

¡VIVAS NOS QUEREMOS!

**Feminist Activism in Hip-Hop Culture in México: Batallones Femeninos and Mare
Advertencia Lirika**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Linda Daniela Villegas Mercado

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ABSTRACT

In a Mexican political context permeated by drug-related violence, organised crime, and violence against women and feminised bodies, young women with different class and ethnic backgrounds are using hip-hop culture to denounce the government and create consciousness in relation to *feminicide* in the country.

This thesis focuses on the work of the female rap collective Batallones Femeninos (Women's Battalions) which originated in the frontier of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and of Mare Advertencia Lirika, from the southern state of Oaxaca. Immersed in heavily male-dominated hip-hop culture, the female rappers in my research emerge as openly feminist artists and position their feminisms with reference to very particular geographical contexts, and class and ethnic backgrounds. In the case of Batallones, their feminism is informed by specific experiences in *el barrio* (the hood), of Juárez and Mexico City, the influence of autonomous Zapatismo, and their travels through the country. Mare's feminism is also influenced by her travels, but mostly by her identity as a Zapotec woman and the practices of *comunalidad*, characteristic among the indigenous groups of her hometown, Oaxaca.

Both these artists generate networks, mainly among women, that allow them to travel, produce their music, and organise their concerts and workshops. I define these networks as *redes extendidas de sororidad* (extended sorority networks) by which women from different backgrounds, regardless of their autonomous or institutional feminist locations, support Batallones and Mare in the fight against feminicide, in consciousness-raising towards women's autonomy, and in questioning the foundational myth of *mestizaje* as the Mexican national identity.

Travelling was at the core of my fieldwork during the feminist ethnography reflected in this thesis. I accompanied the members of Batallones and Mare on their music tours and while they conducted workshops in different locations in México. During these travels, I immersed myself in Batallones's and Mare's historical contexts, either at the desert Juárez frontier or in rebellious Oaxaca. In this way, I had the opportunity to experience first-hand the construction of *redes de sororidad*, the key role played by their located geographic problematics, and the impact of broader social movements on their work as well as the impact of their feminist hip-hop on their own communities and *redes de sororidad*. In this thesis, and in the work of my participants, feminist hip-hop becomes a space for dialogue among women from different class, ethnic, racial backgrounds, and a space for articulating the possibilities for an enduring feminist autonomous consciousness.

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To all the women who fight, in every corner of the world!

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION

All of the translations from Spanish to English in this thesis are the author's unless otherwise stated.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, I was finishing my Master's degree in Women's Studies in México with a dissertation focused on an analysis of *Remains of the Day* (2005-2007), a photographic series by Mexican American artist Daniela Edburg. The images portrayed oneiric landscapes juxtaposed with the shocking placement of dismembered body parts of young fair-skinned women, wearing clothes that associated them with a middle-class, urban background. At the end of my project, I concluded that Edburg's images, a mixture of sublime landscapes and abject, dismembered female bodies' result in a grotesque visual composition. The grotesque here functions as a disruptive strategy to denounce the violence exerted against female bodies in the Mexican context. I argued that Edburg's work is a critique of the normative discourses of femininity, domesticity, and the public-private dichotomy. The harsh contrast within these images unveils the dispensable and disposable social condition in which female bodies have been positioned.¹

In my thesis defence presentation, one of the examiners offered two observations that had a fundamental impact on me as a young feminist researcher. The first was that I had naturalised the whiteness of the protagonists in these images. I had not described them as white women; rather, I had described them plainly as women, as part of a whole group without taking into account the signification of their race and ethnic backgrounds. The second observation was that I had neglected to mention my personal and political motives for choosing the topic of violence against women. I didn't insert myself into the research, and this exacerbated the fact that I hadn't analysed the race elements in these images and the discourse that surrounded them.

¹ I did my Master's degree in Women's Studies in Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Unit Xochimilco in Mexico City. UAM-X was among the first universities to offer studies in gender and feminisms in México. On March 19, 1998, UAM-X approved the Master's Degree in Women's Studies.

I was caught off guard but immediately recognised that I had assumed the whiteness of the protagonists in my analysis, and that I had consequently made invisible the racial axis which was so crucial to the object of my research. Later, during the beginnings of my doctoral research, I would come to reflect on the specific Mexican context of this oversight that seemed at the time a personal mistake on my part. In particular, I reflected on the ways that Mexican race politics continuously makes invisible other ethnicities that do not fit into the idealised Mexican myth of *mestizaje*, comprised of both indigenous and European roots. However, the second observation, pointing to the importance of my motives for choosing to analyse abject images of dismembered women's bodies, was in some ways even more confronting. Following the feminist axiom that the personal is political, I had thought it was quite obvious that having decided to use a feminist theoretical framework, my position in relation to both feminism and gendered experience would be fundamental. In front of the examiners at my defence, I burst into tears. I couldn't help it. I had tried to maintain objectivity during the two-year research process, but suddenly I was confronted with the initial reasons for immersing myself in feminism. I myself had almost become a sum of my severed female body parts, like those in Edburg's photos, after experimenting gendered violence, just before starting my Master's dissertation. And I felt liberated when I could express this experience out loud. All of these experiences bring me to where I am today and still motivates my research.

After the thesis defence, I decided that my future investigations would be informed by the class, ethnic and racial backgrounds of the protagonists of my research, a process which in the long run has brought me to reflect further on my own class and racial background. At the beginning of this doctoral research I had assumed myself to be a young Mexican feminist mestiza, studying overseas. But during the ongoing process of writing this thesis I began to more deeply explore my identity and finally to position myself as a peripheral working-class woman from

the edge of the Greater Mexico City area. This difference is significant, both to me and to this thesis.

Coming into my doctoral research, I had already decided that I wanted to focus on the diverse artistic strategies of women raising their voices to denounce violence against women. Coincidentally, also in 2012, Chicano filmmaker Simon Sedillo launched Mare Advertencia Lirika's documentary *Cuando Una Mujer Avanza* (When a Woman Steps Forward), which depicted Mare's career as a female rapper, her indigenous background, and her political commitment to social movements. Some feminist friends recommended this to me, saying the documentary was already online. I watched it in one sitting, enthralled.

I had already heard Mare's song "¡Qué Mujer!", included in a compilation album released by Mexican female rap collective Mujeres Trabajando. In "¡Qué Mujer!", Mare's lyrics addressed the importance of solidarity among women and of fighting against female beauty stereotypes. From the first moment I heard Mare's music it was evident to me that she was a feminist, although at that time, as I later discovered, she didn't recognise herself as one. It was equally clear to me even then that she had a powerful connection with her indigenous identity and with the social movements in Oaxaca, her hometown. In fact, it was in 2014, at the time when I was beginning to think through a doctoral project, that Mare first openly recognised herself as a feminist, both through her Facebook account and on a music television program screened on Canal Once in Mexico City.²

² Documentary *Cuando Una Mujer Avanza* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvVtDcXC0XU&t=1687s> (Accessed on 8 January, 2017).

In 2013, the Department of Women's Studies in which I had earned my Master's degree celebrated 15 years of existence, and the female rap collective Batallones Femeninos was invited to the celebrations. The founding members of the collective from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, gave a concert followed by a public interview that focused on their cultural production as female hip-hop artists from the Mexican-US frontier. This was the first time I had heard of Batallones Femeninos. Their lyrics denouncing the long-violent context of women's lives on the frontier, as well as the militarisation of Ciudad Juárez following the War on Drugs initiated in 2006, spoke to my new research interests. The frontier seemed so far away for me in 2013 but Batallones Femeninos' experiences resonated with me at the very beginning of this research.

Considering Batallones Femeninos and Mare Advertencia Lirika together, these were young women in their twenties from indigenous, working-class, and frontier backgrounds, raising their voices to denounce violence towards women in all its forms in México, and using hip-hop culture as the tool to communicate their message. For these reasons, at the beginning of my research I wanted to focus on the work of these artists. Thinking through the parameters of my research I then decided I wanted to also analyse the work of Rebeca Lane, a feminist rapper from Guatemala. I was interested in her work mainly because of her singularly clear articulation of an anarchist feminist position within rap music. Also, it was particularly interesting, from my perspective, that Lane is an academic focused on youth practices such as hip-hop at the same time as she is a rapper constructing feminist Latin American alliances.

Transnational alliances between these artists had materialised in music tours that constructed a dialogue among the different female rappers in Latin America (lately referred to by some of these artists as Abya Yala, the Panamanian indigenous Kuna name to designate the region).

Such female hip-hop tours constitute a political movement that denounces sexual violence, discrimination, feminicides, and seeks the advancement of women's autonomy. One example of these tours was *Somos Guerreras* (We are Warriors), a feminist hip-hop tour which included artists from Guatemala, Costa Rica and México organised by Rebeca Lane and ran from January to April 2016 in Central America and México.

By the time I came to begin my fieldwork in July 2016, however, I had returned to my initial focus on the two Mexican cases with which I began. The first reason for this change was that I had discovered Rebeca would be on tour in Europe during my fieldwork period, presenting her latest album *Alma Mestiza* (2016). So, it wouldn't be possible for me to visit her in Guatemala. The second and more substantial reason, however, was that once I began my fieldwork I realised how much work there was to do in the Mexican cases, and how much there was to say if I wanted to do justice to the immense quantity of detailed information produced by my time with these women. This is how I came to write a dissertation focused on the cultural production of *Mare Advertencia Lirika* and *Batallones Femeninos*.

Throughout the thesis I use the term girls and young women indistinctively, when designating the female rappers' of my research and the women that construct their networking. My use of the concept of girl is not tied to a definable age group as Catherine Driscoll remarks "...someone who is called a girl or is visible as a girl is not necessarily any particular age or at any particular point of physiological development" (2002, 5).

During the four-year period of my PhD research, Latin America has given rise to a wave of powerful public protests against what I will define and explain as *feminicidio*. Argentina and

México witnessed huge demonstrations in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Slogans such as “¡Ni una menos!” (Not One Less!) and “¡Vivas nos queremos!” (We want us alive!) have become the screaming protest slogan of the young generation of feminist activists in Latin America. *¡Vivas nos queremos!* – the title of this project – recuperates the long history of feminist Latin American slogans. They express an audible scream that resonates across borders in response to violence against women.

In Latin America, for reasons I will elaborate in chapter three we often use the term *feminicidio* (femicide), and this will be the term I utilise throughout my thesis. Substantial rates of gender-motivated homicides have become a crisis in the whole Latin American region. According to United Nations Women, 14 of the 25 countries in the world with the highest rates of feminicides (the murder of women because they are women) are in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) registered 1,661 feminicides in 2015, while in 2010 and 2014 there were 1,000 in each year spread across 16 countries of the region. In the case of México, the National Citizen Observatory of Femicide has calculated that between January and June 2017, 800 women were murdered across 13 states, of which only 49% of the cases were investigated as feminicides. Following data from United Nations Women and the Mexican Secretariat of the Interior, at least seven women were victims of feminicide every day in 2016.

On the 6th of June 2015, this situation was described by various Mexican feminist collectives as: “El riesgo de ser mujer en México: comunicado feminista frente a la situación actual” (The risk of being a woman in Mexico: feminist statement regarding the current situation) in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. They denounced the lack of effective measures by the Mexican State to eradicate feminicide. Regarding forced disappearances, the murder of female human

rights activists and journalists, and obstetric violence, among other crises, the collective declared:

Mexican women live in the midst of a war where the house and the street have become deadly, because impunity protect the partners that mistreat and kill, as well as the members of the Army or organized crime who also kidnap, rape, torture or murder us (Renaud et al 2015, *my translation*).

This violent context for women has impacted on the cultural production of young female artists, more in specific in female rappers' work. In recent years, numerous Spanish-speaking newspaper and magazine articles have addressed the emergence of feminist discourses in female artist's productions, mainly in music. Titles such as "Cantantes abiertamente feministas son tendencia" (Openly feminist singers are a trend) and "Recuperar la voz: diez propuestas de rap feminista latinoamericano" (Recover the voice: ten Latin American feminist rap proposals) commonly appear to provide commentary on the feminist and artistic Latin American milieu. Among the feminist hip-hop artists that appear on web searches for artists of this kind are Mare Advertencia Lirika and Batallones Femeninos from México.

In the academic world, research on feminist rap is nascent in the Latin American region, but constantly growing as a result of the emergence of openly feminist rappers. Most of the existing research focuses mainly on the production of feminist hip-hop as young women's cultural expression and on women in a male-dominated hip-hop youth culture. In the case of my thesis, an historical component plays a vital role, as does understanding the emergence of Mare's and Batallones Femeninos' music from their specific geographical contexts to add to the literature.

Although this is a thesis about young feminist activism in hip-hop culture, it is also, through a form of activism, a thesis about Mexican history and politics. Historical memory plays a

fundamental role in the artistic trajectories and feminist politics of the female rappers featured in my research. They are political agents living through an important period of Mexican political history. It is crucial to know where Mare and the members of Batallones Femeninos come from, including the history of their hometowns, the specific political problematics and social movements of their locations, as well as the historical and current political Mexican context insofar as it impacts on their feminist positioning and artistic production.

Thus over the course of this thesis I will offer, in pieces – as they become relevant to my argument - a general historical framework for Mexican politics. I want to highlight in particular the long history of indigenous resistances to colonisation and to the current capitalist system; the different historical stages of identifying the Mexican state; the foundations of the Mexican myth of *mestizaje*; and the importance of internal political conflicts such as the Dirty War and the War on Drugs, among others. I will also be offering, between the lines of my ethnography with these female artists, an account of the horror of contemporary México, with its forced disappearances, feminicides, economic precariousness, lack of sovereignty, governmental authoritarianism, and classist and racist segregation. These are not features specific to twenty-first century Mexican politics, in fact quite the opposite, as they all have their roots in a colonial past. The brief historical sketch I want to give here in the introduction will offer a foundation for the arguments that follow, and to be more succinct I have only cited specific sources where I am not either recounting well-known encyclopedic “facts” taught as benchmarks of Mexican history or generally uncontested arguments about the political history of México.

Colonialism has had an ongoing effect throughout the establishment of the Mexican Constitution of 1857, the creation of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) as a state party, and the dismantling of the welfare state in the 1980s. These and other elements are part of the “history [that] has been against us in the matter of democracy and much in favor of

authoritarianism”, as the Mexican political analyst Lorenzo Meyer declared during his recent participation in the International Conference on Democracy and Authoritarianism in México and the World (ahead of the 2018 elections). The authoritarianism Meyer is referring to first materialised in the establishment of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, after the conquest of Tenochtitlán, the capital of the *Mexica* empire. This was part of a series of elements that created the foundations of Spanish colonisation of México from 1521 to 1821. These events included the imposition of Christianity and other Western ethics; the extermination and invisibilisation of numerous peoples and their languages; the extraction of natural resources to support economic growth, including the establishment of the *encomienda* system of land grants and the enslavement of first nations groups; and the Spanish caste system that privileged a white Spanish elite over the first nations and black people (Bonfil 1994; León-Portilla 2002).³

The arrival of the Spanish also signified the creation of the ‘indian’, “as a product of the instauration of the colonial regime. Before the invasion there were no indians, but particularly identified *pueblos*” (Bonfil 1994, 121, my translation). The indian was the colonised subject defined in opposition to the Spanish colonisers. In this sense, the linguistic and cultural particularities of each subjugated ethnic group were erased, because the only distinction was that they were the others: the non-Spanish. The complex schema that developed to divide the indigenous from the Spanish derived from a caste system. This system was defined by different levels of mixture among different ethnic groups living in the colony such as indigenous groups, Spanish, and Africans. Ethnic identity determined one’s socio-economic status with little if any allowance for social mobility. At the top of the racial hierarchy were the Spanish, also known as the *peninsulares*, followed by Spanish subjects born in México, the *criollos* (creoles). Below

³ “El Estado autoritario anula la democracia en México y deja sin sentido las elecciones: Meyer” <http://www.sinembargo.mx/14-02-2018/3385580> (Accessed 3 March, 2018).

them were people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent, known as *mestizo*, and then all the other mixed-race people of European, indigenous and African background.

The lack of social mobility for the *criollos* and *mestizos* and the constant indigenous resistance to social, political and cultural domination, was the impetus for Mexico's long war for independence (1810-1821). The 16th of September of 1810 famously marks the Cry of Independence by the priest Miguel Hidalgo, who is often cited as initiating the revolt against the Spanish. The revolt was successful and led to the construction of México as a nation from the 27th of September 1821. Nevertheless, the condition of indigenous groups did not improve and the only benefited were the *criollos* and *mestizos*. On the contrary, the exploitative assimilation of indigenous peoples would worsen with the passage of time, and the economic exploitation and the dispossession of indigenous lands continued during the imposition of liberalism as the Mexican State ideology, centrally through the Constitution of 1857. The liberal political aim was to integrate the country into a modern dynamic economy and transform it into a modern secular state. To this end, the government decided to remove the pre-existing land privileges of both the Roman Catholic Church and indigenous communities.

The transformation of the Spanish ex-colony into a nation entailed the homogenization of the indigenous groups, including dispossession of their lands, and the country's integration within an economic development program based on foreign investment. These practices characterised the dictatorship of president Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1911. During this period of savage integration into the capitalist system it was fundamental to wipe out indigenous claims and connection to communal land. Nevertheless, the indigenous communities continued their resistance, grounded in their communal tradition, and organised riots against the *Porfiriato* authoritarianism. They were detained, returned to take back their lands and escaped to the

mountains (Gilly 1980). The indigenous resistance and defense of the land through communal organization was pivotal to the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920 that eventually overthrew Porfirio Díaz.

