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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Women's Movements Against VAW and Feminicide: How Community-Based Feminisms Build Worlds Otherwise from the Periphery of Mexico City

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**ABSTRACT**:

In this article, I draw on feminist and new social movement literature to analyse contemporary Mexico's Women's Collective Action (WCA) through a framework of prefiguration. I challenge traditional epistemological analysis of social movement theory by engaging with Icaza's (2019) body-mind-spirit framework and Ahmed's (2004) cultural politics of emotions in my analysis of the cultural outcomes of the women's movements. By analysing emotions as cultural practices rather than psychological states, we can understand the intricate and at times contradictory reciprocal emotions at the inside of the women's movements. Similarly, analysing direct action through the body-mind-spirit framework, allows for a complex reading of direct action that transverses the body/mind cartesian dichotomy, instead understanding the body as the primary territory of defence in the healing, re-imagining and (re)building process of new relationships of doing and being. By engaging with an analysis of the contemporary Mexican feminist movement, I argue the WCA in Mexico is part of a new wave of hope movements which engage in a process of prefiguration through the construction of alternative, anti-patriarchal worlds in the present. Rather than one united front with a series of political goals, the only strategy this movement embodies is its desire to build (an)other worlds.

**KEYWORDS:**

Community-based Activism, Emotion, Feminism, Social Movements, VAW

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## 1. Introduction:

Since 2016, Women's Collective Action[1] (WCA) in Mexico has been increasingly present in media outlets, positioning themselves within the political agenda under one critical topic: the exponential rise of VAW and feminicide across Mexican States. At the international level, the recent wave of women's movements across Latin America and the US have had significant impact in the development of Mexico's WCA, specifically, movements in Argentina, Chile, and the US (Revilla Blanco 2019; Muñoz-Saavedra 2019). In 2019, women's mobilisations in the US under the umbrella of the #metoo movement echoed loudly in the consciousness of Mexican young women. Women reported hundreds of thousands of stories of sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, kidnappings, trafficking, and gender discrimination in all social spheres, private (home, family) and public (school, work, the streets) (Álvarez Enríquez 2020). In this article, I draw on feminist and new social movement literature to analyse Mexico's contemporary WCA through a framework of prefiguration. I challenge traditional epistemological analysis of social movement theory by engaging with Icaza's (2019) body-mind-spirit framework and Ahmed's (2004) cultural politics of emotion in my analysis of the cultural outcomes of the women's movements. By analysing emotions as cultural practices rather than psychological states (Ahmed, 2004), we can understand the intricate and at times contradictory reciprocal emotions at the inside of the women's movements. Similarly, analysing direct action through the body-mind-spirit framework allows for a complex reading that transvers the body/mind cartesian dichotomy, instead understanding the body as the primary territory of defence in the healing, re-imagining and (re)building process. Following Mohanty (2003), I argue that indigenous and grassroots feminisms possess a radical emancipatory power that can eventually lead to radical change as it is 'precisely the potential epistemic privilege of these communities of women that opens up the space for demystifying capitalism and for envisioning transborder social and economic justice' (Mohanty 2003, 250). Grassroots feminist collectives put forward alternatives to the present, not as part of an institutional or governmental reform, but as part of a reimagining and rebuilding of social dynamics within communities that look to break down hegemonic violences (Espinosa Damián, 2015).

I argue that the WCA in Mexico is part of a new wave of hope movements (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012) which engage in a process of prefiguration through the construction of alternative, anti-patriarchal worlds in the present. To do so, I divide my article into four main sections. Firstly, I present current literature on prefiguration as understood by the body of academia which engages with an analysis of 'new social movements'. This is followed by a summary of my methodology and epistemological framework which allows for an understanding of the movement's action as prefigurative under three main variables: autonomy as a contradictory process; emancipatory emotions including anger and hope embodied by feelings of personal and collective empowerment; and finally, prefigurative direct collective action which embraces strategies of horizontality with a focus on solidarity and dignity. I demonstrate how personal, social, cultural and spiritual healing embodied through feelings of anger (Holmes 2004; Spelman 1989), empowerment (Poma and Gravante 2017), hope (Dinerstein 2015) are key in the constructions of (an)other worlds 'marked by a feminisation of resistance' (Motta and Seppälä 2016, 6) which alter community dynamics in relation to the family and the community through a deconstruction of capitalism's framing of social reproduction. Through direct community action, women fight the revolution from below affecting the collective consciousness through processes of

[1] Offering a synthesised account of the women's movements in Mexico is a near-impossible task as the diversity of the movements in their geographic, ideologic and political strategies are multiple with sometimes contradictory messages and often without clear, common and concrete demands (Álvarez Enríquez 2020). For this reason, I employ Maxine Molyneux's term 'Women's collective action' (WCA) (Molyneux 2001), which brings together diverse women's movements across the region.

emotion-sharing, horizontality and prefigurative experimentation. It is in this diversity of strategies the WCA in Mexico shines through the endless possibilities and openness of the present, as much as the future.

