enlightenment to Globalization] by Ana de Miguel and Cecila Amorós
- *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir.
- *Vicky Hernández v. Honduras* (2021).

Session 5

288 reactions, 628 comments, 1K views

"Women's Human Rights and the Legal Framework for their Protection" taught by a lawyer involved with the drafting of the law on feminicide. The lecture was an overview of international and national legal instruments against VAW, while arguing that all those instruments prevent *sex-based* violence against *women*.

Session 6

268 reactions, 497 comments, 939 views

Part 1 - "Women's own time in the context of the care economy" taught by an anthropologist, FS alumna, and former member of Colectivo Violeta. Her lecture mostly revolved around the progress and setbacks of the establishment of the National Care System in Mexico (SNC, in Spanish). The establishment of the SNC has been a legal process organized and driven by different feminist collectives, including Colectivo Violeta, to formalize the care economy in Mexico.

Part 2 - "Feminist Economies" taught by an economist. The lecture was a feminist approach to economy highlighting the unpaid labor done by women that supports the capitalist system. She presented feminist alternatives, such as gender-sensitive budgets and community-based exchanges of goods and services.

- *¿De qué Crisis estamos Hablando? Cuestionamientos y Propuestas a la Política de Activos desde la Economía Feminista y la Economía Social* (2009) [What Crisis Are we Talking About? Questions and Proposals about Policy from Social and Feminist Economics] by Natalia Quiroga Díaz
- *Con Voz Propia: La Economía Feminista como Apuesta Teorética y Política* (2014) [Own Voice: Feminist Economics as a Theoretical and Political Proposal] edited by Cristina Carrasco.

- *De la Reflexión a la Acción, por un México que Cuida* (2020) [From Reflections to Action, towards a Caring Mexico] by Margarita Garfías and Jana Vasil'eva.
- *Economía Feminista y Decolonialidad, Aportes para la Otra Economía* (2022) [Feminist Economy and Decoloniality, Suggestions for Another Economy] by Naralia Quiroga Díaz.
- *Economías feminista, social y solidaria. Respuestas Heterodoxas a la Crisis de Reproducción en América Latina* (2008) [Solidary, Social and Feminist Economies: Heterodox Responses to the Crisis of Reproduction in Latin America] by Naralia Quiroga Díaz.
- *El Trabajo de Cuidados* (2011) [Care Labor] edited by Cristina Carrasco, Cristina Borderías y Teresa Torns.
- *La Aparición de la Economía Feminista* (1999) [The Emergence of Feminist Economy] by Lourdes Benería.
- *La Economía Feminista: Una Apuesta por otra Economía* (2006) [Feminist Economy: A Proposal for a New Economy] by Cristina Carrasco.
- *La economía feminista. Un recorrido a través del concepto de reproducción* (2017) [Feminist economics. A look at the concept of reproduction] by Lourdes Benería.
- *La Lógica del Cuidado como Base del "Buen Vivir"* (2018) [The Logic of Care as the Basis for "Good Living"] by Alba Carosio.
- *Los Cuidados Al Centro* (2020) [Care at the Center] by Ailynn Torres Santana.
- *Los Cuidados No Remunerados y Su Relación con el Trabajo Remunerado en México* (2013) [Unpaid Care Labor and its Connenction with Paid Labor in Mexico] by Edith Pacheco Gómez.
- *Micromachismos: El Poder Masculino en la Pareja "Moderna"* (2008) [Micromachismos: Male Power in the "Modern" Couple] by Luis Bonino.
- *Mirando con Lupa Feminista los Micromachismos en el Trabajo de Cuidados y Domestico* (2020) [Micromachismos in Care and Domestic Labor under a Feminist Lens] by Pilar Alberti Manzanares.
- *Pobreza Multidimensional y Pobreza de Tiempo en el Marco del Observatorio de Género y Pobreza* (2010) [Multidimensional Poverty and Time Poverty in the *Observatorio* of Gender and Poverty] by Anitzel Merino Dorantes.
- *Reproduction, Production and the sexual division of Labour* (1979) by Lourdes Benería.

- *Subversión Feminista de la Economía* (2019) [Feminist Subversion of Economy] by Amaia Pérez Orozco.

Session 7

254 reactions, 457 comments, 858 views

Part 1 - "The Secular State and Sexual Rights of Girls, Teenagers, and Women" by a lawyer that studied at the UNAM. I found it interesting that she emphasized the role of the Church in promoting movements against sexual and reproductive rights, mainly abortion, with no mention of anti-gender or anti-*disidencias* movements.

Part 2 - "Integral Sexual Education and Sexual and Reproductive Rights" taught by a sexologist, sex-educator, and member of Colectivo Violeta. At the beginning of the session, she invited participants to "reflect with each other" about their experiences with sex education, making reference to consciousness-raising exercises. But the interaction was not any higher than in any other session. No mention of *disidencias* or rights on gender identity or sexuality.