After the convulsive years of the Mexican Revolution, the nationalising project of *mestizaje* was imposed in order to homogenise the socially, racially and linguistically diverse population. Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos played an important role in consolidating the idea of *mestizaje* as a nationalist ideology in his 1929 essay, *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race). From this perspective, the contemporary Mexican identity was solely the result of the conjuncture of European and indigenous heritages, notably ignoring the African presence and other ethnicities in the country (Moreno 2016; Saldivar 2014; Sue 2013).

The post-revolutionary years were marked mainly by agrarian reforms and the aforementioned creation of the PRI. The foundational political act of the post-revolutionary era was the consolidation of the state party PRI which has ruled the country from 1929 to the present, interrupted only during the two presidential *sexenios* (six-year term) of members of National Action Party (PAN): Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). The agrarian reform that took place from 1910 to 1940 aimed to redistribute the land among peasants and indigenous peoples as part of a process of revolutionary nationalism. *Cardenismo* was the name assigned to the era under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, from 1934 to 1940. Under his government the 1934 Agrarian Code was passed and the distribution of lands was accelerated through the collective *ejido*, an area of communal land used for agriculture. Cárdenas also nationalised the railroad and all petroleum reserves in 1938, organised the labor unions, established socialist education and opened the nation to the refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil

War. Beneficiaries of the land reform received a plot of land held either individually or collectively. These reforms were mainly designed to stop peasant and indigenous rebellions.

In the aftermath of *Cardenismo*, the focus on the agrarian question moved to the city. The industrialization of México and the foundations of the Mexican welfare state were established through the creation of institutions dedicated to health and social protection. However, in exchange for these services, the political system demanded absolute submission of the working class to the PRI as state party. These were the years (1940-1970) of the so-called “Mexican miracle”, a term used in common speech to designate the period of economic growth, of 3 to 4% annually, mainly due to the model of substitution of imports (Villalpando 2003). However, during this period, such positive developments did not extend to all the Mexican population. There were also signs of social unrest in response to government authoritarianism, agriculture stagnation, and the move towards private ownership over the land distribution once emphasized under the influence of *ejido*.

Among the main social counter-movements at this time were labor troubles, including the railroad and doctors’ strikes of the 1950s and 1960s, the student protests of 1968, and the emergence of rural and urban guerrilla groups in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Party of the Poor (PDLP) created in 1967 by revolutionary Lucio Cabañas. As John Ross argues, “The Mexican Miracle was not working *milagros* down at grassroots. The slaughter of Rubén Jaramillo and his family in 1962 was a rude indicator of just how the all-powerful PRI government would respond to social agitation” (Ross 2009, 241). The PRI’s despotic firm hand was evident in the period known as *Guerra Sucia* (the Dirty War), which extended from 1968 to 1982. During this time, more than 1,200 people disappeared without a trace (Castellanos 2011). The main targets of the government were not just left-wing insurgents fighting the army

in rural areas, but also left-wing students in the cities, where the PRI sought to subdue dissent through arrests, torture, and killings.

Amid the economic crisis, the leftist guerrilla insurrections and the Dirty War, José López Portillo (1976-1982) from PRI came to office after a presidential campaign in which he faced no legal opposition candidate. This scenario jeopardized the power of the ruling PRI, therefore López Portillo opted for a pivotal electoral reform in 1977 that facilitated the legalization of several political parties, mostly on the left. These series of reforms should not be understood a maneuver by PRI to transition to a more democratic system. In fact, allowing the opposition certain access to the political system made PRI seem more inclusive, and thus legitimate, without allowing them substantive power (Barquin 1987; Middlebrook 1986; Molinar Horcasitas 1996). In 1979, the legalization of left-wing political parties, along with the amnesty offered to both imprisoned and at large guerrillas, caused a number of combatants to end militant struggle against the government. However, certain groups continued fighting, and according to the National Human Rights Commission the hostilities continued into 1982 (Castellanos 2011).

The 1980s were, however, most spectacularly characterised by the Mexican financial crisis that caused this period to be called *Década Perdida* (the Lost Decade) a term coined by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) to characterise a Latin American period of financial crisis, still prevalent today, In August 1982, México was the first of many Latin American countries to default on its sovereign debt. That was the starting point for recurring financial crises, the abandonment of the welfare state, and what is often discussed as integration into neoliberalism (Villalpando 2003). In 1988, after the electoral fraud that gave the presidency to Carlos Salinas de Gortari of PRI, the political paradigm changed (Reding 1988).

Salinas de Gortari chose to exchange Mexico's relative economic independence, based on a weak internal market, for the preservation of PRI rule by signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA was signed by Canada, the United States and México on January 1, 1994, and finally ended revolutionary nationalism. This is also, however, the same day of the rising of the Zapatista movement. The enthusiasm that NAFTA awakened within elite spheres in México was diminished or neutralized by the attention attracted by the indigenous Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in January 1994. The uprising indicated the deeply backward nature of political development in the country that went awry with the pretension that México was about to join the group of developed economies (Meyer 2016).

Almost two decades later, an electoral fraud similar to the one that occurred in 1988 gave the presidential power to Felipe Calderón from PAN. On this occasion, the government sought its legitimacy through the so-called War on Drugs, initiated in 2006. The exacerbation of violence materialized in forced disappearances, torture, and murder has claimed the lives of well over 150,000 people and led to the disappearance of more than 25,000 others (Gibler 2011). The violence committed by the State, and by organized crime, echoes the practices of the Mexican state's decades-long attack on left-wing movements who have been advocating for social and economic justice since the Dirty War. As Alexander Aviña argues, "We cannot fully understand the emergence of a transnational narcotics economy in Mexico if we fail to appreciate the constitutive role played by the very same military forces that waged violent counterinsurgency in Guerrero, on the orders of the ruling PRI during the late 1960s and 1970s" (Aviña 2016, 144).

Today, the War on Drugs initiated by Calderón continues in the current *sexenio*, under PRI's Enrique Peña Nieto. The number of forced disappearances, feminicides, and the death toll has

escalated (INEGI 2017). There are approximately 32,000 disappeared or missing people in México, according to government data, and more than half of these reported disappearances have occurred during Peña Nieto's administration, which began in December 2012. The disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teacher's training school in the state of Guerrero in 2014 has been one of the most recent and controversial issues during this period, and the government's handling of the case received widespread international attention and condemnation. Although in November 2017 Peña Nieto promulgated a new law designed to better fund and improve search efforts for the thousands of people across México who have been reported as missing or forcibly disappeared, the results have not been fruitful and the disappearances continue.

As I write this introduction, México is on the eve of another presidential election and the panorama described above persists. The current War on Drugs represents not only decades of repression and corruption but also one of multiple transformations of colonial wars that never entirely ended, based on a racialised form of creating horror and legitimizing the discourses and practices of the people in power.

A Feminist Ethnography

It is in this cultural and historical context that I decided to immerse myself in a feminist ethnography that would allow me to understand the feminist positions of young Mexican female rappers with reference to their particular geographical contexts, class and ethnic backgrounds. I visited them where they lived and travelled with them as they spread their messages during fieldwork undertaken from July to November 2016. In this period, I accompanied the members of Batallones and Mare on their music tours throughout different

locations in México; tours which also brought me to the desert frontier of Juárez and the rebellious city of Oaxaca, the respective hometowns of these female rappers. This fieldwork not only engaged with the music tours, which are autonomously funded in ways that are fundamental to the dissemination of these artists' work in an underground hip-hop sphere, but also engaged with the hip-hop and women's autonomy workshops designed by Mare as a complement to the concerts. Around these events I conducted extended interviews with these artists to supplement my continual participant observation of the music tours.

During this fieldwork process, I began to identify the main political influences on these hip-hop artists, as well as the creation of networks among women from different political, ethnic, class, and race backgrounds that made possible the concerts, the workshops, and the travel through different areas of the country. In this thesis I call these networks *redes extendidas de sororidad* (extended sorority networks), and argue that they have become the space for dialogue among women from different backgrounds in the fight against femicide and the construction of an autonomous feminist consciousness through hip-hop.

Once I returned from my fieldwork I began to structure my research around my ethnographic notes and around the historical context of each of the feminist hip-hop rappers. In writing up my ethnography I have not separated my critical and theoretical analysis writing from the stories of the young women whom I met and travelled with. Instead, I have interwoven my own critical reflections with their stories. In this, I want to evoke the traditional practice of weaving *trenzas* (braids) as a metaphor for my ethnographic practice. In each chapter my writing braids three main strands together. First, the historical context from which my female rappers come; second the particular concepts that distinguish Batallones Femenino's and Mare's work; and, finally, their performance on stage.

Batallones Femeninos, the feminist crew, originated in Ciudad Juárez, and then expanded their network to different states of the country although they have been widely influenced by their experiences in *el barrio* (the hood), by the model of Zapatismo autonomy, and by the Zapatista women's fight for indigenous women's rights. Meanwhile, Mare's feminism has been constructed through her identity as a Zapotec woman and through the practices of *comunalidad*, characteristic among the indigenous groups of her hometown, Oaxaca.

In both instances, the importance of the female rappers' historical contexts is manifest through not only their cultural productions, but additionally the feminist geography that it is weaved along the travels we made during the concerts and workshops, supported by the *redes de sororidad*. Given these connected yet simultaneously distinct contexts, I want to point out that over the course of the ethnography and writing process, the connection between historical memory and geography mapping emerged, and is reflected throughout the thesis. However I do not discuss it at length here, because of the way it emerged organically through my ethnographic interactions with the female rappers.

I will end this introduction with some comments on the structure of this dissertation. The first chapter, titled "We are bad, but we can be worse", addresses more closely the Mexican historical context in which hip-hop culture was introduced during the 1980s. This period, which as noted above is known as *Década Perdida* is fundamental to understanding the time in which the female rappers of my research were born and raised. The central concern of this chapter is how feminist hip-hop might be situated in the debates over intersectionality in Latin America. Chapter two, "My life in a suitcase: a feminist ethnography", further develops my methodological framework in a discussion of feminist ethnography. I position myself as a young feminist researcher and consider ongoing discussion of ethnographic practice using a

feminist lens. I also explain my fieldwork process during the music tours, the workshops and my first contact with Mare Advertencia Lirika and Batallones Femeninos.

The last two chapters focus respectively on my case-studies of Batallones Femeninos and Mare Advertencia Lirika. In each chapter I give a closer historical account of their geographical hometowns. The chapter on Batallones focuses mainly on the impact of the feminicidal context of Juárez on these female rappers and discusses their construction of extended sorority networks through the whole Mexican territory. I explore the emergence of the concept of femicide and the impact of these murdered women on Batallones' lyrics. The concepts of disruptive bodies, *autogestión*, autonomy and *sororidad* are central here for analysing the hip-hop cultural production of Batallones. In the case of Mare, I focus on the long history of social movements in Oaxaca, within which the teachers' union plays an important role, discussing the notion of *comunalidad*, a central concept of indigenous collective work in the southern Mexican state. At the same time, I develop a critique of the myth of *mestizaje* through *comunalidad*, Mare's lyrics, workshops and her immersion in different music genres, such as *son veracruzano*.

Throughout this thesis, to try and capture their musical and performative activism, I have included many of the lyrics from their different songs, music videos, and live performances. I have made the somewhat unusual decision, for a thesis written in English, to include these lyrics in Spanish in the primary text, with translations to English included in the footnotes. While I understand that the readability of the text might be somewhat interrupted by this choice, I understand it as a form of critical engagement. Keeping the original lyrics in the text foregrounds their primary meaning, and as I will argue in the case of some key critical concepts raised throughout this thesis, it is important not to translate away the cultural specificity of the meaning and feeling of their precise word choices. At the same time, the disjunctive practice

of reading, in English, from the main text to the footnotes and back again, reflects an important element of the border crossings involved in conducting my ethnography at home in México, in Spanish, and translating that, back in Australia, into the critical languages of English feminist cultural studies.

Finally, I invite my readers to listen to and watch some of the performances to which I will refer. For that purpose, I have also included a range of links to audio and video tracks in the last two chapters. I hope that in this way my readers can accompany their reading with their own engagement with the world of *Mare Advertencia Lirika* and *Batallones Femenino*, and share some of my own experience during the enriching crafting process of this PhD thesis.

CHAPTER 1

WE ARE BAD, BUT WE CAN BE WORSE

Daughters of the *Década Perdida*

“Somos malas, podemos ser peores ...”, (We are Bad, and We can be Worse), sounds from my computer speakers. I am listening to Batallones Femeninos, and trying to remember where I have heard that same phrase. After a couple of minutes, it makes sense to me. During feminist mobilizations against gendered violence, young women shout among many other slogans those Batallones’s lyrics. Nevertheless, it’s not the first time this phrase is used to critique the stereotyped female characteristics such as submissiveness, passivity, and commitment to basic care. Mexican writer, poet and philosopher Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) had herself defied female stereotypes of domesticity and submission, while occupying with her artistic work the public sphere. For this she is considered a proto-feminist and was called the Tenth Muse. The phrase *Yo, la peor de todas* (I The Worst of All) engraved by Sor Juana in the arch of the infirmary the Convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City, before she died victim of a plague in 1695, still resonates in young women (Schons 1926; Paz 1982; Merrim 1999).⁴

While doing this reflection a message appears in my Facebook account: “Urgent! Register! Please, spread the word”. These are the lines I received from Obeja, rapper in the feminist collective Batallones Femeninos, on the 28th of July 2016. A web link accompanied the message, inviting me to a gender and hip-hop workshop, “Femcees, alzar la voz: jornadas de hip-hop y género” (Femcees, to Raise the Voice: Hip-Hop Journeys and Gender), on the 5th of

⁴ The phrase inspired the Argentinean filmmaker Maria Luisa Bemberg to direct, *I The Worst of All* in 1990. The movie is focused on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz life.

August in downtown Mexico City. This wasn't the first time I had read the word femcee. Femcee (female emcee) is a concept to which I had previously been introduced to in the 2014 *Femcees Feminist Flow Rap Compilation for Women's Rights*, which I had previously bought in 2015 in Barcelona. The word femcee and the term feminist rap have become common in Mexican cultural events, including ones that might be held in a museum. I will use this term, as well as the phrase women rappers throughout this research when referring to the artists on whom my work is centred.

As soon as I opened the link Obeja sent me, the biographies of Batallones Femeninos members appeared. Women from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, joined by Swedish feminist lesbian rapper Silvana Iman, would participate in a workshop discussing the role of feminism in their hip-hop practice as well as the current situation of women's rights in their specific locations.⁵

Scrolling down the page I found the following statement elaborated by the Swedish Embassy in México and Centro Cultural España en México CCEMX (Spanish Cultural Center), the organisers of the event:

Feminist rap functions as an amplifier of realities. It questions the androcentric logic of power, offers resistance to patriarchy and denounces the strong and current aggression towards women. It is a common struggle space where different women of the world have forged networks and work from different fields to build an inclusive space of creation, plural and free of *machismo* (my translation)⁶

This conceptualisation echoes the main objectives of feminist practice in questioning the patriarchal system and embracing the construction of women's networks, but it does not

⁵ Silvana Iman is a feminist and openly lesbian rapper from Sweden, with a Syrian and Latvian background. In 2016 she won Swedish Grammys for Best Live Act of the Year, Lyricist of the Year and Artist of the Year. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMuVPARGwfQ> (Accessed 13 November, 2016).

⁶ <http://ccemx.org/musica/femcees-jornadas-de-hip-hop-y-genero> (Accessed 28 July, 2016).

address the relation between rap and feminism, or hip-hop culture and feminism, within Latin America and more specifically the Mexican context. Therefore, some questions started to fuel my research in this chapter and how to discuss the work of my case studies.

What is feminist rap? What is the historical conceptualisation of hip-hop feminism? What is the relation between feminism and hip-hop culture within Latin America and México? How does Latin American feminism's history impact on the histories of Batallones Femeninos and Mare Advertencia Lirika, the central subjects of my research? The reader will encounter throughout this thesis both answers and questions. In particular rhetorical questions which map my own thought process and they serve to convey the rhythm and narrative style of my research.

Presently, I must first explain how these terms are generally understood, they thus provide a starting point for a literature review of how these terms are currently defined within feminist and academic circles. But before I proceed, I would like to introduce briefly the collective Batallones Femeninos and then Mare Advertencia Lirika, all of whom are active in the hip-hop underground scene and the autonomous feminist movement in México.

The collective Batallones Femeninos originally emerged in 2009 in Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, and has expanded their members to Mexico City, the Mexican states of Nayarit and Querétaro, and to Washington in the United States (figure 1). Their lyrics address women's rights, autonomy and community practices, the militarisation of the Mexican frontier, and support various social struggles within México. The denunciation of femicide was, more particularly, the main engine that inspired Batallones Femeninos to leave Juárez and meet other women denouncing femicide. Under the feminist flag, and focused on recovering the experiences of young women from Mexican *barrios* (the hood), the members of Batallones

Femeninos have recently been acknowledged as a powerful voice within the anti-femicide movement in México (see chapter 3).

In turn, Mare Advertencia Lirika is an indigenous Zapotec woman from the state of Oaxaca, who has been involved in the hip-hop scene since 2003 (figure 2). In her lyrics, she denounces the stealing of indigenous lands and languages, forced disappearances, and raises awareness concerning women's rights, autonomy, *comunalidad*, and making evident the effacement of indigenous and afro-identities by the Mexican State. Her feminism is directly connected with the struggles of *pueblos originarios* (first nations) and local Oaxacan social movements, such as the teacher's movement (see chapter 4).