## 2.'New Social Movements' and Prefiguration: Theory in Action

Social movement literature often identifies the birth of 'new social movements' during the late 80s, early 90s in Latin-America. The irruption of the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil, the CONAIE in Ecuador, *los cocaleros* in Bolivia and many more dominated the political landscape in Latin America in the 90s (Stahler-Sholk *et al.* 2007). These 'new' Latin-American social movements were not class-based but community-based, what Escobar (2004) denominates 'placed-based' or territorial struggles. That is, communities' struggle to reclaim access to the 'commons' as well as a struggle against the environmental impact and endangerment of their livelihoods result of extractive capitalism. Their main objective was not the development of policy or some political goal but affecting cultural and social structures by challenging and (re)imagining pre-imposed capitalist values and beliefs (Earl, 2004). Some authors such as Escobar (2004); Motta (2011); and Icaza and Vázquez (2016) have argued that contemporary social movement theory fails to comprehend the nature and impact of these autonomous mobilisations as they do not capture their transformative political and epistemological potential. While social movement and critical theory scholars have historically framed collective action in relation to their impact on policymaking and law, as well as the seizure of state power and representation as the main ways to incite social change, there is a growing scholarship that centres around the movements transformative power outside the realm of the state and institutions. That is, outside of the hegemonic socioeconomic and political structure of Western nation-states. Scholars like Holloway (2002/2010) consider these new social movements evidence a need to reject state-centric mobilisation strategies, and instead engage with everyday resistance strategies outside the logic of the state and its institutions. It is through this struggle autonomous movements 'can create 'cracks' in the capitalist system which plant the seeds for movements toward a post-capitalist world' (Goodwin 2020, 226). The present hegemonic socioeconomic structures (patriarchy, capitalism, coloniality, 'western' development) must, therefore, be understood as one of many possibilities.

I argue that the contemporary WCA in Mexico must be analysed from the language of autonomy (Cerva Cerna 2020). To do so, I seize on the concept of prefiguration as my analytical framework (Yates, 2015). Prefigurative politics address questions about radical social change beyond the given socio-economic structure. Social movement's prefigurative actions are understood as 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (Boggs 1977, cited in Gordon 2018, 522). The concept of prefiguration makes it possible to envision a transformed society 'based on concrete actions rather than abstract principles' (Cornish *et al.*, 2016: 115). However, there are dangers in assuming these autonomous collective actions can occur outside of the context of the State or capital, as:

> the concrete practices of autonomy by social movements are embedded in socioeconomic and political contexts and as such involve a contested relationship in and against the state, the market and hegemonic discourses on development' (Dinerstein, 2010: 356).

While the WCA in Mexico embrace autonomy from political parties and the state, many of the demands in their struggle towards a dignified life continue to be negotiated with (albeit simultaneously against) the state. The struggle for autonomy is 'a contradictory process which takes place within the

social relations of capital and is full of setbacks and disappointments' (Goodwin 2020, 230). While the state demarcates that which 'exists' and 'does not exist' within the law, those practices and epistemologies that have been proven (un)translatable within the logics of the state and capital do not cease to exist (Dinerstein 2015). Prefigurative practices and ideologies go beyond the objective material reality marked by colonial heteropatriarchal capitalism, giving way to a world of 'surplus possibilities'.

In this article, I understand all those actions, emotions, knowledges, epistemologies and new ways of doing, living and relating embodied by the WCA in Mexico City as part of the new wave of Hope movements (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012). In this resistance, subaltern women 'are at the forefront of the creation of a multiplicity of female political subjectivities' (Motta and Seppälä 2016, 6). Redefining social struggles as epistemic struggles can aid the comprehension of social struggles not only from the analysis of economic or political systems of domination brought by neoliberal organisation but also as generators of new knowledges, broader and more complex than the academic realm can attempt to frame with traditional epistemic tools (Icaza and Vázquez 2016). The multiplicity of thoughts within the WCA creates an informed, rich dialogue that acknowledges the diversity of oppression experienced by the individuals that engage in this conversation (Motta 2016). This dialogue does not aim to create a unique theory of knowledge but embraces the existence of multiple epistemologies. We must pay special attention to the diversity within autonomous struggles and how this difference is negotiated, as well as the social and historical conditions in which this struggle takes place (Goodwin 2020). Thus, I engage with the body of literature that frames 'new social movements' as prefigurative, understanding prefiguration as concrete practices and ways of mobilising including direct and collective action wherein the 'means reflect the ends' (Yates 2015, 4) as well as a collective project that engages in the construction of alternative worlds (Epstein 1991; Maeckelbergh 2011).