Session 8

260 reactions, 468 comments, 1.3K views

Part 1 - "Development of New Phallo-Patriarchal (Neo-Patriarchal) Ideologies: Gender-ism, Gay-ism, Queer-ism, Trans-ism, Cyborg-ism, Transhuman-ism, Postorganist-ism" taught by a Mexican lesbofeminist activist. Although the lecturer is, to my knowledge, a *mestiza* woman, she has adopted an indigenous name and began her lecture with an indigenous ceremony and prayer without contextualizing it to the audience. At the end of the session she requested her participation certificate did not include the word *disidencias* as it refers to queer theory.

Part 2 - "Sexual/Gender *disidencias*" was co-taught by two members of Colectivo Violeta, a lawyer and a sociologist currently enrolled in law school. It was a tense session that kept refering to the previous lecture. It dismissed gender identity.

Session 9

261 reactions, 488 comments, 920 views

- Part 1 - **"Political Participation and Women's Citizenship"** by a political scientist member of Colectivo Violeta. It was a very passionate lecture on women's political rights without a critique of the nation or democracy. She advocated for a feministocracy.
- Part 2 - **"Political Participation and Women's Citizenship (cont'd)"** by a lawyer and politician who works at the national electoral committee. It was an overview on the history of Mexican women's political participation and laws that protect women's rights.

Session 10

236 reactions, 5 comments, 1.6K views.

Closing Lecture and Colectivo Violeta's Political Agenda. This was the only livestream that had the comments "limited to organizers" only during the 2022 FS. In my fieldnotes I recorded it was an odd decision to limit participation even more during the last session, giving participants no opportunity to reflect on their experience. It was a review of Colectivo Violeta's future steps and how FS participants can get involved.

Glosario

Acompañar - (v.) To keep [someone] company, to be with [someone].

Amiga/Amigue/Amigo - (n.) Friend. In Spanish female nouns usually have an -a ending while male nouns have an -o ending. Recently, *disidencias* have adopted the ending -e as a gender-neutral alternative although it is not "formally" recognized by the Royal Spanish Academy, which still "rules" the Mexican dialect.

Amistad - (n.) Friendship, in Spanish the etymology comes from the Latin root *amare* (to love).

Amor - (n.) Love. There are different words that convey different dimensions or types of love (see *cariño*, *querer* and *ternura*), amor can be directly translated to love.

Borrado de Mujeres - erasure of women, a term used by anti-gender feminists to denounce the erasure of women from historiography and policy as well as mobilize against trans-inclusion.

Cariño - (n.) Love, although it is mostly associated with care. It is also often used as a term of endearment.

Chisme - (n.) Gossip, usually between women or femme-presenting people. Often used derogatively.

Compañera/compañere/compañero - (n.) Companion. Although it is used in non-political contexts, such as amongst classmates or coworkers, it is often used to refer to fellow colleagues in a political movement.

Confianza - (n.) Trust

Conocimiento - (n.) Knowledge.

Convivir - (v.) To live with one another, to spend time together.

Conquista - (n.) Conquest, a reference to the colonization of present-day Latin America by (specifically) Spain.

Curandera/Curandere/Curandero - (n.) Healer, in Mexico curandera is used in contexts outside of hospitals or formal healthcare. In indigenous and pagan religions, healers (traditionally female or non-binary) are figures of high social importance.

Desesperanza - (n.) Hopelessness, despair. The adjective *desesperante* is rooted in this word.

Desparramar - (v.) To spread, to overflow.

Disidencias - (n.) Dissidents, a term colloquially used by LGBTQIA+ activists in Mexico to refer to people that dissent and resist against heteropatriarchy.

Estancado - (adj.) Stuck, stagnant.

Feminicidio - (n.) An adaptation of "femicide" to the Mexican context, it refers to the murder of women for gender-based reasons.

Feministlán - (n.) An imaginary nation of [Mexican] feminists.

Feministómetro - (n.) A tool to "measure" someone's feminism.

Funar - (v.) To "cancel" someone and/or their work publicly, a Chilean neologism.

Glosario - (n.) Glossary

Gracias - Thank you.

Herida Abierta - Open wound.

Hermana/Hermane/Hermano - (n.) Sister, sibling, brother.

Mestizaje - The construction of an "authentic" Mexican identity. Under Spanish rule, *mestizos* were a caste of people born to a Spanish and an Indigenous parent.

Metodología - (n.) Methodology.

Movimiento Estudiantil - Student movement, in Mexico this specifically refers to the 1968 student mobilizations.

Plática - (n.) A friendly talk based on respect and exchange.

Primavera Violeta - Violet Spring, a reference to Mexican feminist mobilizations in March and April of 2016.

Querer - (v.) To love, to want. Although *querer* is often said to be "less intense" than *amar,* I find the difference is mostly in *querer*'s association with desire/want. Platonically, it symbolizes *wanting* the best for one's *loved* one. It makes for great *queer* puns.

Respeto - (n.) Respect

Sororidad - (n.) Sisterhood.

Ternura - (n.) Love, mostly associated with a soft and tender kind of love.

Transodiante - (n.) Trans-hating. *Odio,* hatred, comes from the Latin root *odium* which is associated with disgust.

Zócalo - (n.) a socle or a plaza. In CDMX the *Zócalo* is the main square of the city, built above the ceremonial center of the Mexica empire *Tenochtitlán.* Today it is flanked by the Metropolitan Cathedral and the National Palace.

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