Born during the 1980s the members of Batallones Femeninos and Mare are part of the *Década Perdida*. During this crisis, countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America became immersed in bloody civil wars, which included the genocide pursued against the indigenous Maya population during the internal armed conflict in Guatemala (1960-1996). México itself was living the aftermath of the *Guerra Sucia* which left thousands of political dissidents, students, and activists murdered or disappeared. The political unrest was exacerbated in 1988, when the Mexican presidential election was rigged, resulting in the manipulative triumph of the candidate of PRI, Carlos Salinas de Gortari over the leftist Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

In the 1980s, feminism in Latin America, and more specifically in México, was dominated by “feminists from autonomous groups, independent feminists and double militancy – activists in both political parties and in the feminist movements” that came from the *guerrilla* and Leftist movements (Fischer 2005, 70, *my translation*). These were often “separatist” groups, who

decided to separate from more mixed groups given their experiences of oppression, and even sexual harassment from their male partners and peers who reproduced the same authoritarian practices as the military and oppressive governments they were denouncing.

A decade later, in the 1990s, while *Mare Advertencia Lirika* and the members of *Batallones Femeninos* were growing up as daughters of the *Década Perdida*, the NGOization of Latin American feminisms, or appropriation of feminist discourses by institutions, was occurring (Alvarez 1998; 1999). The institutionalisation of feminism during the 1990s goes hand in hand with the introduction of the term gender and the so-called gender perspective as part of public policy measures in Latin America. These practices have been fuelled by the institutional discourses for which “gender seems to fit within the scientific terminology of social science and thus dissociates itself for the (supposedly strident) politics of feminism” (Scott 1988, 31). The substitution of the feminist discourse by a much lighter gender category that depoliticizes the feminist movement impacted the way young women assume these institutionalised measures according to their class, racial, and ethnic belonging.

During the same period, hip-hop culture began to take root in México. Initially, the arrival of hip-hop with its characteristic four elements (rapping, break dancing, disc jockeying and graffiti) was dispersed and the elements separated from each other. Exposure to hip-hop culture, primarily breakdancing, took place through movies such as *Wild Style* (1982), *Flashdance* (1983), and *BeatStreet* (1984). Rap, another of the first elements was introduced when Mexican radio stations played songs such as: “Funky Cold Medina” by Tone Loc (1989), “The Message” by Grand Master Flash & The Furious Five (1982), “Funk You Up” by The Sequence (1979), and “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang (1979) (Tickner 2008). Hip-hop culture arrived in the 1980s mainly through the migration flows of Mexican migrants scattered throughout the United States as well as the mainstream music industry. However, it

was not until the 1990s when there was an emergence of Mexican rap groups, mostly male-dominated, such as Speed Fire, Rapaz, V.L.P., Sindicato del Terror, Nasty Style, Kartel Aztlán, Caballeros del Plan G, Mike Diaz, Sekreto, MC Luka. Most of the crews were created in Torreón, Monterrey, Gómez Palacio and Mexico City, the most important cities of México's rap scene. (Cortés Arce 2004).

Regarding the participation of femcees that paved the way for my participants, it is important to highlight the work of Jessy P from the municipality of Ecatepec in the State of Mexico. She began her career with Pollos Rudos (Rude Chickens) a crew that was active from 1996 to 2002. Later she developed an alliance with femcee Ximbo to create in 2009 Mujeres Trabajando, a space of collaboration between female rappers from different states of the Mexican territory (Puebla, Oaxaca, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Mexico City and the State of Mexico). Among other pioneer female rappers, are Niña Dioz, Joaka, Ximbo, Yoez, Malike, Luz Reality, Broma Mc of Rango Bajo, Vicky Mc, La Tita, Yara, Risa, Rabia Rivera and La Mexicana.⁷ In the next section, however, I want to expand on the international background that also informs the practices I discuss in subsequent chapters.

Hip-hop Generation Feminism: an intersectional approach

My knowledge of hip-hop culture was still underdeveloped at the time I began this research. I had been more familiar with punk music, so I was immersed in other styles of music and associated subcultural practices. Nevertheless, it was clear to me that hip-hop shared the same discursive emphasis on contesting authority and critiquing the music industry of disco and rock

⁷ Documentary: *Somos Lengua* (2016) by filmmaker Kyzza Terrazas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzSmnGQmaIY> (Accessed 3 November, 2017).

music respectively, and also that their paths had converged at some historical points. Since its very beginning, the politics of race have been essential for punk and hip-hop both music genres and the subcultures that arose around them.

During the 1970s, and perhaps more specifically 1976, (McNeil 1996) British punk emerged mainly from the confluence of two different music genres: rock and reggae. The British white working-class youth living in the post-war era had adopted a mixture of some elements of glam rock, American proto-punk and reggae music. (Hebdige 1979; Liang 2005). Reggae music had an extensive influence on this punk music, largely propelling punk's increasing interest in race. The black British subcultures that arrived from West Indies were an indubitable influence, and they were continually dealing with issues of race, which provided punk music with a broader political commitment to race issues, meaning their politics were not only circumscribed by class (Hebdige 1979; Liang 1996; McNeil 1996). Hebdige discusses the politics of race in subculture movements:

It is on the plane of aesthetics: in dress, dance, music; in the whole rhetoric of style, that we find the dialogue between black and white most subtly and comprehensively recorded, albeit in code. By describing, interpreting and deciphering these forms, we can construct an oblique account of the exchanges which have taken place between the two communities. We can watch, played out on the loaded surfaces of British working-class youth cultures, a phantom history of race relations since the War (1979, 45).

Contemporaneously with these changes, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean in the United States, hip-hop artists Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash were invited to perform at some downtown spots in New York like the Mudclub or the Roxy which was frequented by punk and new wave kids. African-Americans and Latinos in the Bronx embraced the classic James Brown Soul and Funk music and developed hip-hop, while their Lower Eastside white counterparts got into British punk and new wave. Bambaataa, Fab 5 Freddy, Debbie Harry of

Blondie and British New Wave icon Malcolm McClaren would wind up being key figures in hip-hop's first cross-cultural exchange. Blondie's pivotal song "Rapture", where Harry appeared rapping with Grandmaster Flash—in the video this is a B-Boy party where he is DJing—exemplifies the cultural alliances between both music subcultures during the 1970s in New York City (Chang 2005; Piskor 2013).

Hip-hop culture originated from the Black, Latino and Caribbean working class youth during the 1970s and early 1980s in Brooklyn and the South Bronx in New York City. Since its beginning, hip-hop was identified by the conjunction of four distinctive elements: break dancing (b-boying), disc jockeying (DJ-ing), graffiti writing and rapping (MCing). All these elements of hip-hop were related in the rise of the culture, however its relation to each other have changed over the years, and not still necessarily tied together. Later a fifth element - knowledge- would be added by Afrika Bambaataa, founder of the Universal Zulu Nation, the first hip-hop institution, opposed to gang violence, interested on raising consciousness and community development. For Bambaataa, its members, the "Zulus... are about having 'right knowledge, right wisdom, right overstanding'" (Chang 2005, 90). Afrika Bambaataa took the idea of creating the Zulu Nation from the "British film Zulu which gave him the idea in the early 1960s to form the Zulu Nation, a loose organisation dedicated to peace and survival which has since spread outwards from the Bronx to other parts of America" (Toop 1984, 57). Initially hip-hop was a recreational practice, and way of making recreational spaces, as well as a response to the exclusivity of the New York disco music scene and the growing gang culture. Progressively hip-hop evolved into a more contested field, but still often reflecting on the living social conditions of the racially and economically marginalized.

As a number of authors have argued, hip-hop is, historically, a political movement created by the black and Latino communities in poor and working-class neighborhoods, arising from the

refusal of poverty and violence, but most of all refusal of white domination in the post-civil rights era in the United States (Rose 1994; Forman 2004; Perry 2004; Collins 2006). In their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of African American History* dedicated to hip-hop history, Alridge and Stewart note:

For many youth, Hip Hop reflects the social, economic, political, and cultural realities and conditions of their lives, speaking to them in a language and manner they understand. As a result of both its longevity and its cogent message for many youth worldwide, Hip Hop cannot be dismissed as merely a passing fad or as a youth movement that will soon run its course. Instead, hip hop must be taken seriously as a cultural, political, economic, and intellectual phenomenon deserving of scholarly study (2005, 190).

One of the first publications on hip-hop culture was written by journalist and musician David Toop in 1984: *Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop*. In that text, Toop takes an Afrocentric approach, arguing that rap music was born in West Africa and comes from the *griots*, who narrate the genealogies of African tribes in the form of songs. “The griot is a professional singer, in the past often associated with a village but now an increasingly independent ‘gun for hire’, who combines the functions of living history book and newspaper with vocal and instrumental virtuosity” (Toop 1984, 31-32).

A decade later, Tricia Rose published *Black Noise: Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) where she provided an extensive historical study of hip-hop and its impact on youth culture. Rose also examined the role of female rappers in the male-dominated hip-hop scene, stressing the huge influence of black female rappers as artists, writers, performers, producers, and industry executives. For example, former R&B singer Sylvia Robinson founded the Sugar Hill Records rap label, which produced “Rapper’s Delight,” rap’s undisputed first hit record. And Robinson’s stewardship presaged other women’s involvement on the

production side of hip-hop, such as Sylvia Rhone at Elektra Records. (Rose 1994, 17). Women were not absent from the origins of rap music imported to México, and as Gwendolyn Pough also argues, hip-hop may seem like “a unique testosterone filled space, but to say that women have not contributed significantly to its development is false” (2006, 8). Nevertheless, since its beginnings, there has been an ambivalent relation between women and hip-hop in the United States. On the one hand, African-American women critique the misogynist lyrics and sexist representations of women prevalent in male-dominated hip-hop. On the other hand, the same women express solidarity with such male artists against classism and racism that affects both sexes (Phillips 2005; Keyes 2000; Pough 2002).

This critique of sexism is the starting point for hip-hop feminism, which is influenced by the experiences of young black feminists in the United States, mainstream, implicitly white, academic feminism and the male-dominated hip-hop scene that surrounded them as they grew up. Rose has analysed how female rappers resist and challenge, but to some extent also reproduce gender norms (1994, 147). These experiences make them part of what Bakari Kitwana designated as the “Hip-Hop Generation”, comprised of those born between 1965 and 1984 that identify with the language, culture, and music associated with hip-hop (Kitwana 2003, xiii).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the above scholars, in addition to Joan Morgan (1999), Shani Jamila (2002), Kyra Gaunt (2006), and Aisha Durham (2007), began to circulate the term hip-hop feminism and develop feminist hip-hop studies within academia. Such analysis has often focused on situating hip-hop feminism with black history, culture, and politics in the United States (Pough 2004; Rabaka 2011). Other work has explored hip-hop’s significance for young black women, including its possibilities for feminist pedagogies, and the role of motherhood

in hip-hop narratives (Brown and Kwakye 2012; Motapanyane 2012). An essential text in this field is journalist Joan Morgan's book *When Chicken Heads Come Home to Roost* (1999). She raised the questions of what it means to assume a feminist position within hip-hop culture, which remains male-dominated and has often crudely objectified black women: "In between the beats, booty shaking, and hedonistic abandon. I have to wonder if there isn't something inherently unfeminist in supporting a music that repeatedly reduces me to tits and ass and encourages pimping on the regular" (1999, 34). Such dilemmas pushed Morgan to initiate a body of work focused on feminism and hip-hop and coin the term hip-hop feminism while acknowledging that hip-hop also functions as a site where young black women begin to build their gender critique and feminist identity. For Morgan, feminism is "the power women attain by making choices that increase their range of possibilities" (1997, 76-77). Hip-hop feminism, represented by third wave feminists such as Shani Jamila, Joan Morgan, and Tara Roberts, is the heir of second wave Black Feminist thought developed by Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, bell hooks and Audre Lorde. Black feminist thinkers were influenced by the civil rights and black power movement and made evident the scant attention paid to the intersections between class, race and gender.

During the 1970s The *Combahee River Collective*, one of the most active groups of Black feminism, published a statement where they made clear the importance of personal experience in their feminism. They would constitute the paradigm of intersectionality: the extension of the feminist principle 'the personal is political'. They wrote that "Personal experience is a crucial element of Black feminist thought because Black feminist subjectivity is located at the intersection of multiple subjectivities" (Smith 2000, The Combahee River Collective 2000).

The specific term intersectionality was coined in 1989 by American legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, and it refers to the multi-dimensionality of black women's

experience of subordination within the civil rights movement as well as in anti-discriminatory jurisprudence. This term has become very popular within the Anglophone academy when designating the complex intertwining of multiple identities and inequalities (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991; Yuval-Davis 2006).

More recently, The Crunk Feminist Collective, which is a space for hip-hop feminists of color, both queer and straight, within the academy and without, have acknowledged their belonging to the legacy of the Black feminist movement of the 1970s. In *Hip Hop Generation Feminism: A Manifesto*, they argued once more for an intersectional approach attentive to the different ethnic, racial, class, education and sexual backgrounds of its members:

We unapologetically refer to ourselves as feminist because we believe that gender, and its construction through a White, patriarchal, capitalist power structure, fundamentally shapes our lives and life possibilities as women of color across a range of sexual identities. We are members of the hip hop generation because we came of age in one of the decades, the 1990s, that can be considered post-soul and post-civil rights (Cooper 2017, xix).

Collins affirms that intersectionality should address both macro-sociological and micro-sociological questions. She uses the term intersectionality to denote the particular forms taken by the complex of interlocked oppressions in the everyday experiences of individuals, and the phrase “matrix of dominations” to designate their societal organisations. For her, intersectionality constitutes “an alternative paradigm to the antagonism between positivism and post-modernism which was part of the dichotomies structuring Western epistemology” (Collins 2000).

Sirma Bilge further synthesizes the concept of intersectionality as follows:

Intersectionality reflects a transdisciplinary theory aimed at apprehending the complexity of social identities and inequalities through an integrated approach. It refutes the compartmentalization and hierarchization of the great axes of social differentiation through categories of gender/sex, class, race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. The intersectional approach goes beyond simple recognition of the multiplicity of the systems of oppression functioning out of these categories and postulates their interplay in the production and reproduction of social inequalities (2010, 58)

The question of how to understand the articulation of social relations of gender and class was also raised in France, by materialist feminists, concerning consubstantiality and coextensivity. Danièle Kergoat critiqued the concept of intersectionality, because it implies the existence of groups formed at the intersection of racism, classism and sexism, which does not allow for emphasis on changing and historical relations of domination. She thus critiques the “geometric notion of intersectionality”, arguing that “reasoning in terms of cartography fixes and naturalises categories... In other terms the multiplicity of categories mask the *rappports sociaux*... the positions are not fixed, because they are inserted in dynamic relations in permanent evolution and renegotiation (Kergoat 2012, 133, my translation). French materialist feminists have proposed the framework *rappports sociaux de sexe* instead of the concept of gender. Their rationale is to emphasise the social dimension of inequality between the sexes rather than naturalising them. For this approach, women and men are social classes defined by their class position in the sexual division of labour (Falquet 2011; Kergoat 2012). For Kergoat, “the *rappports sociaux* are consubstantial they form a knot which cannot be sequenced to the new social practices except the perspective of analytical sociology and they are coextensive in deploying the *rappports sociaux* of class, gender, race. They reproduce and co-produce themselves mutually” (Kergoat 2012, 127, my translation). Consubstantiality and

coextensivity are intermingled and mutually constructed in the different *rappports* of class, gender, and race.

Latin American feminists also propose a critique of the essentialist and universal subject of feminism: ‘woman’. The intersectional perspective unmask the *blanco-mestiza* (white mestiza) as a heterosexual, middle-class, Westernized-thinking woman positioned at the centre of feminism. For afro-lesbian feminist Ochy Curiel, the intersectionality concept “has been essential to discover the Eurocentrism and the colonial legacies that persist within the hegemonic Western feminist theory and practice” (2007). But before addressing the use of the intersectionality concept in Latin America, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of autonomous feminism to such questioning of the homogeneous conception of woman, which in turn gave rise to the possibility of positioning some Latin American feminists within the framework of decolonial feminism. It is important to draw out the impact of these feminist autonomous discourses which make visible the different ethnic, race, class, and sex positionalities of feminist Latin America rappers such as Mare Advertencia Lirika and the members of Batallones Femeninos.

Most of the work that engages with feminist hip-hop using the intersectionality approach has been mainly focused on the context of the United States. Academic feminist hip-hop research in Latin America is scarce, although what has appeared is focused mainly in Cuba, Brazil, Colombia and, more recently, México, often taking up the approaches of youth culture studies which I will be taking up below.

Young women are the protagonists of Latin American and Mexican hip-hop and from their experiences described in their lyrics it is possible to approach the impact of the historical on

their lives. In the case of México, Silva Londoño (2017) analysed the work of Batallones Femeninos from a youth studies framework, and characterized their work as *hip-hop femenino* (feminine hip-hop) during the period when the members of Batallones Femeninos were beginning to engage with feminism. Lara Chávez (2016) also explores the emergence of women in hip-hop in México and their difficulties while participating in a male-dominated hip-hop scene using approaches drawn from the study of youth subcultures. Tanya Saunders (2009) work on the Cuban collective Krudas Cubensi is one of the first to address these questions from a feminist intersectional framework. In “La Lucha Mujerista: Krudas CUBENSI and Black Feminist Sexual Politics in Cuba”, Sanders explores Kruda’s intersectional struggle against the capitalist and colonialist systems and their lesbian identity within male-dominated hip-hop culture.