## 3. Context, Case Study and Methodology

The main purpose of this article is to examine the ways in which contemporary women's movements across the world engage in processes of prefiguration as part of their reimagining and (re)building of alternative worlds in the present. To exemplify my argument, I engage with an analysis of the WCA advocating for an end to VAW in Mexico, which have been gaining traction and popularity in the last five years. In Mexico, VAW is endemic. Sixty-three percent of Mexican women above 15 years of age report experiencing some type of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, or economic) (INEGI 2013) and this violence has not yielded. On the contrary, in the past decade VAW in Mexico, in all its legal typologies (trafficking, domestic violence, sexual violence, rapes and harassment), has been on the rise (Gobierno de México 2020). Rates of feminicide have almost doubled in the last decade (ibid). In 2020, ten Mexican women were killed every day. The pervasive rise of feminicide rates and VAW have been and continue to be a united front for WCA in Mexico City and initiator of many of the marches in recent years (Marcha por Lesvy 6th May 2017; Marcha por Ingrid, 14th of February 2020; Marcha for Fátima, 17th of 2020) (Álvarez Enríquez 2020; Cerva Cerna 2020). On the 8$^{th}$ of March 2020 for International Women's Day, an estimated 80,000 women went out onto the streets to protest the violence they experience. Feminist collectives, independent feminists, working-class women, families of the victims, indigenous women, LGBT+ feminist groups, sex workers, etc. collectivised under the Ni una mas ('not one more') campaign.

My research methodology is informed by Motta's (2016) decolonial 'prefigurative epistemologies' approach to research design. Motta (2016) commends that those academics who wish to work alongside movements that engage in prefigurative praxis, need to adopt a methodology that is also prefigurative and post-representational/decolonial in nature. To engage in prefigurative epistemologies, the

researcher must in the first instance reject traditional research methods that view participants as research subjects and instead engage in active dialogue that facilitate community building (Motta 2016). To address this article's main hypothesis, I place subaltern women's experiences, feelings, and emotions as a critical source of knowledge which play a crucial role in the building towards new societies. 'Prefigurative epistemologies are embedded in the collective construction of multiple readings of the world' (Motta 2016, 35). To do this, in my research I have utilised primary qualitative data collection. I illustrate my argument by engaging with experiences, feelings, and emotions as well as actions embodied by feminist activists from the periphery of Mexico City. Activities and ideologies varied between and within the collectives. As already argued by Maeckelbergh, (2011, 1) 'there is no singular goal, adversary, or identity that is shared by all movement actors except at the most abstract level of desiring '(an)other world(s)''.The three collectives from the periphery I had the opportunity to work with, named Vulvisima, Insubordinadas and Femipraxicas focused most of their activities in the areas with highest levels of violence and economic and social deprivation, in the neighbourhoods of Iztapalapa, Ecatepec and Netzahualcoyotl. By engaging in an exploration of subaltern women's experiences and knowledge my research uncovered feelings of alienation, exclusion, and marginalisation that women from the periphery of Mexico City experience within the same women's movement that seeks to liberate them. However, far from generalising these collective and independent women's experiences as homogenic single truths, I put forward these findings as part of a glimpse into those situated and partial knowledge that emerge in women's narratives and which uncover the multifaceted complex nature of women's reality (Krauss, 1993) and as part of the ever critical and deconstructive nature of feminised resistance (Motta and Seppälä 2016).

From February to April 2020, I conducted initial exploratory fieldwork in Mexico City aimed at understanding dynamics and ideological differences within the women's movements, working alongside several feminist collectives. As an outsider to the movements, convenience sampling and snowballing were used as primary sampling methods. As it is characteristic of the fourth feminist wave, much of the movements' organisation occurred through social media and so I used several platforms as well as a handful of the activist group's official websites to establish a connection with a total of 19 feminist activist groups or *collectivas*. I attempted to fight one-sided, asymmetrical power relations of researcher/participants, underlying my research's aim as being ultimately cooperative, as opposed to extractivist. I attempted to do this by becoming involved in the activities put forward by the feminist collectives while conversing and getting to know their work. As a result, I attended and participated in several lectures, seminars, focus groups, peace circles and dialogues organised by the collectives, as well as numerous marches and protests including two International Women's Days (2018, 2019). Sometimes my participation involved short-term help such as poster designs, adhering posters to walls, or cutting stencils. Other times, my involvement was more in-depth work, helping the planning and collaboration of some collectives' events and workshops. The data I analyse in this article belongs to a set of 30 open-ended interviews with members of feminist collectives as well as independent feminists, which took place during marches, protests, and formal and informal meetings. Each interview lasting between 30minutes to 3 hours. These interviews were tape-recorded, encrypted, transcribed, and then translated to English. Considering the context of violence and state repression, the identities of the participants remain anonymous.

## 4. Fear, Anger and Disappointment: Bridging Feminisms

Analysing experience and emotions is crucial to understand the reality of how certain bodies are marginalised, targeted and violated. The role emotions play in social movements including their impact in group connectivity, interactions, and strategies have been documented extensively (Taylor 1996;

Reger 2004). In this article, I engage with Ahmed's (2004) cultural politics of emotion that considers emotions to be culturally constructed. Inspired by the theories of emotions developed in psychoanalysis, poststructuralist, Marxist, feminist and queer scholarships, Ahmed's work pays special attention to the role of emotions in the forming of individual and collective bodies as emotions 'define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects' (2004: 25). Ahmed (2004) names 'collective feelings' those feelings that create the distinction between the inside and the outside of a collective. This emphasis allows for an analysis of the role emotions play within the formation of social movements and collectives and the internal dynamics of the same, highlighting the role of the body: 'it is through an analysis of the impressions left by bodily others that we can track the emergence of 'feelings-in-common' (2004, 27). Uncovering the cultural politics of emotions experience by the individual and collective body can help us trace their connection to the social, historical and cultural contexts, uncovering power hierarchies. Only, when emotions are analysed as part of the cultural, can we fully understand the body as a territory of struggle. A resistance which opens endless possibilities to the construction of new radical female subjectivities, ways of doing and being in the personal, the family and the community (Motta 2011). Embedded theory is being constructed by the concrete experiences and histories of women in resistance, 'not through individual abstraction […] but rather product of a critical collective reflection, it is relational and immanent rather than fixed and transcendent' (Motta 2011, 181). In this section, I analyse certain emotions expressed by activists from the periphery and centre of Mexico City into two main groups: emancipatory or empowering emotions including anger and hope; and reciprocal emotion including solidarity and sisterhood, but also feelings of alienation and frustration.

## 4.1. Emancipatory feelings: Anger, Solidarity and Hope

An amalgam of emotions collides in the weaving of women networks, transforming feelings and beliefs into what is known as 'emotion cultures' (Taylor 1996). In my interviews, anger and fury as a result of collective outrage (Reger 2004) concerning the ever-growing crisis of VAW and feminicide in Mexico were the primary emotions expressed by a majority of the activists:

> Yes, we are angry and how could we not be. I mean, all the [public] destruction we do bothers them more than the women who are murdered. And how terrible is that! So yes, what we say is that we are going to stop breaking and graffitiing and burning and destroying when they stop killing us. As long as we are being killed, we are going to keep breaking. Meanwhile, let everything burn. We are tired and we will not allow it to continue (Black Bloc Activist).

This raw anger embodied by women has historically been considered a form of gendered emotional deviance (Reger 2004; Frye 1983). Holmes (2004) understands anger as moving, which implies an understanding of anger as performative. That is, anger as productive of, as well as produced by, social relations. While women are encouraged to feel emotional, anger is not one to embody unless it is on behalf of someone else (Fyre 1983), this is what Holmes denominates as the 'situ-relational' character of anger. Understanding this anger is vital in our understanding of gender inequality as women have been encouraged to suppress their anger (Spelman 1989). As feminine anger 'challenges the culturally valued passivity assumed as part of feminine demeanour' (Holmes 2004, 215), that is, it challenges patriarchal gender roles and power dynamics. However, moral outrage and anger are not inherently emancipatory (Holmes 2004; Reger 2004) but ambient, as 'it is part of a politics of struggle that takes

place in/between and through space/time and bodies… Like politics, anger is always in movement' (Holmes 2004, 211-212). For anger to lead to social change, it must move towards collective action. The Mexican feminist movement, which has been influenced by autonomous and indigenous movements including the Zapatista uprising, have seized the language of revolution from these movements into the feminist cause, including 'la Digna rabia' (Dignified rage). The potential for social change through this *collective* anger was not new to the activists:

> *What feminism has shown us is that revolutions are a matter of affection. That is, you will never rise up because of what you have never had, you rise up because of what they take from you. When the anger spreads, we will change history, but yesterday and today we are changing ourselves which is also important. When this history-changing process really happens, it's going to be too many furies together. We will knock all this down and all will burn in flames (Insendiosas).*