From the intersection of cultural and gender studies, Carmen Díez Salvatierra (2016) initiated a mapping of Latin American feminist rap while analysing the work of Latin American feminists rappers Mare Advertencia Lirika from México and Caye Cayejera from Ecuador.⁸ In defining ‘autonomous feminism’, she writes:

The female rappers of this work belong to the underground scene, and at the same time challenge, *mainstream* feminism of the middle class, heterosexual white woman comfortably installed in the academy and the institutions ... the struggle of the autonomous (feminists) is on the street, in *autogestionados* social movement. Their work has the merit of bringing the feminist discourse closer to women who, for different reasons, had never considered their oppressions from a critical emancipatory theory such as feminism (2016, 45, *my translation*)

⁸ Caye Cayejera is a feminist rapper from Ecuador and her lyrics are mainly focused on sexual and gender diversity.

Díez highlights as fundamental the theoretical and critical scope of a localised, contextualised intersectional approach when she argues these feminist rappers use hip-hop as an expressive channel for autonomous feminist discourses that replicate the autonomous Latin American feminist struggles.

Inserted in the NGOization period of feminism in Latin America, when very few young women adopted feminism as part of their discourse and everyday practices, Batallones Femeninos and Mare Advertencia Lirika's process of becoming feminist in early 2010s took very different paths. However, for all, their practices are inscribed within the resurgence of feminist autonomous activisms in Latin America and emergence of feminist rap, which is understood by Díez as "a space that enhances sorority and respect among women, without forgetting the alliances that are created with some men of the movement" (2016, 45, *my translation*).

From my consideration of this literature and the specificities of these femcees, I have drawn the following central questions for my research: How did Mare and the members of Batallones Femeninos become feminists after the institutionalisation of women's movements in Latin America? And, consequently, what are their histories within the conjunction of hip-hop culture and feminisms in México? At what point do their histories converge and differ? What were the processes of constructing their feminist positionality within hip-hop? How does their relationship to the communities they are engaged with inform their particular identity from a geographical and political context? And finally how do they interact with autonomous and institutional discourses surrounding Latin American feminisms and hip-hop culture?

Throughout the thesis I will argue that although Batallones Femeninos and Mare's feminisms within hip-hop have been constructed from different ethnic and geographical positionalities,

they converge in their *autogestivo* self-management practices (producing their own music albums and events, constructing community within social movements) and through their sorority practices, which in turn replicate well-established *autogestivo* or autonomy practices that are at the core of autonomous Latin-American feminism. In this current moment, when there is a resurgence of autonomous practices among young Latin American feminists, and huge feminist mobilizations against gendered violence, this new generation of feminists are adding decolonial feminist discourses to help highlight and understand the intersectionality of their varied ethnic, class, gender, sexual and race positionalities, and they are thus broadening the notions of community within their practice. In this way, their hip-hop underground practices echo an ideal of feminist autonomy which is a cornerstone of Latin American feminist identity. In the following chapters, I will stress the current resurgence of autonomous feminisms in Latin America, as part of a vast historical memory that nourishes their feminist hip-hop practice.

CHAPTER 2
MY LIFE IN A SUITCASE:
A FEMINIST CULTURAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Positioning Myself/Locating the Self

Before beginning my fieldwork for this thesis, I had a lot of doubts about my capacity for this research. How could I write a thesis about self-declared feminist female rappers who all used explicit political discourse to articulate their clearly situated identities when I was still struggling with my identity, and had never been politically active? What was my political identity as a Mexican citizen, a feminist, a researcher? I felt I needed to answer those questions to engage properly with these participants and constantly thought about these issues in the first two years of my PhD while familiarizing myself with relevant scholarly literature and preparing to immerse myself in fieldwork.

As already mentioned in the introduction, I had previously positioned myself as a young feminist *mestiza* woman from Mexico City, working on a PhD overseas. Nevertheless, during my ethnography, my conversations with Mare Advertencia Lirika, with the members of Batallones Femeninos, and my participation in their activities as well as the writing of this thesis, I have been brought to explore and question these identities. During my fieldwork, I obviously wanted to know more about these feminist rappers – who they were, what they did, and why – but they also wanted to know about me. Some of the questions they formulated for me were apparently casual while others were more politically pointed, but all were important for me as a feminist, a young Mexican, and as a researcher: What are you doing in Australia? Why in Australia, such a faraway country? How is Sydney? Where do you live in México?

What do you know about the feminicides in the State of Mexico? What music do you like?
What artistic activities do you pursue?

In the majority of the cases, these questions were formulated by the members of Batallones Femeninos, especially Obeja Negra. But all the ostensible “participants” in my research were also analysing me, and my motivations and relation to their work. Thus, I wasn’t the only one formulating the questions in this research. As Julie Bettie would say, “the ethnographic text is not a transparent account of reality but a product of the interaction and negotiation between researcher and researched” (2003, 22). In my conversations with the members of Batallones Femeninos and with Mare, we were creating and recreating our positions and ourselves in our experiences and stories. Sometimes I would ask the questions and in other moments they would. I found myself, in some moments, creating and singing my rap lyrics, in others producing and selling their merchandise (t-shirts, CD, stickers), and then in others, learning theoretical concepts and approaches, especially from Mare and Obeja. These conversations, in which we mutually began to know each other and share our experiences as young women from different geographical, political, racial, educational backgrounds in México allowed me to position myself both within and outside the community during this ethnography.

Over the course of my fieldwork, which took five months working in three different regions of México (the North, the Centre, and South), I came to see myself more specifically as a young feminist woman from Naucalpan with a mestizo, working-class background, studying a PhD overseas in an Anglophone context. Naucalpan is a municipality of the State of Mexico and part of the extensive metropolitan hinterland of Mexico City. In 2016 Forbes news in México

named Naucalpan as one of the worst cities to live in México because of the high rates of organised crime, kidnapping, and feminicides.⁹

Acknowledging the importance of this context for my research, I came to define myself in important respects as a *peripheral* Mexican woman. I take this term, peripheral, from conversations I had with feminists from the State of Mexico during my fieldwork rather than from any critical literature. These conversations prompted me to remember a photograph of a young woman in Mexico City, pictured on the subway en route to a feminist protest, with a banner saying: *Las Mujeres de las Periferias También Valemos* (Women from the Periphery Are Also Worthy). In this context the periphery applies to the edge of the megalopolis of Mexico City, which covers the different municipalities of the State of Mexico that surround the Greater Mexico City. The people living in the edge of the Valley of Mexico, inhabit the periphery, the edge, the margins of the city, which generally are less equipped and have less infrastructure than Mexico City. In this sense, women who inhabit the periphery of Mexico City suffer the invisibility of their social demands and are more vulnerable to gender violence, especially in the non-well equipped municipalities with lack of light on the street, effective security and social justice (figure 3).

My different positionalities informed the ethnographic work. They affected the way I addressed topics such as class and ethnic background, and especially how I approached the complicated issue of otherness, which is crucial for feminist ethnography, and regarding which it is all too easy to slide into polemic. Many different feminists have raised difficult questions regarding studying the other, and centrally studying other women. Mostly Western feminists have been

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com.mx/ecatepec-y-naucalpan-los-peores-lugares-para-vivir-en-mexico/> (Accessed 5 October, 2016).

confronted by accusations about their lack of *rappport* with the women they study and their misrepresentations when studying women that belong to different racial and ethnic backgrounds, especially when these might be considered as women from ‘third world’ countries or women of color (Mohanty 1984; Lugones 2008, 2015; Visweswaran 1994).

In her highly influential article, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984), Chandra Mohanty claimed that third world women have been considered by Western feminists as the ‘Other’ to be rescued from their violent cultures. The result is the reproduction of colonialist practices and the essentialization of Third World women. Gayatri Spivak (1988) in turn questioned whether or not silenced subaltern others can be “given voice” by intellectuals. For her, the subaltern’s voice will always already be coopted and secondary. Its ongoing history has changed the term of this critique. Women of color in the United States have also contested the colonialist gaze. In María Lugones’ words, the term “women of color” is not an identity mark but instead “a term of a coalition that crosses and challenges the fragmentation of racialised groups conceived as closed and waterproof by the modern capitalist coloniality” (2014, 13, *my translation*). For her, this open coalition of women of color in the United States includes black women, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latina, Asian-American, indigenous women, chicanas, boricuas, with a colonial history and a present of coloniality (2008, 82).

These criticisms pose different challenges for the practice of feminist ethnography. The risk of taking away women’s political agency while portraying them as mere informants or victims of their context, especially in so-called Third World countries, has become an ongoing concern for feminist ethnography. In the case of my research, and in evaluating my own positionality, I recognize myself part of that category of “otherness”, in the sense of Trinh T. Minh-ha’s

inappropriate 'other' or 'same' "who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at" (Grzinić 1998). Reflecting on this claim requires an argument that develops in two main directions: the first acknowledges my privileges, and the second identifies the characteristics that produce me as "other", including producing this ethnographic work.

First, I would like to address my academic privileges. In conducting this research, I am writing an academic text which is the result of my interpretation of the cultural practices of these female rappers. Following Bettie's asseveration, it is clear to me that "the text is not simply the result of an even negotiation between ethnographer and subject, because in the end authority literally remains with the ethnographer, as *author* of that text." (2003, 22-23). I am producing these reflections from an institutional context that invests me with authority to write about these ideas, and these women. Furthermore, my institution is Anglophone and requires me to write in English. I am aware that Western and Anglophone academia has been determinant in the colonising project of creating and imposing knowledge over other subjugated knowledge. A lot of responsibility is thus incurred when writing from this specific location about any other. As the primary protagonists of my research are native Spanish-speakers, as am I, I recognise the power I wield when writing their stories and interpreting them in a foreign language. This process means that in transcribing and translating the female rappers' interviews, conversations and indeed music I have felt that there are significant differences between English and Spanish that would potentially be easier to ignore. For this reason, I have decided to retain some of the original Spanish words which refer to local concepts, forms of popular expression among the female rappers, and also fundamental concepts that matter to the experiences and practices of these women, including some that might otherwise be translated into English. These concepts

and popular phrases have been contextualised and explained as clearly as possible, but I think it is important not to replace with an Anglophone approximation simply. Also, the majority of them will not be able to immediately read the results of my research until I translate it to Spanish.

During the fieldwork process I experienced another brief period of doubt about the legitimacy of my research, especially insofar as I was coming from an institutionalised framework to study what these women self-identify as autonomous practices. In fact, I came at one point to feel guilty about having been an institutional feminist for so long. I communicated these feelings to my supervisor while I was in the field, and she gave me good advice. It is fundamental to remember that although we are part of an institution that transforms the stories of such women's lives into institutional knowledge, academia allows me to further disseminate their work, to represent them with as much sympathetic accuracy as I can, and to share their and my experiences as part of the same context. Following on from this reflection, I also consider it important that my participants and I share the privilege of the word – of expression. In the case of the female rappers this is the microphone, and for me, it is the pen. Thus, this thesis documents my process of understanding the protagonists of my research as subjects embodying agency and knowledge, thus challenging the notions that knowledge production only comes from academic institutions.

The main reasons for wanting to situate myself as part of the 'otherness' produced by an ethnography of these women, especially one written for an Anglophone doctoral thesis, is so that I can respond in this analysis to the different meanings generated by specific situations. Having the experience of living abroad has situated me as the other; the foreigner, someone

outside of the culture I am living in and segregated from it. In México I am a *güera*, but overseas I am a Latina.

La herida racial (the racial wound), as coined by Marisa Belausteguigoitia names the racial and class divide based upon the color of skin, and makes evident that “in Latin America and Mexico being a *prieta* or a *güera* counts” (2009, 10, *my translation*). The privilege of being *güera* (fair-skinned), assumed as a mark of richness in Mexican society is contraposed to the discrimination experienced by *prietas* (dark-skinned). Indigenous women, Zapatista women, frontier women, chicanas, are considered *prietas* and “have endowed with analytical, theoretical and experiential content the fact of being a woman and *prieta*, that is to say, the particular interrelation of the variables of race and gender” (Belausteguigoitia 2009, 14, *my translation*). This context reminds me that the female rappers at the centre of this research are young women from a so-called third world country, and so am I. The fact that we belong to the same generational cohort allows us to identify with a series of common experiences. Among them, growing up during the same financial crisis decade of the 1980s and 1990s; being at more risk of experiencing gendered violence, because girls and young women are the main targets; sharing similar generational music and popular culture consumption; and sharing coming of age experiences. Also we come from working-class families and neighbourhoods in México, although from different geographical and ethnic contexts.

Drawing on Lugones’s proposals for decolonial methodologies, insisting that “when thinking about the value of this methodological turn, there is a commitment to value the knowledge that arises from the insurrections of subjugated knowledge” (2011, 789, *my translation*). I thus give equal value and weight to the academic knowledge and the knowledge generated in rappers’ lyrics and workshops. I also accept that ethnographic knowledge is constructed through

interaction, which is always also ‘inter-knowledge’, as theorist Sousa Santos would describe it, meaning a plurality of various knowledges that are not organised by a hierarchy. This knowledge can be connected without compromising the femcees autonomy. In order to make this inter-knowledge mutually intelligible, it is necessary to recognise what Santos calls the ecology of knowledges, a perspective that “aims to provide epistemological consistency for pluralistic, propositional thinking” (2007, 12).

A Feminist Ethnography

While planning my ethnography, I noticed that the vast majority of the research locations would be gig venues and cultural centres, places where Mare and Batallones Femeninos presented their work, generally with around two weeks’ advance announcement on their Facebook pages. Once I embarked on this fieldwork, however, the sites and activities in which I participated expanded to include workshops, not only interviews but also long conversations with band members, travelling together, learning serigraphy (a type of screen printing), and selling the artists’ merchandise and *trueque* (a form of bartering).

From the beginning, it was clear to me that these female rappers’ experiences, both on stage and off-stage and in their every day as well as professional lives, were fundamental to the development of my work. Mare and the members of Batallones Femeninos are used to being interviewed by national and international media. After listening to and reading the different radio, TV and newspaper interviews with them, I knew I didn’t want to repeat the same questions they had already answered many times. Among them: “How is it possible that as feminists and activists are immersed in such a violent atmosphere as rap music?” “How did you come up with the name of Batallones Femeninos?” “How did you get involved in hip-hop

culture?” I wanted to learn, firsthand, about their cultural, social, and geographical contexts and how they related to their everyday lives. I also wanted to understand how their personal experiences fed their cultural practices and how they viewed the ongoing relationship between life and art. I wanted to immerse myself in the processes of their cultural production and be part of the experiences that constructed them as political and artistic subjects.

Judith Stacey wrote in her pioneering text, “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?”, that “ethnography emphasises the experiential. Its approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal, attentive like most women, therefore, to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency” (1988, 22). During my fieldwork, I focused on the lived experience of these femcees, off stage and on stage. I travelled on the SiempreViva Tour in the north of México with Mare Advertencia Lirika and Obeja Negra from Batallones Femeninos. I went to their various performances in Mexico City. I attended the Women’s Urban Festival Feminem in Tlaxcala with Batallones Femeninos. In addition, I went to Oaxaca, Mare’s hometown and joined her in everyday activities and attended different hip-hop events (figure 4). I will give a full account of these activities in what follows, but in this section, I would like to address the genealogy of my feminist ethnography, which responds to the positions taken by both Western and Latin American feminist ethnographers. To do this I am drawing on the work of ethnographies focused on girls in particular subcultures, or on girls who are strongly marked by the axis of race and class in their everyday lives.

For a long time, ethnography appeared to be a Western male-dominated sphere of practice within anthropology. Ethnography was predominantly characterised by supposedly objective perspectives that viewed the subject of research as *the other*, a mere informant, centred on the patriarchal and colonising ethnography legitimised by canonical anthropologists, among them

Bronisław Kasper Malinowski and Franz Boas. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), famously argued that anthropologists had played a key role in European colonialism through the representation of the colonised countries as other, and of the West as ‘civilized’ in contrast to the East and the Global South. But anthropologists themselves have now long interrogated their discipline and their practice with the aim of avoiding such presumptions. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), James Clifford and George E. Marcus, the authors questioned the practices and tropes of both anthropology and ethnography. They explored how ethnography is a fiction that creates an account of ‘others’ that claims to be a valid source of objective knowledge. Nevertheless, *Writing Culture* did not equally question the canon it addressed and the general exclusion of women ethnographers, showing very clearly how women’s writing within ethnography has been undervalued and dismissed. The only woman included in the *Writing Culture* anthology was Mary Louise Pratt, whose essay “Fieldwork in Common Places” examines how the discipline of ethnography was founded as different from “less specialised genres” such as journalism, memoirs and travel books, which were considered as less “scientific” than ethnography.