Reger (2004) suggests the process of individual emotions leading to collective action occurs in stages: firstly, finding space in which to respond to moral shocks; secondly, engaging in collective emotion work to create shared identities and feelings; finally, if reciprocal emotions are fostered and everyday life obstacles are overcome, these feelings can be translated into collection action. The first stage is already arising within and beyond the WCA. Activities such as protests, 'tendederos' (clothe line where feminists denounce their abusers), reading circles, peace circles and dialogues are held by numerous feminist collectives from both the centre and periphery of Mexico City. These relate to a process of collective consciousness which forms political subjects within the movement and translates individual emotions into a collective sense of injustice (Reger 2004). Both in the marches and during collective activities and reunions, testimonies of abuse, sexual violence and rape were shared in a cathartic way. Emotions are heightened and anger, tears, shouting, silence, pain, are shared (Jasper 1998). Emotions are a key part of the feminist collective identity (Taylor 1989). While each individual story is powerful, each story contributes to a collective story. Women commence engaging in dialogue and reflection around their reality, naming their social worlds as part of the resistance. Naming allows for these violences to become a concrete reality, enabling people to understand and fight against them. It breaks the silence and makes it a social problem (Álvarez Enríquez 2020). In the process, women weave networks of solidarity and compassion.

> You realise you are not alone. We have a phrase that accompanies us throughout our entire process. We shout at the demonstrations when someone is giving their testimony, everyone starts screaming 'you are not alone'… This part ... I don't cry much, but for me this part, in this part I cry a lot. I cry angrily, and I cry screaming which is the feeling that moves me. (Acoso en la U)

> It is an artistic space between women where we can feel free to express ourselves. Not only the pain, but also the disagreement and anger we feel because of all the feminicides. We have found our voice through protests. By raising our voice, we find our voice in the city. (Grl Pwr).

For WCA activists, claiming/reclaiming the public space as social subjects, that is, their valid spaces in the realms of politics, the economy and society – they must engage in dual process of negating/affirming the material reality given (Dinerstein 2015). The process of negating the heteropatriarchal, racist capitalist order contains new possibilities of doing and being. The spaces

created by the WCA are a place of resistance, of community building and healing, of questioning, deconstructing, learning, and connecting. Through resistance a new collective political subject is being built. A political subject whose body is marked by discrimination, inequality, and violence but a resisting body.

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

Through the strategy of 'poner el cuerpo', this body in resistance reaffirms itself in the public space and makes it its own, sometimes materially through direct action, other times symbolically through dance, singing and performances, disrupting normative notions of female embodiment. The body of the protester becomes part of a collective body that struggles together, becomes tired, thirsty, angry, ecstatic. As highlighted by Peterson:

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

This is a categorical example of how an analysis of social movements must be understood through an analysis beyond the dichotomy of mind/body, instead must be understood through feeling-thinking (Icaza 2019) through theories of mind-body-spirit (Trinidad Galvan 2015).

Beyond anger as emancipatory, the collectives explore prefigurative action in their engagement with feelings of hope for an(other) world. Collectives such as Insubordinadas, a small anarchofeminist group from the periphery founded in 2018 encapsulated this process as key in their 'feminist cinema session', an exhibition aimed at bringing together different narratives and experiences around violence from women across Latino America. The video sample, called *Narratives for Hope,* was born out of the idea that with VAW and feminicide ever present in the media and social outlets, they appear to be creating an environment of collective anger and depression. To challenge this hopeless narrative, they invited women across Latin America to share the ways in which they resist this violence, fostering spaces that allow thinking of alternatives to capitalism and patriarchy from a perspective of hope.

> Even though the media can show the reality of femicides, it just creates an environment of collective depression. There is a lack of imagination to think of alternatives to capitalism, to patriarchy, so in that moment we thought 'we have to start think from hope'. Imagining alternatives and claiming autonomy. It is not enough to talk about resistance because you also place yourself in a place of immobility. Thinking about alternatives allows us to imagine other paths. (Insubordinadas).

## 4.2. Embracing Difference: Frustration and Isolation

I argue here that the main problem present within the Mexican WCA is in its struggle to move beyond collective outrage and foster difference and dialogue within the movement. The importance of making connections and affirming connectedness is crucial in the navigation of prefigurative action as part of WCA resistance. However, it should not be assumed that collective identity is the starting point or the force behind the organising of the WCA struggle, on the contrary, it is built in a negotiation process that transforms the personal identities of those who are involved in the movement (Cerva-Cerna 2020). It is therefore critical to explore the internal dynamics within the WCA and the ways in which internal differences between these diversities of women's struggles are negotiated. The collective identity is built through resistance. At the centre of this identity is solidarity and hope for another reality, expressed individually as a promise and not just as a pragmatic interest (ibid). Connectedness is negotiated through networks of solidarity through horizontality and emotion-sharing methodologies (Reger 2004) in an environment of growing social, economic, and political violence. Connectedness becomes a painful journey that must recognise the cultural and social violence women experience, as it is full of contradictions and conflict that arise as part of a dialogue of difference. The project of creating new realities within, against and beyond hegemonic violent structures becomes a simultaneous collective project, full of contradictions and disappointment (Dinerstein 2015). Building a collective imaginary must include and embrace difference. According to Reger (2004) emotions in a movement may be shared or reciprocal in nature. While collective anger against feminicide is shared, reciprocal emotions between collectives, activists and movement participants are mixed. While these can give rise to feelings such as friendship, solidarity and loyalty; it can also arise discontent, feelings of injustice and alienation (Motta 2011). In my research, three main matters arose when examining the internal politics of the women's movements in the capital: the academisation and institutionalisation of the movement; a breakage between liberal and socialist feminists and radical feminists; and geopolitical differences between the historical feminisms of the centre and the periphery.