Writing Culture aroused debates around the subjects of feminist ethnography mainly because the male editors were convinced feminist ethnography had made no significant input to the procedures of the discipline. It seems worth quoting the editors account of this “fact” at length:

Planning the seminar, we were confronted by what seemed to us an obvious – important and regrettable – fact. Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts. Where women had made textual innovations (Bowen 1954, Briggs 1970, Favret-Saada 1980, 1981) they had not done so on feminist grounds. A few quite recent works (Shostak 1981, Cesara 1982, Mernissi 1984) had reflected in their form feminist claims about subjectivity, relationality, and female experience, but these same

textual forms were shared by other, non-feminist, experimental works. Moreover, their authors did not seem conversant with rhetorical and textual theory that we wanted to bring to bear on ethnography. Our focus was thus on textual theory as well as on textual form: a defensible, productive focus. Within this focus we could not draw on any developed debates generated by feminism on ethnographic textual practices. A few very initial indications (for example, Atkinson 1982; Roberts, ed. 1981) were all that had been published. And the situation has not changed dramatically since. Feminism clearly has contributed to anthropological theory. And various female ethnographers, like Annette Weiner (1976) are actively rewriting the masculinist canon. But feminist ethnography has focused either on setting the record straight about women or on revising anthropological categories (for example, the nature/culture opposition). It has not produced either conventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such (1976, 20-21).

In response Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon compiled the book *Women Writing Culture*, in which they wrote:

Writing Culture, not surprisingly, both saddened and infuriated many women anthropologists ... Clifford made the now infamous claim that women anthropologists were excluded (from the compilation of *Writing Culture*) because their writing failed to fit the requirement of being feminist and textually innovative. To be a woman writing culture became a contradiction in terms: women who write experimentally are not feminist enough, while women who write as feminists write in ignorance of the textual theory that underpins their own texts (1996, 4-5).

In fact, as they go on to propose, anthropologists such as Judith Stacey (1988), Lilia Abu-Lughod (1990), and Kamala Visweswaran (1994) had presented feminist critiques of traditional male and colonial ethnography. They have defined feminist ethnography as not only

mainly investigating female experiences but also as prioritising some approaches which had been marginalised within classical ethnography.

In my own work I take up some of these emphases. I would like to focus on first-person narratives, which have been adopted as a key possible strategy for feminist ethnography. I consider this specific form of narration as the intimate account of my first-hand experiences during fieldwork, including an important summary of how these experiences brought me to moments of self-reflection. Visweswaran asserts that “first-person narratives are being selected by women as part of an implicit critique of positivist assumptions and as a strategy of communication and self-discovery” (1994, 23). A first-person voice, however, has been used by many kinds of ethnographers, and something more than an orientation to personal, self-reflexive experience is needed to make ethnography ‘feminist’. For example, male ethnographers such as Malinowski (2013) and Geertz (1977) used the first person in some of their ethnographies.

I approach the task of writing this ethnography with the conviction that a feminist ethnography will have, at its core, the detailed description of, and reflection on, women’s experiences within their specific contexts, oriented at the same time by a feminist theoretical framework that strives to avoid objectification. Visweswaran uses the examples of writers and ethnographers Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Cara Deloria, with their respective ethnographies *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Speaking of Indians* (1944), that “expose how race and gender intertwine to establish a feminist ethnographer’s positionality” (1994, 38). Visweswaran further asserts that Hurston did not use an objectifying gaze in her analysis of African-American cultures and that Hurston’s “tendency to blur genres and to rely on first-person narration is both ‘experimental’ and an early example of feminist ethnographic work” (1994, 33). As Visweswaran asserts in

her experimental ethnography, when departing from a more traditional style of objective ethnography, feminist authors have proposed different approaches that place at the centre of the research process the impact of the researcher's subjectivity in ways that do not take the Other for granted.

In another tenor, but particularly relevant because it deals more directly with the communities arising from popular music, Lauraine LeBlanc proposed to write what she calls an ethnography of resistance while conducting research into girls living in a punk subculture in Canada and the United States during the 1990s. LeBlanc understands ethnography of resistance as "the best methodological strategy to discover acts and accounts of resistance" (1999). In the case of her work, these resistances are exemplified by the double resistance of punk girls to the norms of femininity in society as well as to gender norms within male-dominated punk subculture. She focuses on trying to "access both the 'objective' and 'subjective' aspects of lives, which provide the only types of accounts that can satisfy both the objective and subjective determinants of accounts of resistance" (1999, 20).

Another feminist ethnographer whose interests and ethnographic "objects" clearly overlap with my research, is Julie Bettie, who in *Women Without Class. Girls, Race, and Identity* use ethnographic reflexivity to approach Mexican-American and white girls in a study of the construction of class identity in a small Californian community. Bettie's vision of ethnography "demands that as ethnographers we point to our subjectivity, acknowledge that it undoubtedly shapes the story we tell, and –most importantly– recognize the fact of the power we wield, the power of interpretation" (2003, 22). Both LeBlanc and Bettie refer directly to the intersubjectivity constructed between the researcher and the researched, focusing on an exchange of positionalities in particular moments of a dialogue being conducted by both sides.

LeBlanc reflects on her position as a young researcher concentrated on a subculture to which she belonged, and Bettie represents herself as situated in a complicated relationship with working-class white girls and working-class Mexican-American girls, with these complications derived from a range of racial and class factors.

It was important for me to read these works on girls alongside theories of feminist ethnography because my research was focused on working with young women, which itself involves additional questions about power and privilege than working with women of a different age. In the case of my research, I am part of the same generational cohort of the femcees. We were born in the 1980s and I can relate to them through our coming of age experiences, historical context, language and what is to be a young person in México. I was also working with, and writing about, young women who bring different racial, class and ethnic backgrounds into hip-hop culture. In this sense LeBlanc's and Bettie's reflections on their relation to their ethnographic subjects have helped me find ways to talk about my position as a researcher.

México is a place already defined by a particular social and political context, some of which are concerns more broadly for Latin America. Unlike in Western countries, Latin American ethnographers have largely decided to study their own culture, instead of travelling to far away locations. This tendency has not, however, prevented anthropologists from reproducing colonising and *indigenista* assimilationist approaches and anthropology was an important tool of the *indigenista* Mexican national project.

Numerous scholars have explored the historical power relations between anthropology and the Mexican state, which has given rise to the institutionalization of *indigenismo* (Warman 1970; Gamio 1992; Nahmad 2004; Martinez 2006). Saldívar points out that “the discipline of

anthropology prides itself on its ethnographic approach to everyday phenomena” (2011, 68). In this sense for Castañeda, ethnography has been constituted “from an early stage as a ‘State discipline’ in countries such as México, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, to mention the most representative of this disciplinary situation” (2012, 233, *my translation*). In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, *indigenismo*, as official ideology and system emerged. It was designed “to mestizo-ize the Indians, and at the same time to Indianize the mestizos, to create a national synthesis on the basis of reciprocal contributions” (Knight 1990, 86). Despite the apparent good intentions of *indigenismo* towards the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the modern Mexican society, it was clear the political agenda was to assimilate them to hegemonic mestizo culture and control them through paternalistic public policy (Knight 1990; Bonfil 1994; Saldívar 2008, 2011). Rather than a movement advocating for the liberation of indigenous peoples, *indigenismo* is best understood as a counterpart to the ideology of *mestizaje*, which celebrates the emergence of mestizo identities (white European and indigenous) and the denial of other ethnicities (Franco 2002; Dietz 1999; Chang 2009; Smith 1996).

Therefore, feminist Latin-American ethnographers have taken up the initiatives of feminist ethnography, to give a voice to women who have been silenced by *indigenismo* and other male-centred and/or white ethnographic projects. They have also tended to employ a biographical and autobiographical style and to explicitly situate the women with whom they conduct research as producers of a first-person discourse in their contexts (D’Aubeterre 2000; Hernández 2008). In situating my own research within this context, I want to stress that feminist ethnographies produced in México have emphasised representing the lived experiences of women from non-victimizing perspectives. For example, Sabine Masson (2008) addresses the life stories of Tojolabales indigenous women from the locality of Margaritas in Chiapas. Firstly, mobilised by the alimentary crisis in their respective families, a group of

Tojolabale women created the cooperative Tzome Ixuk, that recently evolved into an indigenous rights woman's defense centre. Masson highlights the organisational and autonomous work in the cooperative as an expression of the empowerment of the Tojolabal women in the region. Along these lines, feminist ethnographers have particularly emphasized the ways that "women move in liminal, border, transit and intermediate places" (Castañeda 2012, 229, *my translation*). Situating women in frontier places means, in the Mexican context, locating them in the liminal spaces of marginalisation and invisibility but at the same time with the potential of rebellion, transgression and resistance.

Mapping the Route

I arrived in Mexico City in the aftermath of the 2016 Nochixtlán confrontation between government forces and teachers, who protested against the Education Reform; at the same time as the visit of photographer Annie Leibovitz to a blackwater river in Chimalhuacán, State of Mexico where dead women appear regularly and during the Tenth Year Anniversary of the Mexican War on Drugs, which has caused more than 160,000 victims.¹⁰ At the beginning of my Mexican fieldwork in July 2016, the panorama was tense and desolate, especially for women and girls. This context was all too familiar to Mare Advertencia Lirika and Batallones Femeninos, indeed it has been documented and denounced in their lyrics and political activism. Their most recent musical productions *Siempre Viva* (Always Alive) and *Vivas Nos Queremos* (We Want Us Alive) respectively made this clear.

This is also, then, the context in which my research must be situated, drawing on many different visual, sensory, auditory, geographical, performative, and textual sources to engage with how

¹⁰According to official numbers in Chimalhuacán, State of Mexico, 1722 women were murdered between 2011 and 2015. http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2016/07/08/actualidad/1468014900_690740.html (Accessed 7 February, 2016).

these feminist hip-hop artists make sense of that context. Some of these sources were analysed before my ethnographic fieldwork and others were specifically identified or located within it. Material I analysed in advance included not only the theoretical and historical literature I have been engaging so far, but also material produced by these artists, including media interviews and the songs on their different musical albums. In the case of Batallones Femeninos: *Informacion Nutrimental* (2012) and *Vivas Nos Queremos* (2014); for Mare, *¡Qué Mujer!* (2010), *Experimental Prole* (2013) and *SiempreViva* (2016). Listening to such songs on Soundcloud or YouTube is very different from listening to the same songs performed live in concert in different locations and to different publics. This is the main reason I included the live performances to be part of my ethnography, because of the importance of the different impact and different sensory experience of the songs in diverse contexts. Live music is fundamental to these artists as performers, while they write lyrics and arrange music, performance is the place of their music creation, of their self-expression; it is also the place of an exchange of emotions between artists and the audience to which they perform.

Given that I thus wanted to engage both with their performances and with the artists themselves, my five-month ethnography took the form of following their travels as performers and activists. I travelled in the North, Centre and South of México where female rappers were performing in different concerts in public plazas and cultural centres, museums, and universities as well as autonomous venues. I also participated in a range of women's autonomy and rap workshops, in which these artists participated during those travels. In addition, I engaged more broadly with the sorority network that made these events possible and offered us accommodation and connected with the radio stations and media outlets that undertook journalistic interviews during the period of my fieldwork. Finally, I took the everyday activities

and conversations on these travels, and the geographical and political context of each of the locations as crucial parts of my fieldwork.

When I began planning my fieldwork, I was aware that travel between different locations in México would be part of my ethnography, in order to follow artists who themselves were travelling performers, but I wasn't aware that it would become the core of my research. I was under the impression before commencing the research that the concerts and workshops would be the most important aspect of the ethnography, however travelling with them ended up being the most significant part in shaping my relations with the female rappers. The thesis evolves as a narrative, some events at the beginning are not clear and become clearer through the development of the ethnography. In that sense the fundamental significance of space and its mapping emerged and materialized throughout the development of the ethnography.

My ethnography has as central elements the experience of travel and the way travel constructs what I call extended sorority networks. The travel axis is central and constant in Mare's and Batallones Femeninos' activism and in their daily conversations, which are full of their different experiences during such nomadic tours, and how these travels feed their lyrics and political positions. Mare has toured with her music in South America, Central America, México, the United States, and most recently France. Batallones Femeninos have travelled extensively both domestically within México as well as to Seattle in the United States via different networks. Mare and Obeja, from Batallones Femeninos, are continuous travellers. This travel constructs and reconstructs them, which is also what happened to me during this music tour and feminist ethnography.

“She went to work; she's on tour”, Mare's relatives say when she cannot attend family events, marriages, and so on. “I am going to be a traveller just like you”, Obeja's niece tells her.

These artists/activists are never sedentary and always on the road, and I had the opportunity to share that embodied experience with them for a brief time. During their SiempreViva tour, Mare and Obeja even announced they would write a song that would relate their travels on this tour, and its title would be “Mi Vida en una Maleta” (My Life in a Suitcase). It is important to remark at this point that my travelling fieldwork brought me to meet many other women who were part of the extended sorority networks of Mare and Batallones Femeninos, and the questions and conversations with these women, some of them other female rappers and others supporters, also formed part of my research.

I first contacted Mare Advertencia Lirika and Obeja Negra, one of the founders of Batallones Femeninos, via their professional Facebook accounts, in the months before my arrival in México. Both expressed enthusiasm when I told them about my research project. Obeja also encouraged me to read *Ley Rebelde de Nosotras en Abya Yala* (The Rebel Law of Us –Women – in Abya Yala) of which she has collaborated. This “law” is under constant revision by women from the Abya Yala region, which is a name for the American continent before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 in various Caribbean islands that are now the Bahamas. More specifically, it is the name given to the land by the Kuna indigenous people of Panama, and it means *tierra madura* – a land in its full maturity or land of vital blood. The rebel women’s law recognizes two main political influences: *feminismo comunitario* (communitarian feminism) (see Mujeres Creando 2008; Paredes 2010; Cabnal 2010), and the *Ley Revolucionaria del EZLN*, or Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Laws, published in *El Despertador Mexicano* (*The Mexican Awakener*) on January 1, 1994.¹¹

¹¹ See <https://es-la.facebook.com/Ley-Rebelde-de-NosotrAs-en-Abya-Yala-660855124056529/> (Accessed 4 May, 2017).

The way Obeja thus inserted a political manifesto into my first engagement with her as a hip-hop artist certainly shaped my research. In my subsequent decision to focus on only Mare and Batallones Femenino's work, I was also made to consider their politics as well as the politics of my engagement with them, as discussed above. I have approached each of the cases by paying attention to various axes. Firstly, their geographical and cultural contexts and how they impact the content of their lyrics and strategies in music production. Secondly, their construction of sorority networks through their feminist activism in the workshops. Thirdly, their community and autonomous practices informed by various ethnic, class and racial backgrounds.

When I told Obeja I had arrived in México and I was staying with my mother and grandmother, she replied, in Facebook chat, "Now I am in Juárez, I'm on my way to Chiapas. Iré de ride (I will hitchhike) to the Comparte in Chiapas, and it finishes on the 30th". Comparte was an event in Chiapas that ran from the 17th to the 30th of July, featuring political and cultural activities with the EZLN. Immediately I asked her: "So you'll be back on the 30th of July?" Obeja answered: "I don't know exactly which day, but I'll let you know as soon as I know it myself". It was the 22nd of July, and I would learn that, in general, this was characteristic of Obeja's travels. Everything was relatively spontaneous within a schedule that offered little room for planning, especially when she was working with Batallones Femeninos. My first thought at that moment, however, given the well-known violent context in the country, was that it was hazardous for her to hitch a ride in this way. Then when I met other girls from Ciudad Juárez they talked about taking *rides* as a widespread practice and surprisingly they did not seem extremely fearful, even though they knew very well about the prevalence of femicide.

On the same day of my arrival, but in Oaxaca, Mare was singing in a cultural event organised by Campaña Nacional en Defensa de la Madre Tierra y el Territorio (National Campaign of Defense of Land and Territory) in Oaxaca. This event was organised by civil, communitarian and social organisations from Oaxaca, and included a forum titled “Estrategias de Lucha para la Defensa de la Madre Tierra y el Territorio” (Fighting Strategies for the Defense of Mother Earth and the Territory) although in a subsequent conversation Mare let me know that she didn’t participate in the talk.¹²

Unlike Obeja, Mare’s Facebook page showed a very punctual schedule of her past, ongoing, and future music events. In this way, I found out she was participating on the 31st of July in the “1er Festival para No Olvidar (First Festival for Not Forgetting) #JusticiaNarvarte”, supporting those affected by homicide and multiple feminicides in the Narvarte neighbourhood in 2015. It also indicated that she would participate in a music tour with Batallones Femeninos in the north of the country during August, performing material from her latest album *SiempreViva*. As luck would have it, apparently I would get the opportunity to see both Mare and Batallones Femeninos in action at the same time and in the same place. When I communicated with Mare to say I had arrived and I would like to meet her, she told me that Obeja from Batallones Femeninos was the organiser of the SiempreViva tour and we could meet during the Narvarte event.

Mexico City/31st July/Mare Advertencia Lirika

Luz Saviñón Street in the Narvarte neighbourhood, a middle-class district located in the central-southern area of Mexico City, was closed. Police patrols flanked the entrance and exit

¹² Mare participated with other Mexican political artists, such as Ruben Albarran of Café Tacuba; Roco, Aldo and Pato, from La Maldita Vecindad, Lengualerta and Moyenei <http://www.defensamadretierra.mx> (Accessed 5 October, 2017).

of the road while the stage for the concert was being set up just in front of building number 1909, where journalist Ruben Espinoza and activists Nadia Vera, Olivia Alejandra Negrete, Yesenia Quiróz, Mile Virginia Martín were murdered in 2015.¹³

Around 4pm, under a bright summer sun, the cultural and political activities began with the instalment of a plaque outside the building to pay tribute to the victims. Immediately the activists and musicians started their performances. Social activists and journalists constituted most of the audience given that the tragedy of this event impacted these people. I saw and greeted some journalist colleagues I had previously worked with, who were covering the event and exchanged some thoughts about the murders being commemorated. I saw Mare near the stage after the other artists had performed and approached her saying, “Hi, I’m Daniela. How are you? I wrote to you, do you remember me?” “Yeah. Sure, let’s talk as soon as I finish”, she replied.