> The reality is there are no spaces in the periphery. That is, there are no spaces for the girls to approach, and I assure you, there are many interested girls. In the end, these experiences cross them. They live them in their daily life: fear, precariousness. What is missing is more companions who are also there as if to say: 'We build with you'. (Insubordinadas)
>
> I think we must remember that feminism is very centralised. Here the marches in the city are gigantic. We have a chance to do graffiti, to do damage. Go to a march in Ecatepec, which is one of the most dangerous municipalities to be a woman in the entire country and there are 30 or 40 women at most. Where they must walk carefully... not do anything that attracts too much attention. Forget about graffiti and destruction, because the situation is so bad, they cannot even march in peace. We must be aware of that. We also have our privileges here in the city. (Grl Pwr peace circle)
>
> For us it is easy because the space is already ours so to speak. But going to places like Neza, like Ecatepec, that space still isn't theirs. That is why it must be this question of taking over public space. Once we have it and dominate that space, we do what we want (Independent feminist).

Acknowledging the feelings of anger, disappointment, and alienation women from the periphery experience is not an attempt to divide the movement, rather it can work to pre-empt its downfall. Feminist discussions around anger are often focused more on institutions, government, and men than a discussion around accountability amongst and between women from the movement. In the second wave,

dominant feminisms suppressed other women's anger tagging it as destructive rather than moving, failing to acknowledge intersectional relations of power and domination amongst women (Lorde 1984). While feminists from the 70s, as well as feminists from the contemporary Mexican WCA claim to work horizontally in their discussion, they place consensus as a goal which continues to 'impose a will to agree despite ideally involving argument […] small difference of opinion can be shunted away until the frustration of members who feel unrepresented builds up and erupts in anger' (Holmes 2004, 220). This present anger and disappointment embodied by peripheral collectives must be acknowledged as valid emotions that can help strengthen the movement rather than as personally directed blame or resentfulness as this does not allow for a dialogue and a negotiation to occur. Harmony may not always be desirable and amiable in the pursuit for alternative social dynamics, especially in relation to marginalised groups. Embracing difference and disagreement as part of the construction of other worlds allows for an openness of possibilities. Empowerment as a feeling of resistance, should not be only analysed as a personal feeling alone but rather as one of collective empowerment (Poma and Gravante 2017), as expressed by an activist from Insendiosas: 'It is important to emphasise that empowerment is not individual, right? If the community is not empowered, if the movement is not empowered, there is no real empowerment'. Feminist collectives from the peripheries challenge the centralisation of the feminist struggle and in turn, hegemonic discourses around VAW and gender. As one of the founders of *vulvisima* argues, 'being a woman from the periphery already allows you to think and do feminism differently, due to your life story, your set of mind'. In their work with the community, they reject the intellectual and codified language of academic feminism as well as the radical strategies that have popularised across the WCA, such as gender separatism which do not translate and align with the community's needs and experiences. The lack of choice present in hegemonic feminist discourses makes women from the community believe they must choose between being a feminist or their family and community.

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

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

For this reason, community processes that are inclusive of and engage with knowledges that are already being built by members from the community are fundamental for change to take place and tackle the present situation of violence in Mexico from its roots. Open dialogue and active listening with the community are key for the growth and enrichment of feminist activism and literature and essential in the struggle for women's emancipation. It is vital to recognise and engage with the work of feminisms in the periphery, emphasising the potential for social change, strengthening those already

present subaltern feminisms while revisiting the way in which academic, elite, and institutional feminisms approach these practices.

## 5. Collective Action in the Periphery: Popular Pedagogies

In this article, I understand 'direct action' as an amalgam of embodied resistance including graffitiing, civil disobedience, squatting, seizure of government buildings, community projects to include but a few, which have a commonality: these actions are prefigurative in nature. As argued by Maeckelbergh (2011, 4) 'practicing prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present'. Direct action must be prefigurative as (an)other worlds are being built in the present through doing (Epstein 1991; Franks 2003). It is an active project of transformation of social relationship and construction of community through solidarity (Breines 1989, cited in Yates 2015, 3). Embodying a prefigurative resistance means challenging the idea of a unique goal, instead building together in community, embracing diversity, and networks of solidarity (Franks 2003). The rationale behind my distinction between the 'short-term' direct action embodied in the centre (i.e., graffitiing, breaking monuments) from the collective action from the periphery is under three premises:

1) for analytical ease due to the vastness of the women's movements in Mexico City;
2) an acknowledgement of the far too common feelings of alienation and frustration expressed by several feminist collectives from the periphery and an admittance of the privileges of context and situation by feminists from the centre;
3) finally, due to the common strategies of direct action through horizontality and popular pedagogical processes the collectives from the periphery embodied.