Mare began her performance with the following statement:

I am Mare Advertencia Lirika; I come from the South, Oaxaca. [Oaxaca] has been in the spotlight [because of the teacher’s protests] but sadly is not the only place where such things [violent events] are happening. It happens here [in Mexico City], and the whole world and we need to begin to unify ourselves, to recognise who we are, and who we can count on and trust.

¹³ The victims were photojournalist Rubén Espinoza who had fled Veracruz to his hometown in Mexico City to escape threats he received due to his work covering State Governor Javier Duarte and social and environmental movements. Nadia Vera was from Comitán, Chiapas and studied at Veracruz University in the state capital of Xalapa. Trained as an anthropologist, she was an activist in Xalapa and like Rubén left for Mexico City after receiving threats. Yesenia Quiróz and Mile Virginia Martín lived in the apartment in Narvarte along with Nadia. Olivia Alejandra Negrete was a housecleaner at the residence. The murders shook the journalistic community in Mexico City, which is considered a safe haven from the violence against journalists in other states of Mexico. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/who-killed-ruben-espinoza-and-nadia-vera> (Accessed 14 January, 2017).

Of the nine songs played during the event, seven were from Mare's latest album, *Siempre Viva*. Between the songs Mare addressed the audience, who were mainly women. They barely knew the lyrics, but they followed Mare's instructions for their participation, especially when she sang "Libres y Vivas". Her efforts to interpellate the audience were explicit. She said:

There have been several different demonstrations related to sexual harassment. The demand becomes common. We want to walk free on the streets, we want security in our spaces, and we want to live. Yes or No?

And immediately the female audience exclaimed in unison: "Yesss!!!" Mare continued:

Because of this, this song is called 'Libres y Vivas'" (Free and Alive). She then instructed the audience: When I say, I don't want your *piropo* (catcalling) I want your respect, I want you to say – *Libres y Vivas Nos Queremos* (We want Us Free and Alive). I am inviting the *compañeras* (female colleagues), but obviously male colleagues who wish to join the struggle are welcome, we need more hands here.

She gave the instructions three times and then began singing.¹⁴

This strategy of interpellating the female audience is a constant in Mare's music performances, especially with songs such as "Libres y Vivas" (Libres y Vivas), "Luna" (Moon) and "Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista)" (Annoying Woman [Feminist Manifesto]). They would be repeated in every one of Mare's concerts I attended. In the case of "Luna", she declares this a bewitching song, aimed at witches, to honour all *compañeras*. "Incómoda is a song that articulates Mare's feminist position. Mare finished this first concert I attended with the song "Gracias", as "a tribute to those who are here and those who are not here anymore". The title alludes to the popular Chilean folk song "Gracias a la Vida" (Thanks to the Life). Originally

¹⁴ See Patricia Gaytan Sanchez's book *Del Piropo al Desencanto. Un Estudio sociológico* (2009) for a sociological study of the dynamics of street harassment in Mexico City.

composed and interpreted by Chilean singer Violeta Parra (1917-1967), and the beginning of “Gracias” incorporates the fifth stanza of this song, stressing formally and lyrically the unity she calls for:

Así yo distingo dicha de quebranto
Los dos materiales que forman mi canto
Y el canto de ustedes que es el mismo canto
Y el canto de todos que es mi propio canto
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto¹⁵

When Mare’s concert finished, I approached her while some young women, who seemed to be activists from different collectives, were taking photos with her. I bought her new album from her – I had already listened to her new material via Soundcloud, but I wanted to have the album – and asked her about the music tour in the North. Again, she told me I had to talk with Obeja because she was organising everything. I told her I would go on the tour. She smiled, and it began to rain. Luckily, I had brought an umbrella.

August was a month full of activities and it constituted the core of my fieldwork, because I travelled to so many places in the north of the country. During this month I spent 16 days in Mexico City meeting some members of the female rapper collective Batallones Femeninos (mainly in South and Center/downtown of Mexico City). The other 15 days I travelled to the north of the country (Torreón/Coahuila, Gómez Palacio/Durango, Chihuahua/Chihuahua, and Cd Juárez/Chihuahua) on the SiempreViva tour with Mare Advertencia Lirika and Obeja Negra from Batallones Femeninos. But before the tour commenced I also attended the women and hip-hop workshop with Swedish feminist rapper Silvana Imam and Batallones Femeninos

¹⁵ I distinguish happiness from pain; Two of the ingredients that form my singing; And your song, that is mine too; And the song of all, that is my singing; Thank you, life, for giving me so much (*my translation*).

mentioned previously, as well as a concert featuring both these rap exponents, and I conducted a lengthy interview with Obeja and Poly, another member of Batallones Femeninos.

Mexico City/5 and 6 August/Batallones Femeninos

On the 28th of July, Obeja from Batallones Femeninos invited me to “Femcees, to raise the voice: Hip-Hop Journeys and Gender”, with Silvana Imam and Batallones Femeninos. The event consisted of the following: on the 5th of August, a two-hour gender and hip-hop workshop with Imam and Batallones Femeninos and a concert with the rappers and DJ Baby Bruise; then, on the 6th of August, there would be a discussion of the documentary *Sonita*. Gender, hip-hop and human rights were the main elements that brought together from very distant geographies, a Swedish feminist lesbian rapper and a Mexican female rap collective. The Swedish Embassy in México and the 5th *MicGenero Muestra Internacional de Cine con Perspectiva de Genero*, (International Film Festival with Gender Perspective) organised Imam’s two-day visit and this feminist rap encounter at the Centro Cultural España en México (Spanish Cultural Center) CCEMX in Mexico City. The workshop would be in English, with an interpreter, and the event, was limited to a maximum of 15 people. My work with Batallones Femeninos was about to begin.

The workshop in CCEMX with Silvana Imam had an informal format, aiming for an open discussion with the female rappers and with the young female assistants. The topics covered in this workshop ranged from musical influences; feminisms from Latin America and México; the personal and the community; female stereotypes; and social movements such as Ayotzinapa, the teacher’s struggle, and EZLN; and violence toward women in México.¹⁶ On

¹⁶ Many books have been published discussing the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, among them: Grecko (2016); Maldonado (2015); Gibler (2016).

this occasion I met for the first time the whole Mexico City crew of Batallones Femeninos, with Obeja, who is one of the founding members from Ciudad Juárez. The crew from México City formed in 2014 with Poly, Luna, Xibakbal, and Yazz. As well as these members I also met and talked with Fabiola Masta Quba, who was not in this particular workshop, during my five-month stay. They comprise a significant section of this rap collective, although there are other members, such as Dilema, Siniestra, and Murder Doble H, all from Ciudad Juárez, who were, with Obeja, the founders of this hip-hop group. The other member at this time who I did not meet was Xirena, from Nayarit and Poesia Mariarte, from Seattle.

Before returning to this particular event, I would like to address two connected issues. The first is that during my fieldwork there were so many events related to music, women and feminism in México, especially in the Centre-South region of the country. I could not go to all of them and focused on those who were attended by Mare and Batallones Femeninos. It should be noted that these events were mostly organised by feminist autonomous collectives, underground music venues, by cultural centres, museums, university institutions, or foreign Embassies. The second issue is that these events all had an element in common, the workshop format, which mainly consisted of open conversations that centred on talking about violence toward women. It is consequence of the fact that there had been a rise in the number of femicides in the country, especially in the metropolitan area of the State of Mexico, a region very close to Mexico City. These conditions, as well as demand for music and cultural production for increasingly politically active young women, encouraged interactive activities with the public.

Among the other events which took place in different venues in Mexico City at this time were those organised by Museo Universitario El Chopo (Chopo University Museum) and Foro Alicia, a cultural and musical underground venue in La Roma neighbourhood. The event

organised by El Chopo was titled, Estruendo Multilingüe Festival Internacional de Músicas Indígenas Contemporáneas (Multilingüe Thunder International Festival of Contemporary Indigenous Music) and the one in Foro Alicia was El Sonido y la Furia (The Fury and the Sound). These conversations took place over four days during November in the evening, with free admission. The first one was on the 3rd of November, with the topic “Women, music and violence”; the next was on the 10th, on “Youth and Social Movements”; the third was on the 17th, on “Youth and Work”; and the last, on the 24th, focused on “Cultural Venues and Youth Socialization”. During each session some bands played, mostly featuring women. Also important, on the 4 and 5th of November, was “Ruidosa Fest – mujeres que hacen ruido”, a feminist musical festival in Mexico City. This event was, mostly organized by Chilean people, and the CCEMX. Mare participated in this event, on both days. On the Friday she participated in the panel “Punk, Rap and Cumbia in Latin America” in Centro Horizontal, and the other participants were Jenny Bombo and Al’I Gua Gua (both former members of Las Ultrasónicas) and Planta Carnívora, Riobamba.

The Rehearsal

Once a week, for two or three hours; that’s the time Batallones put aside to rehearse. Obeja explained this when, after the workshop, she invited me to their rehearsal a couple of blocks distance from CCEMX. We walked from downtown Mexico City to Mesones Street. During the 15-20 minutes’ walk we had lunch and then continued on our trajectory. Once there, Obeja introduced me to the other members telling them about my research. I was a bit nervous at first, but the other members appeared very welcoming and interested. The rehearsal space was an apartment owned by a friend, a DJ specialising in Dub music who had collaborated with them on some tracks. They began rehearsing with “Mujer Guerrera” and then continued through the rest of the songs in playlist order for the performance.

It was the first time in a long time that they had rehearsed together, because Obeja had been in Ayotzinapa for twelve months, so it took them some time to organise the order of the songs. Over the course of my fieldwork, I would attend many different rehearsals; I was also in the room when they were preparing their song for a performance on the independent media channel *Desinformémonos* and before their presentation in the concert titled *BBC 100 Women*. During breaks in this first rehearsal, they talked about the interview they had with a feminist Norwegian radio station at Comparte in Chiapas in July. They also listened to music – some dub and some drum & bass, as well as Mexican rappers from different hoods in Mexico City. Finally, they asked me about what I was doing. One of the girls who was accompanying the rappers thought I was an anthropologist. Her questions – “Are you taking notes?” “How is your research going?” “What do you do?” – made me reflect differently on my relation to the way the ethnographic process has been so closely associated with the discipline of classical anthropology.

Concert Bahía Bar

A tattooed image of Tongolele – an exotic dancer and actress from the 40s and 50s Mexican cinema – decorated the stage background of Bahia Bar; her distinctive white patch of hair caressed by Hokusai’s *The Great Wave*. This cultural melange was also apparent in the music, with DJ Baby Bruise playing dancehall, rap and cumbia. Following the music’s rhythm, a small group of young b-boys and b-girls were taking the dance floor just before Batallones Femeninos would make their entrance, around 11 pm.¹⁷

We had taken the subway after the rehearsal in Mesones Street, from Salto del Agua subway

¹⁷Cumbia is a popular musical genre from Colombia, with a mixture of African, indigenous and Spanish rhythms.

station to Balderas station (a 15-minute trip). When we arrived at Bahia Bar, around 9:40 pm, there was a very long queue of young people that looked to be in their 20s and were wearing street clothes associated with a hip-hop, dub, or reggae audience. Here, the Batallones Femeninos crew met with other rappers, among them Ollinka, a Mexican singer and activist. Some of the assistants were talking about having already seen Batallones Femeninos during the Comparte event in Chiapas in July. It was already clear that this audience was connected with both hip-hop culture and social movements.

Si el hombre es de la calle y la mujer de la casa

¡Basta!

Pa' qué naciste vieja/el machismo mata, lastima, duele

separa, limita

el machismo mata

lastima, duele/separa, limita

el machismo mata/el machismo mata

el machismo mata¹⁸

The Batallones Femeninos concert began with these lyrics, addressing their audience in two different directions. When addressing the female audience directly they called them “ladies in the house”, and the male audience as “compas solidarios” (solidary dudes), the ones that in their words during an interview “are deconstructing themselves to have a more emancipated society”.

¹⁸ If man is from the Street/ and woman from house/Stop it/Why were you born a woman? Machismo kills, hurts, is painful/separates, limits (*my translation*).

Most of the songs played during this concert were part of their latest production, *Vivas Nos Queremos*, and some from their previous albums, including songs written by the members from Ciudad Juárez, Dilema and Siniestra, such as “Así era ella” (She was like this). Among the new songs, they sang “Represent”, “Mujer Guerrera” (Warrior Woman), “Libre, Linda y Loca” (Free, Beautiful and Crazy), “Sin Miedo” (Without Fear). Between these songs they shout “We Are Not Princess, We Are Warriors”, “We come from *el barrio* (the hood)”, and “We Want Us Alive’. The audience in the front, who were mostly young women, applauded and followed the crew’s instructions to cry out loud: ¡Vivas nos queremos! Almost at the end of the performance they also cried out: “We have a message to the rapists: “Verga violadora a la licuadora y si no hay luz con machete” (Raper dick to the blender and if there’s no electricity with a *machete*). Part of the male audience that were listening to the song kept silent at this point, while the women in front continued singing the stanza. After this song, they said goodbye, singing the following line: “¡Vivas nos queremos!” Afterwards, it was Silvana Imam’s turn, but she invited the members of Batallones Femeninos back on stage when she sang “Svär på min mamma” (Swear on My Mother). Seven young women were then on the stage, rapping in different languages with the same objective: to fight patriarchy.

Sonita documentary conversation

The next day, following the activities in MICGenero, I went to the screening of *Sonita* (2015), a documentary by Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami. This story is about a young Afghani girl who is a refugee in Iran and uses rap to denounce forced marriage among Afghan families (such as the one she has been forced to). I had already seen this documentary, as well as discussion with the filmmaker, during the Sydney Film Festival 2016 in Australia. In México, the female rappers from Batallones Femeninos, Swedish artists Imam and pop artist Beatrice Eli, Jessy P, member and founder of Mujeres Trabajando, Afromega, and Nelly Lucero Lara Chávez (2016),

an academic from UNAM were all invited to comment on the documentary.

Obeja was the only member of the collective on stage, although Poly was in the audience, which was very small. The chair of the discussion was a journalist from *Vice*. The topics addressed during this conversation centred on feminist rap in the Mexican context, rather than the political context of the film; the *prácticas autogestivas* (self-governance practices), in contrast with the mainstream music industry as well as the femcees' negotiation process with their families in the development of their music career.

The artists on stage responded to this story very personally. Jessy P, from *Mujeres Trabajando*, for example, said "... what I can mention about Sonita's story is the clear example of [how?] hip-hop saved my life". Obeja continued, "for me Sonita is the greatest expression of how this patriarchal system brings women to the extremes of taking death or life decisions". I consider it important to address their reflections because when I went in September to Oaxaca with Mare, the *Sonita* documentary topic emerged. Mare told me she had seen the film and had shared her thoughts with me. For her, the documentary was sad, not only because of the topic but also because by the end Sonita was saved from getting married very young when she could flee to the United States. Being able to leave that oppression was only beneficial to Sonita, while other girls still live in those oppressive conditions. Sonita's opportunity of leaving did not extend to other girls. It is on this principle that Mare is deeply engaged and politically concerned with the impact of advancements to the whole community, not only for an individual.

The previous day, during *Batallones Femeninos*' rehearsal, I had also met another girl who was beginning to study women in hip-hop in Latin America in the Universidad Autónoma de la

Ciudad de México. This evidence of academic interest in feminist hip-hop in the region, and that it is finally beginning to be theoretically addressed is matched by the attention paid by popular media. This emergent self-proclaimed feminist movement within hip-hop culture, which challenges hetero-patriarchal structures, has been lately covered by media networks such as the BBC, The Guardian and Al Jazeera, among others. As we wait while Lara Chávez finishes interviewing Obeja, in one of the CCEMX corridors, Poly, who has worked for Zapote radio, an independent network, tells me, “I think that researchers (of female rappers) are becoming hip-hop promoters. Also, I think you are necessary people because you have the neutrality that I have experienced when I’ve been a journalist”. Poly’s declaration draws my attention, differently, to my role as a researcher of this particular cultural movement, and my relation to other women researchers working on this topic and also more generally, as I discussed in chapter one, working on feminist rap and as playing an important role in the dissemination of these important cultural products.

As soon as Lara Chávez finishes her interview with Obeja, we leave CCEMX and head towards Donceles Street where we find a *cocina económica* (daily food at low cost). We had lunch together and talked about the important work of the crew Mujeres Trabajando and then I decided to find a place to have an extended interview with Obeja and Poly from Batallones Femeninos. We walked ahead to Madero Street in downtown Centro Historico and finally entered VIPS, a family restaurant, to avoid the coming rain. Now it was my turn to formulate some questions.

On Stage/Off stage

I narrated my first encounters very fully with Mare Advertencia Lirika and some of the members of Batallones Femeninos above, because I wanted to show the style of activities,

environments, and discussions that emerged as I began my ethnography and that began to shape the organisation of my fieldwork and writing. I did notice from the beginning a sort of separation between the on-stage and off-stage presence and activities of the female rappers. By on-stage activities, I mean the concerts and other hip-hop performances, while the off-stage activities took three primary forms: the workshops; the open talks with the public; and conversations during the daily activities and continual construction of sorority networks. So I decided to divide my ethnography into two big sections: On Stage and Off Stage. The discussion of Mexican feminist hip-hop on-stage is focused on the lyrics, the performance, the positioning of the body on stage, the use of voice during the concerts and the environment of these performances. The off-stage discussion covers the travel itself, being on the road, on tour, but also the political and community activism, the different workshops related to women's autonomy, which also use the voice and rap, and the daily conversations sustaining what I will call the braiding of extended sorority networks.