Careful not to fall into false dichotomies of periphery-centre as if there were two separate contexts in a vacuum, I acknowledge that while there is truth in the fact that the 'type' of direct action that *can* take place in the periphery is different to that of the centre, this is largely due to their condition and context of extreme violence and vulnerability. Similarly, the 'long-term', collective direct action exemplified by collectives from the periphery often invites women from the centre to join to find strength in numbers, while simultaneously many women from the periphery would often action (sometimes lead) protests, marches, squatting and government building seizures (Okupas) in the centre.

The grassroot feminist collectives I had the opportunity to work with embodied similar political strategies that can be categorised as prefigurative, 'long term' direct action with a focus on popular education methodologies (Freire 2000) including strategies that embrace horizontality, collectively and community-driven dialogue and action. By challenging dichotomies of public/activist (Franks 2003), they build alternative worlds with and alongside the community. Challenging paternalistic and detached strategies, they engage in dialogue with the community, actioning collectively. Raising collective consciousness is a joined process, informed by the realities of the people from those communities. As highlighted by Franks (2003) the identity of the subjects performing direct action is key as direct action must be primarily:

> 'for the benefit of those who carry it out… direct action should primarily involve the oppressed overcoming, albeit perhaps temporarily, their oppression. Direct action when successful, for the anarchists, is a form of liberation. Tactics of this form embody anti-

> hierarchical behaviour that prefigures the forms of social relationship that the actors wish to bring about' (Franks, 2003: 27).

Rather than imposing their academised knowledge, plagued with linguistic complexities that create distance, feminist collectives from the periphery present themselves as a channel for dialogue for the people that belong to the community, as part of that community. It is a space for them to share their knowledges and their reality with one another, weaving networks of solidarity and (re)imagining social relations. The embodiment of these emotions and experiences become politicised in the construction of new realities.

> Community work in the neighbourhood, does not take place in a month or two, it is a process of years. We have seen that, and we have discussed it with colleagues who organise in other struggles, like the water struggle. […] You need to generate dialogue, because if you only arrive and just put a 'workshop' poster in the entry, people will not enter. We have even had reactions like 'is it free?'. It causes a lot of conflict that things are free, because they are used to giving something in return. So that's also difficult. People are cautious. People are distrustful because of all the violence that takes place ... (Insubordinadas)

Horizontality as a methodology assumes power always centralised and so epistemologies built by the community must challenge this centralisation to allow for pluriversal epistemologies and ways of doing and being to be built (Maeckelbergh 2011). Horizontality requires for constant experimentation and openness; there cannot be one united front or singular predetermined goal sought by the movement (Yates 2015). Rather than working on the destruction of a particular system these collectives work on the idea that new realities can be shaped through a critical process of the present. Not by rejecting all social constructions but by deconstructing their origin, becoming critical of them, and discarding whatever is no longer useful or may be hurtful. Like the collectives from the centre, feminist collectives from the periphery invite people from the community to engage in discussions around romantic love, marriage, and the traditional family. However, this is not done as a way of moralising one perspective over the other or telling them they are doing something wrong, but rather by working on the deconstruction of harmful behaviours and practices that affect the community together with the community. In this process, they engage in a rethinking those knowledges and beliefs that people carry and may lead them to inflict violence and rescuing those that bring good things to the community. Inclusive discourses and language become a critical tool for communication. A constant that drives the collective's grassroots work is the idea of collective construction of knowledge informed by decolonial narratives around horizontality and in direct challenge to vertical, centralised state structures.

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

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

Their work in the community is not envisioned as a temporary 'workshop-led' action but aims to help break the cycles of violence that are reproduced within the community. This space allows the community to come together and get to know other realities, challenging their own. The matter of affection and experience as producers of knowledge is present in their community intervention methodologies, popular education and resilience. These methods allow people in the community to self-reflect on their experiences, think about how they have learnt things and why they have learnt them. It is autobiographical (Giugni 2004), by sharing their personal experiences it also ignites other minds in the community about their learning processes and experiences, how they differ, why they may need to change. Informed by decolonial feminist and chicana feminist writers such as Anzaldúa (1987) they also highlight the importance of naming as part of the resistance. Women find their voice in the collective, renaming the world as they know it and experience it. It is through this process, testimonies and naming become essential strategies in creating as these individual experiences open a dialogue that 'involves understanding, intervening, and transforming the(ir) world' (Motta 2011, 194). In these spaces, naming becomes a methodology of resistance, giving them agency over their situation and the ability to change it and countering narratives of subaltern women who are viewed as passive victims in need of external guidance. (Motta 2016).