The historical and political context of the country was also a constant presence. During my fieldwork, I would attend and be witness to many different political demonstrations that form part of the historical background and memory of *Mare and Batallones Femeninos*. The second anniversary of Ayotzinapa's 43 disappeared students. The huge demonstration demanding the resignation of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (#Renuncia EPN), on the 15th of September, the same day as Mexican Independence. The protest of the 19th of October against femicide in México. The International Day against Violence towards Women on November 25th, as well as several demonstrations against the government's current Education Reform. This intense political engagement reflects the concerns of these rappers. The rate of feminicides has increased in the whole country as well as forced disappearances during the last decade. This conflagration of human rights violations reflects the conditions of war, in which women's

bodies are so often both constituted as primary targets and become war booty. This context is a fundamental framework for my research object, which constantly feeds on the changing and ongoing movement of political events.

Participating in the lives of the rappers on whom I focus here thus involved me in musical and non-musical events. As I mentioned above, in July I met Mare Advertencia Lirika in Mexico City while she was giving a concert supporting the Narvarte case. On that occasion, she only gave a show, and we talked about the SiempreViva tour, which I would follow. Later at the beginning of August, I met all the members of the Mexico City crew of Batallones Femeninos in Mexico City downtown, during the visit of Silvana Imam and undertook the first extended interviews with two of the members, Poly and Obeja. From the 10th to the 21st of August I followed the SiempreViva tour in the northern Mexican states of Coahuila, Durango and Chihuahua, travelling with Mare and Obeja. On the 26th of August I attended a concert by Batallones Femeninos in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences in UNAM staged as part of the UN campaign HeForShe. The whole month of September I followed Mare Advertencia Lirika in her work, encompassing different concerts in Mexico City and in her hometown Oaxaca. I also conducted a lengthy interview with her. Among the highlights was her Grito Feminista performance on the 15th of September, a clear allusion to the official *Grito de Independencia* (Cry of Independence) made by the Mexican President.

In October, I participated in a mix of events involving Mare Advertencia Lirika or Batallones Femeninos. In the case of Mare, I attended one concert in Mexico City, where she performed with a very well-known figure in Latin American hip-hop, Karen Pastrana, a former member of Argentinian female hip-hop collective Actitud Maria Marta. In the middle of October, I attended a Batallones Femeninos concert in UNAM in the Faculty of Philosophy as well as the

recording of a song for media independent Mexican network Desinformémonos and I attended Batallones Femeninos' performance in Tlaxcala in the 5th Feminem urban street art event. In the last month, November, I followed the participation of Mare in the *Ruidosa Fest* event in Mexico City with a talk and a concert with other Latin American female artists from different music genres. And finally, on the 24th of November, I attended the performance of Batallones Femeninos in the *BBC 100 Women* event in downtown Mexico City. All of these were interwoven with off-stage activities in which I came to know these rappers as I supported, learned from, and travelled with them.

Braiding Sorority Networks

It is the night of Friday the 12th of August and Obeja is weaving my hair in a two double French braid. We are in Torreón, Coahuila, during the SiempreViva tour and Mare and Obeja are preparing themselves for the concert in the public plaza of El Pensador. We are talking about Geobrujas (GeoWitches) the Facebook page that Kar Helena, a feminist geographer from Mexico City and friend we have in common, is constructing. The page is focused on the creation of an accurate Mexican feminicide map. On this rhythm our conversations developed – braiding thoughts like strands of hair.

In México, girls' hair gets braided from a very early age (as soon as it gets long enough) by our mothers, grandmothers, and girlfriends. This activity constructs an intense connection between women, both metaphorical and explicit intimacy that creates sorority networks. Chicana and Latina feminist scholarship has used *trenzas* (braids) as a metaphor to express values, multiple identities, shared knowledge and common vocabulary (Gonzalez 1998; Quiñones 2016). Obeja braided Mare's hair and mine. When she offered herself to braid my hair for the concert, even though I was not one of the performers, I felt embraced. Obeja's act

of braiding my hair wove between us cultural knowledge, practices, identities, and affective connections. As I mentioned in the introduction this *trenzado* (braiding) has had a profound effect on how I think about my research and writing. It is not only a metaphor for the different people, stories and ideas I weave together here, but also is tangible in “the braiding story critical to consciousness-raising experiences about race/ethnicity, gender” (Quiñones 2016, 340).¹⁹

Most of our extended conversations emerged in such intimate situations. Some of our topics were related to our family’s histories, our thoughts on romantic love, feminisms, political opinions, and the personal experiences that brought us to feminism and *medicina tradicional* (home remedies). During the SiempreViva tour (figure 5), Mare suggested many home remedies to me, especially for a sore throat, such as eating garlic and rinsing my mouth with apple vinegar. Also she gave me *sangre de grado* to cicatrise my wounds after being bitten by mosquitoes, -known as moyotes, in the North of the country- during the rainy season.²⁰ Of course, we also talked about music, and our musical tastes. Many times during the tour in August, Mare or Obeja would play their preferred songs from different genres, mainly protest music, rap in Spanish, salsa, cumbia, and they would ask me if I knew the groups. I knew some of them, some others I didn’t. They then talked about the songs they liked and how they were connected with their life experiences and feelings.²¹

Esta noche mi gente, de frente,
tiene una cuenta pendiente
y la va a querer cobrar.

¹⁹ Another example of the significance of this weaving hair from the frontier of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso Texas is seen in this protest against U.S. President Trump: <http://fusion.net/story/382073/women-on-u-s-mexico-border-weave-their-hair-together-in-a-giant-braid-to-protest-trump/> (Accessed 25 January, 2017)

²⁰ Sangre de grado or Sangre de Drago is a plant with anti-inflammatory healing properties

²¹ The salsa musical genre was born in New York with some of its most important exponents Ruben Blades, Willie Colon. The members of Batallones Femeninos would go to the Willie Colon concert in Mexico City the 15 of September, while I was with Mare.

Los callejones vomitarán su rabia en las avenidas,
va a ser interrumpida la pulcritud del mármol de los palacios
por la estampida de nuestras botas,
que ya están rotas,
de bailar al son del poderoso,
al compás del que atribuye la norma.²²

Obeja sings while she plays, on YouTube, ‘La Danza de los Nadie’ (No One’s Dance) by Spanish rap crew Hechos Contra el Decoro. As Obeja sings, we fold and paste the paper cover on copies of Batallones Femeninos’ latest CD, in preparation for selling them during the concert in Galeria Las Animas in downtown Chihuahua, the penultimate stop of the SiempreViva tour. We stay in a hotel in downtown Chihuahua, while Mare is being interviewed by a local radio station. Obeja tells me they sang those lyrics during protests in Ciudad Juárez after asking for permission from the Spanish rappers.

“Musically we said wow, rap wow, politics, wow and socialist wow”, Obeja says, while she plays other songs from the same group. And then Obeja begins to prepare all the equipment for the serigraphy. We are about to begin designing the Batalones Femenino’s t-shirts to sell later at the concert. As we do the printing, we begin to listen to “La Niña” (The Girl) by Spanish female rapper La Mala Rodriguez, as the room begins to be impregnated with the odour of the tints and the heat of the clothes iron. I am more skillful doing the serigraphy now than I was the first time in Torreón.

²² Tonight my people, that stands at the front, has a pending account and will want to charge it. The alleys will vomit their rage on the avenues, the neatness of the marble of the palaces will be interrupted by the stampede of our boots, which are already broken because of dancing to the sound of the powerful, to the compass of whom is attributed the norm” (*my translation*).

Once, during the tour, Obeja asked me, what do you listen to, generally? I answered, punk. We were having a small break between the concerts, and the workshops and Mare were playing some Latin-American rap music on her laptop. I already knew Mare was not into punk, she said it was too “sharp”, and it was one of the music genres she disliked, but Obeja liked to learn new things. So Obeja asked me to play a song from one of the bands I used to listen to. I played “Crudo Soy” (I am Crude) from Latino punk band *Los Crudos*. I looked for them because from the beginning this band has been very politically committed to their Latino identity origins, in the same way, Mare and Obeja are committed to the struggles of their political contexts. Later during one of our conversations, I would learn that Mare and Obeja listened to many styles of music, and not all of them were necessarily politicised, but all involved critical reflection in the lyrics.

During one of our conversations Mare tells me:

Only talking about politics is very stressful, is exhausting, to have always a dialogue, a position, because people expect that from you ... You have to digest regularly all the reality, because finally to have a position, an analysis, you need to have had a process of digesting it, and this digesting, is difficult.

Sometimes Mare listens to music, not necessarily political music, just to relax. She introduces me to some of the musicians she likes. Regarding rap music performed by men, she enjoys the low tone voice of Phyzh Eye from Mexican state, San Luis Potosi, and Spanish rapper Sharif for his calm and nostalgic voice. Among different female rappers, she highlights Mexican rapper Hispana Mamba Negra, because “she is very *ruda* (tough)”. Los Rakas, a Latino group from the United States, pops up in the conversation as one of her favourites. There is also a female musician from Colombia, Lianna, who sings in the “New Jack swing” style popular in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, we listen to some classical salsa songs from

Rubén Blades, like “Pedro Navajas”. “My favourite salsa is ‘Amores como el Nuestro’ from Jerry Rivera” (a Puerto Rican salsa singer), Mare tells me, while she plays the song on YouTube.

We begin to sing together: “Amores como el nuestro quedan ya muy pocos”, and we laugh because we both know the lyrics perfectly. She says, “I talk about the deconstruction of romantic love and this is one of my favourite lyrics. I love it, I can listen to it a thousand times, it has something”, and then we continue singing: “Como los unicornios van desapareciendo” (translation). “It’s so stupid, the unicorns do not exist”, Mare laughs. And we continue singing: “un amor como el nuestro no debe morir jamás”.²³ “Amores como el Nuestro” is a very popular salsa song that we have both listened to since our childhood and maybe because of this, we relate to its rhythm and lyrics. Mare is aware of the nonsense of these romantic love lyrics but as she remarks: “I don’t have a discourse that I listen to”. This construction of feminist complicity could make echo of what Marta Cabrera designates as *affective economies* “that reorder social and sensory space (...) Understood in this way, affect becomes a performative, mobile forcé, capable –by the sheer strength of its attachments- of lining bodies and experiences, individuals and collectives; it promotes agency and is key to the production of other ways of knowing” (2016, 198). However, for the purposes of this thesis I read these feminist dialogues not as part of the field of affect theory but as part of the intersubjective exchanges proper to feminist ethnography.

²³ “Amores como el Nuestro” (Loves like Ours) by Jerry Rivera appeared on his 1992 music album *Cuenta Conmigo* (Count on Me). This album is the highest-selling salsa album of all-time Awarded “Tropical Album of the Year” at the Lo Nuestro Awards 1993. Some of the extracts we sang were: “There are only few loves like ours left...; Like the unicorns, Go on disappearing; To love and to be loved, Is to be given in completely A love like ours, Should never die” (*my translation*).

As these vignettes of braiding hair and singing old songs suggests, I experienced significant changes in my relationship to the feminist rappers I came to research on my fieldwork. At the beginning, I felt I was looking at them from outside, observing the concerts, workshops, and all the other phenomena, but as the time passed my involvement changed, and I began to become more engaged, forging a personal friendship with Mare and Obeja in particular. I remember our stop in Chihuahua during the SiempreViva Tour, after I had become accustomed to helping out with the tour by selling, during the concerts, the t-shirts, stickers, and music CDs that these artists need to sell to help support all their activities. During this concert, one guy from the audience who was interested in buying the merchandise asked me: “Are you part of the SiempreViva tour?” Maybe it was the manner in which he formulated the question that made me feel so clearly interpellated and I answered straightforward, “Yes I am”. He didn’t ask anything more. But yes, at that point I was already part of them, of the extended Batallones Femeninos and Mare sorority crew.

CHAPTER 3 BATALLONES FEMENINOS

Taking the floor in *Juaritos*, a laboratory city

In an interview during my fieldwork, Rosalba Robles, an academic from Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ), stated of Ciudad Juárez:

I say that we are a laboratory city because it appears that here is where many things begin and then go to the Center or the South of the country. We were the first cities on the installation of a new labour market which is the *maquiladora* ... here is the place where the discussion of femicide began to be spoken out loud.²⁴

Geopolitical ambiguity, trade in illegal substances amidst the more general constant flow of commerce, and the continual mass transit of people have characterised the Mexican and American border cities of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas, since 1659, when Paso del Norte was founded. At that time, the Catholic mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (also founded in 1659) and the presidio Paso del Norte, were the heart of the colonial Mexican settlement. The current international border was created in 1848, after the American annexation of Texas and the cession of territory from México at the end of the USA-Mexican War (1846-1848). The settlement on the northern shores of the Río Grande took the name of El Paso. Living in between spaces was set up before the border was completely established. Therefore, Batallones Femenino's experiences and cultural production is materialized in a frontier psychology which existed before the border itself.

²⁴ The American journalist Charles Bowden has also called Juárez a laboratory in his photo essay *Juarez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998), although this has been criticized for its colonial and objectifying narrative. In *meXicana Encounters*, Rosa-Linda Fregoso wrote that "Bowden's perversity, his racist and colonialist gaze constructs border women as abject" (2003, 15).

With the arrival of the railway in 1884 and the subsequent boost to commerce, the state government of Chihuahua officially recognized Paso del Norte as a city in 1888. Its name was changed to Ciudad Juárez in honour of Mexican president Benito Juárez who temporarily installed his government in the border in 1865 amid the French Intervention in México (1862-1867). Historically a city of passage, as its former name confirms, El Paso has been witness to large waves of immigrants, attracted by the Mexican Revolution, then later the *bracero* program and currently the *maquila* industry (both of these will be discussed below). At the beginning of the twentieth century, then, the city would be a key protagonist in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), functioning as the battleground of different militia factions and as the base for the provisional presidencies of Francisco I. Madero (1911) and Francisco Villa, also known as the commander of the Division of the North (1913 and 1914) and, in Mexican popular culture, as the Centaur of the North. The agricultural industry was also affected by lack of water, propitiated by the American farmers who controlled the irrigation from the Río Grande, and other industries were damaged by internal commercial obstacles furthered by war. Thus, during the Revolution, many citizens of Juárez decided to immigrate to the United States because of ensuing insecurity and unemployment.

These factors propelled the city towards tourism as a key economic alternative. Ciudad Juárez would become a centre of entertainment for Americans, especially in the Prohibition Era.²⁵

American consul John W Dye stated in 1921 that:

Juárez is the most immoral, degenerate and utterly wicked place I have ever seen or heard in my travels. Murder and robbery are everyday occurrences and gambling, dope

²⁵ Also known as the Volstead Act. Between 1918 and 1934 this law generated large waves of Americans crossing the border to consume alcohol in the bars and saloons of Mexican frontier border towns.

selling and using, drinking to excess and sexual vice are continuous. It is a Mecca for criminals and degenerates from both sides of the border (Jáquez 2003, 151).

This representation persisted well into the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. It would get worse with the wave of feminicides that began in 1993 and the increase of criminal activity propelled by the Mexican War on Drugs beginning in 2006, and the local version of the Drug War called Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua (Chihuahua Joint Operation), beginning in 2008 (Gibler 2011).

These events would transform Juárez into one of the most dangerous cities in the world, especially for women, whose bodies would be especially targeted as disposable objects and war booty. As Jean Franco and Henfried Munkler argue, “in wars whose aim is to expel large sections of the population—women are no longer just booty, trophies or sex objects; they have become the conqueror’s main target of attack” (2005, 82). But even before the War on Drugs and the disappearance and murder of girls and young women associated with this, *la maquiladora* - the export-processing factories situated in México, often incorrectly referred to as ‘twin plant’ industries (see Arreola and Curtis 1993) – arrived. Their impact on the social dynamics and the urban landscape of Juárez would be crucial.

Maquiladora are not only industrial parks, but also require automobile and truck highways, and bridges and gate crossings to the American border towns, and to the interiors of México and the United States, needed for the transportation of materials for processing as well as goods produced in maquiladoras located on the outskirts of towns. These have become part of the signature landscape of Ciudad Juárez. The maquiladora industry began in 1965 with Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza (Border Industrialization Program BIP) (Valenzuela 2015; Arreola and Curtis 1993). This program was instituted in response to the end of the Programa

Bracero (Bracero Program promoting Mexican Agricultural Labor) between México and United States in 1964. The end of the bracero program which had been established to encourage a flow of migrant workers into the U.S. during wartime, required a changed relation between industry, labour and the border, and the BIP aimed to establish employment opportunities for Mexicans along the border after the United States ended this program. This situation was exacerbated when, in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed between Canada, United States and México came into effect.²⁶

In the 1990s, Ciudad Juárez hosted roughly 350 manufacturing plants owned primarily by U.S transnational corporations. At that time these plants employed 180,000 workers who were paid around USD\$23 per week in take-home pay. Currently Ciudad Juárez has 36 industrial parks and seven industrial reserves all locating maquiladoras. Under NAFTA, Ciudad Juárez became the perfect soil for maquiladoras, giving employment mainly to women, which represented 80% of the industry labour's force. Daniel Arreola and James Curtis take up the argument of Fernández-Kelly (1983) that, "sociologically, the large labor pools – chiefly of women – who are employed in border-city maquiladoras represent a new incarnation of the debt peons of the colonial *hacienda*" (1993, 206), and "The 'new hacienda' of the Mexican border typically is an industrial park maquiladora" (Arreola and Curtis 1993, 207).