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

> We are showing them, perhaps not so much teaching because teaching is something else, but showing people that their body, their spaces can be respected. That it is a right. That women can demand respect. And through this demand you can educate those around those women… A woman may approach another person who may have already started with those thoughts of 'I learned my husband can also help me.' So, you are already creating a sense of community where an idea is spreading: the idea that you too can demand respect. Then, little by little it is sown into the collective social awareness. (Femipraxicas)

They transform community dynamics and social relations so that a dignified life is at the centre of their dialogue. In these spaces a feminisation of resistance' (Motta and Seppälä 2016, 6) takes place, the collectives seek to alter community dynamics, challenging traditional conceptions of the family and the community through a deconstruction of capitalism's framing of social reproduction. Pre-established social dynamics rooted in neoliberal capitalism including individualisation, precarity, the division of labour, and competition are challenged by social dynamic, economic and epistemological alternatives put forward by the movements based on networks of solidarity within the community. This is exemplified through the feminist collective Vulvísima conceived as a socio-productive project to impact women's economic autonomy. The social component comprises community interventions based on the prevention of violence and community participation methodologies. The productive component is through the collaboration of women involved in the production of goods at the design, illustration, or manufacturing level. This component, however, does not involve purely producing something but rather producing something in a way that is oriented at seeking a personal and collective reflection around women's autonomy and the transformation of social relationships to a more egalitarian society. As the quote from a feminist from Insubordinadas suggests, this struggle towards a more dignified life, although autonomous, does not occur outside the realms of the state or capitalism, exemplifying the

constant contradiction of autonomous movement's epistemologies and action with, against and beyond the state (Dinerstein 2015).

> I wanted to design a project where I could work with women. While it is good to have workshops that develop their psychosocial and psycho-emotional skills, if we are not giving them opportunities for economic development, how are we effectively impacting the structural situation they are living? (Vulvísima).
>
> I believe the Chinampa [2]is a beautiful space with strong claims of autonomy, communality and it is also a space of resistance. [...] But we also know the Chinampa is not a space absent from capitalism. It is our context, but within what is possible... we think how not to profit from the project. We think about building a space where communality, coexistence and the construction of affections are above the exchange of capital (Insubordinadas).

Thus, feminist community action is marked by horizontality, popular pedagogies, and experimentation as part of their every-day resistance against hegemonic violent structures. It is when this resistance is played in the key of hope (Dinerstein 2015) we can grasp the prefigurative potential of the WCA:

> Embroidering is a possible way to think about different things... for example, we do not know each other, we come here because embroidering allows us to build listening spaces […] it is a space where you are able to think, to imagine, to find ourselves... Embroidery is an epistemology that enriches other things. It speaks about collectivity, about affections, about building knowledge beyond words. It is embodied knowledge. It is also a hopeful activity, another way of constructing narratives of justice and freedom... That is very powerful. That is what happens here. (Independent Feminist, Embroidery circle).

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have demonstrated how personal, social, cultural and spiritual healing embodied through feelings of anger (Holmes 2004, Spelman 1989) empowerment (Poma and Gravante 2017), and hope (Dinerstein 2015) are key in the constructions of (an)other worlds 'marked by a feminisation of resistance' (Motta and Seppälä 2016, 6) which alter community dynamics in relation to the family and the community through a deconstruction of capitalism's framing of social reproduction and production, as well as dominant violent epistemologies around social and cultural stratification. By challenging these structures through direct community action both short and long term, women fight the revolution from below affecting the collective consciousness by means of emotion-sharing, horizontality and prefigurative experimentation. It is in this diversity of strategies the WCA in Mexico shines through the endless possibilities and openness of the present, as much as the future. They create spaces for open dialogues legitimising, and highlighting the importance of experience, emotions, and *knowledges otherwis*e (Escobar 2004). Together with, and alongside the community, activists from the periphery of the capital challenge and resist exploitative capitalist processes, dominant academic

[2] Chinampa Hacklab is located on the outskirts of Mexico City, in the Tláhuac delegation. Chinampa is a Mesoamerican method of agriculture and territorial expansion used by the Mexica. Insubordinadas' activism is inspired by this technique 'to expand the territories of struggle […] and cultivate in our space sisterhood, network-building, accompaniment in processes of self-learning and collective learning'.

discourses, heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial hierarchies through the reimagining of more just societies. Rather than one united front with a series of political goals, the strategy this movement embodies is its desire to build (an)other worlds.

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