The Mexican maquiladora industry finds the female unskilled workforce desirable for a series of reasons. Their dexterity, attention to detail, and patience make them perfectly suited for the minute repetitious tasks of producing TV sets, automobile parts, electronics and clothing.

²⁶ The Bracero Program, named after the Spanish word *brazo* (arm), meaning 'one who works using his arms', was a series of agreements initiated in August 1942, when the United States needed an expanded workforce during the Second World War. This agreement gave basic human rights and a minimum wage to Mexican workers in the United States (Chacón 2008).

These skills are supplemented by a supposed cultural predisposition to docility and submissiveness, presumed to make Mexican women especially thankful for this work and more unlikely to cause trouble even over the inevitable impact of *turnover* (Wright 1999). Turnover refers to the replacement of an employee by another employee. In Juárez maquiladoras, a high turnover is considered detrimental to productivity, but low turnover (employees that remain for more than two years) is also counterproductive. In this context the female maquiladora worker is a valuable commodity for the industry as long as she remains docile, silent, and works for two years as the ideal time for employment (Wright 1999). The image of Ciudad Juárez's women has thus become intrinsically connected with the maquiladora, but at the same also with the stories about victims of femicide. The association between the maquiladora and femicide comes from several factors. The bodies of murdered women have been discovered in maquiladora dumpsters, but also near vacant lots and in the desert. However, these bodies consistently share a series of common physical and class background denominators consistent with the image of the usual maquiladora worker, including being under 30 years old, skinny, dark-skinned, of medium height, with long hair, and from a working-class background. Many times they are also maquiladora workers themselves.

Under these circumstances, the demand for a political definition that names the specificity of the murder of women in Juárez emerged. The concept of *feminicidio* began to be used in 1998 in México, to describe the murder of women because of their gender (Monárrez 2009). This drew on the work of American anthropologists. Diane Russell coined the term femicide in 1976 for the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, and Jill Radford and Jane Caputi

conceptualized this more specifically in 1992 as “the misogynist killing of women by men” (1992, xi, 3).²⁷

Mexican anthropologist and former Congresswoman Marcela Lagarde then translated the word femicide into Spanish as *feminicidio*. For Lagarde, *feminicidio*:

names the ensemble of violations of women’s human rights, which contain the crimes against and the disappearances of women. I proposed that all these be considered as ‘crimes against humanity’. Femicide is genocide against women, and it occurs when the historical conditions generate social practices that allow for violent attempts against the integrity, health, liberties, and lives of girls and women (2010a, xv-xvi).

Before continuing with a genealogy of the concept of femicide, which allows us to map the power dynamics and relations of gender, sexuality, race and class specific to México, I want to insist on the importance of using the word *feminicide* instead of femicide in this thesis.

There is a linguistic and a contextual positionality to *feminicide*. From a linguistic angle, *feminicidio* (rather than *femicidio*) is a more accurate translation for femicide, given the particularities of Spanish which requires the use of -i to create compound words from two terms. It has etymological roots in the Latin *femina* for ‘female’ and *caedo* (*caesum*) for ‘to kill’. Julia Monárrez Fragoso cites the linguist Martin Gonzalez de la Vara, of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (The College of the Northern Border COLEF), on the etymology and proper translation of *feminicidio*:

We start from its etymological roots to define the term *feminicidio* ... The Latin word for woman is not *femena*, but *fémina*, with – i. When two words are joined together to

²⁷ For Russell’s original conceptualization see the Crimes Against Women Tribunal http://womenation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Crimes_Against_Women_Tribunal.pdf (Accessed 14 December, 2016).

form another, the roots of the two are respected and not only spliced together, but vowels can be put together according to the case where the words are ... The -i is a letter of union of the two words coming from the third decline of the Latin *feminis*, which means “of the woman”. Thus the woman’s death would be *feminiscidium*, and from there we turn to the word *feminicidio*, which is perfectly correct for Spanish. [and] would then mean the death of the female being or with the characteristics of a woman, whether or not a woman. (González de la Vara in Monárrez 2009, 34-35, *my translation*).

In choosing to use the Spanish word rather than the English word from which it is derived, I share the position of Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano who state that they “are using feminicide to mark our discursive and material contributions and perspectives as transborder feminist thinkers from the global South (the Américas) in its redefinition –one that exceeds the merely derivative” (2010, 3-4).

Fregoso and Bejarano elaborate on feminicide as:

the murders of women and girls [are] founded on a gender power structure ... [that is] both public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or state actors); it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence... feminicide is systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities... [and] the intersection of gender dynamics with the cruelties of racism and economic injustices in local as well as global contexts. Finally, our framing of the concept follows [Marcela] Lagarde’s critical human rights formulation of feminicide as a “crime against humanity” (2010, 5).

Mexican researchers (Monárrez Fragoso, Diaz de las Vega Garcia and Morales Castro, 2006) have differentiated between two main types of feminicide: intimate feminicide and systematic

sexual femicide. Intimate femicide is “committed by men with whom the victim had or in the past had an intimate, familial, household, or other similar sort of relationship. This type includes the infantile femicide in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power and the familial femicide type, based on familial relationships between the victim or victims and the victimizer. The second one, systematic sexual femicide is the sexual assassination, called serial, in which there is a systematic and concerted pattern of assassins for the kidnapping, sexual violence, torture and murder of girls and women” (2006, 42-43, *my translation*).

Monárrez follows Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) concepts of *sujetos matables* (killable subjects) and *sujetos desechables* (disposable subjects) that anyone can kill and who remain in a state of naked/bare life when constructing her concept of femicide.

Femina Sacer is the one who can be murdered without the homicidal charge, but at the same time cannot be sacrificed and remains under the mercy of the sovereign; allows to make visible the diverse structural dimensions (political, economic, social) of violence that make possible the exploitation and murder of women (2017).²⁸

Thus, by femicide I am more specifically using the concept of systemic sexual femicide as formulated by Monárrez in 2004. She argues that:

Systemic sexual femicide has the irrefutable logic of poor girls and women’s bodies who have been kidnapped, tortured, raped, murdered and dumped in sexually transgressor settings [the public space]. Through these cruel actions, the murders strengthen unequal gender social relations that distinguish the sexes: otherness,

²⁸ I am citing here Monárrez’s conference presentation “Femicidio / femicidio palabra antisistémica del sur global” (Femicide/femicide anti-systemic word from the Global South), during the Inauguration of the Doctorate Program in Cultural Studies in COLEF Tijuana cycle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8JP0TiSdDk&t=5429s> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

difference and inequality. At the same time, the State supported by hegemonic groups reinforce patriarchal dominion and maintain victims' families and all women in a permanent and intense state of insecurity throughout a continuous and unlimited cycle of impunity and complicities, since the culprits are not persecuted and the victims do not obtain justice (2009, 86, *my translation*).

Melissa Wright (1998, 1999) traces the intimate connections between the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez and the “reproduction of value in the maquiladoras”, where the Mexican woman “personifies waste in the making, as the materials of her body gain shape through the discourses that explain how she is untrainable, unskillable, and always a temporary worker” (1999, 455). Widespread representation of Mexican female *maquila* workers as waste-in-the-making benefits the perpetrators of feminicides because they can count on a lack of generalized public outrage and escape prosecution by corrupted officials from the local and federal governments of Chihuahua and México. From 1993 to 2016, 1,666 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juárez.²⁹

Twenty-five years after the beginning of the Ciudad Juárez feminicides in the 1990s, the murder of women continues in the city, alongside the additional grievances sourced in the unprecedented drug violence fuelled by the State and the deployment of the Mexican army in the city during the *sexenio* (six term government) of Calderón and the continuation of the same procedures by current Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto. Extortions, kidnappings, car-jacking, armed robberies, rival cartel killings, and the military and federal police presence have together resulted in a massive number of decapitated, dismembered, burned, and mutilated

²⁹ Particular investigation file of Julia Monárrez, Julia “Feminicide Data Base cases from 1993 to 16 december 2016” Ciudad Juárez Cultural Studies Department Direccion General Noroeste El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

bodies abandoned on the margins of Juárez. These were everyday occurrence during the ‘great violence between 2008 and 2012 in Juárez’.³⁰

Along the same lines as feminicides, the principal targets of violence related to the drug trade in Ciudad Juárez come from the city’s working poor, especially young people, and more broadly when women are murdered their deaths are often popularly explained as the result of their ‘involvement’ in the drug trade. The concept of “necropolitics” has been coined by Achille Mbembe (2003) to describe such a context. He defines necropolitics as the opposite of Foucauldian biopolitics, insofar as it names a politics based on the “power of death” (2003, 39). This concept has been used by authors such as Fregoso (2010), Wright (2011), Montserrat Sagot (2013) and Monárrez (2015) to make the gang-related violence in México more visible. Mbembe uses necropolitics to widen Foucault’s discussion of how modern liberal governance controls population through different techniques he identifies with biopolitics. For Foucault, biopolitics consists of “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault 1979, 140). For Mbembe, biopolitics is not enough to explain the threat of violent death as a technique of governance in the contemporary world, particularly when it is also drawing from the postcolonial context (2003, 34). Mbembe points out that the first Mexican State of terror was the State established during the Colonial era. He gives the particular example of the slave, who has lost her/his/their citizenship, who is therefore no longer a political subject and could be victim of any harm.³¹

³⁰ Kent Paterson, journalist and writer for the online news service Frontera Norte Sur, calls Felipe Calderon’s War on Drugs “the Great Violence”. The Mexican government sent eight thousand soldiers and two hundred and fifty federal policemen to Juarez in 2008 during *Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua* (Chihuahua Joint Operaton) (Bejarano 2015).

³¹ Andrés Reséndez in *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* explores the ‘other slavery’ that shaped the history of México and its neighbor the United States. “the other slavery that affected Indians throughout the Western Hemisphere was never a single institution, but instead a set of kaleidoscopic practices suited to different markets and regions. The Spanish crown’s formal prohibition of Indian slavery in 1542 gave rise to a number of related institutions, such as *encomiendas*, *repartimientos*, the selling of convict labor, and ultimately debt peonage ... In other words, formal slavery was replaced by multiple

But biopolitics is intimately related to necropolitics, since governments protect the lives of some by justifying the death of others (Braidotti 2007). This is clear in the argument of Rosa-Linda Fregoso, when she proposes that the murder of women at this U.S.-Mexico frontier does not come merely as a consequence of the maquiladora industry, but from terrorism sponsored by the State, which produces a necropolitic order in the frontier. In this sense, Wright points to the importance of gender in the reproduction of subjects within violence dynamics related to the State, “as the proliferation of gendered violence around the world indicates. This kind of violence is constitutive of necropolitics: the politics of death and the politics of gender go hand in hand.” (2011, 710). And in the case of Sagot, she states that femicide is the direct expression of gender necropolitics, which “produces a generalized instrumentalisation of female bodies, constructing a regime of terror and decrees death penalty for some (women)” (2013, 4, *my translation*). For Sagot, it is very clear that this gender necropolitics does not act equally for or against every woman, because there are some female bodies which are more at risk than others in relation of their social, ethnic, class, racial, age background.

There are contexts in which the term femicide fails to cover all the specificities of the murder of women. Rita Laura Segato (2011; 2012) thus proposes the additional term *femigenocidio* to go beyond femicide, and name “gender aggressions in the context of new types of war, human trafficking with its reduction to concentration conditions, and the abandonment or undernutrition of female and female babies in Asian countries, among others. This type of femicide ... I suggest to call “femi-geno-cidios” approximates in its dimensions to the category “genocide” for aggressions against women with intention of lethality and physical

forms of informal labor coercion and enslavement that were extremely difficult to track, let alone eradicate” (Reséndez 2016, 320).

deterioration in contexts of impersonality, in which the aggressors are an organized collective or, rather, they are aggressors because they are part of a collective or corporation and act jointly, and the victims are also victims because they belong to a collective in the sense of a social category, in this case, gender” (2014, 365, *my translation*).

The ‘politics of death’ I referred to above also point to a femigenocidio, increased and expanded to the youth population sectors in Juárez in 2008, especially those from low class income backgrounds. It is impossible to avoid talking about an intersection between Ciudad Juárez feminicides and killing of youth in the city during the War on Drugs. As José Manuel Valenzuela argues, to “analyse the frontier violence that has accompanied the history of the frontier in the last two decades it is important to address migration, femicide, narco-trafficking, the precarization and criminalization of youth at the same time. Precarity and defencelessness become basic characteristics of the frontier” (2015, 91 *my translation*).

Figures from the College of the Northern Border COLEF show that one quarter of the victims in Ciudad Juárez during the period of 2008-2010 were under 24 years old, and 64.2 % under 35 years old, of which 326 were women – about two thirds of the total people murdered (El Colef, 2010). The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) has also registered the existence of 4.3 million Mexican infants living in extreme poverty.³² According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 230 thousand people have been displaced because of the violence of the War on Drugs in México and half of them have decided to relocate to the United States (Camacho 2011, *my translation*). Valenzuela and Carles Feixa use the term *juvenicidio* (youth-killing/killing of youth with impunity) to understand the atrocities and

³² Pobreza Infantil en América Latina y el Caribe [https://www.unicef.org/lac/Libro-pobreza-infantil-America-Latina-2010\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/lac/Libro-pobreza-infantil-America-Latina-2010(1).pdf) (Accessed 14 January, 2017).

impunity expressed on the bodies of the young victims of murder and excluded youth. Nevertheless, there is still not a developed critical definition of this term, as with the category of femicide. Feixa has called *juvenicidio* “the disappearance of adolescence as a vital stage, under the imposed obligations of an economic system of low investment in health and education for minors (2012, *my translation*)”.³³

For Valenzuela, *juvenicidio*

initiates with the precarization of female and male lives, the widening of their economic and social vulnerability, the rise of their lack of defense of citizenship and the diminishment of their available options to construct a reflexive platform that accompanies the fair indignation in diverse Latin American sceneries characterized by the *artero* (sharp) murder of people with discredited identities which makes them vulnerable to the State forces and the paramilitary or organized crime (2016, *my translation*).³⁴

Such concepts as femicide and *juvenicidio* allow us to describe and understand the violent context that situates the lives of young women in a precarious condition, not only in the frontier but in the whole country. “Besides femicide, *juvenicidio* increased widening the record of *artera* (sharp) death” (Valenzuela 2015, 162 *my translation*).

To return to the geographical context and my journey with the female rapper collective, Ciudad Juárez as a dusty desert frontier city, on its way “to turn into a kind of Detroit”, is distinguished by its border culture, which results from the collision of two worlds, which scholars like Gloria

³³ I Bienal Latinoamericana de Infancias y Juventudes in Manizales, Colombia November 2012 https://www.cinde.org.co/sitio/contenidos_mo.php?it=18542 (Accessed 13 December, 2016).

³⁴ Conference Necropolítica y juvenicidio en América Latina in Washington University in St. Louis <https://diversity.wustl.edu/events/event/reading-locality-urban-spaces-regions-margins-south-midwest-international-conference/> (Accessed 21 October, 2016).

Anzaldúa (2012) merge to form a third country. Here, in a city that has also been characterized as a denationalized space (Schmidt 2010; Sassen 2003, 2005) plagued by maquiladora industrial parks, and internationally known for the systemic sexual feminicides and the War on Drugs, the hip-hop female collective Batallones Femeninos was founded in 2009.³⁵

The lyrics to Batallones Femeninos' song "Dulce Tormento" include the following:

Les pediré imaginar por un momento,
Derretirse al sol cubiertos por la arena del desierto,
¡Escucha atento!
Es la frontera, donde la vida pasa, gira, a nadie espera,
Tiros de gracia y en la sien, característica confiable,
No les daré el placer de saborear del rico y cálido sabor,
De un buen sable, culpables, todos aquellos responsables
Del consumo humano, a mí alrededor matan más gente
Que a marranos, escúchame, vengo furiosa, grito libertador,

³⁵ In his book *2666*, originally published in Spanish in 2004, Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño created Santa Teresa in a fictional Ciudad Juárez. In the third section of this book, the protagonist African-American journalist Oscar Fate talks with Mexican journalist Chucho Flores about the feminicides in the city and the following conversation takes place: "Ésta es una ciudad completa, redonda –dijo Chucho Flores- Tenemos de todo. Fábricas, maquiladoras, un índice de desempleo muy bajo, uno de los más bajos de México, un cártel de cocaína, un flujo constante de trabajadores que vienen de otros pueblos, emigrantes centroamericanos, un proyecto urbanístico incapaz de soportar la tasa de crecimiento demográfico, tenemos dinero y también hay mucha pobreza, tenemos imaginación y burocracia, violencia y ganas de trabajar en paz. Sólo nos falta una cosa, dijo Chucho Flores. Petróleo, pensó Fate, pero no lo dijo. ¿Qué es lo que falta?, dijo. Tiempo dijo Chucho Flores. Falta el jodido tiempo. ¿Tiempo para qué?, pensó Fate ¿Tiempo para que esta mierda, a mitad de camino entre un cementerio olvidado y un basurero se convierta en una especie de Detroit?" (2004, 362)

The English translation by Natasha Wimmer was published in 2008. Below the official translation of the previous section: "This is a big city, a real city", said Chucho Flores. "We have everything. Factories, maquiladoras, one of the lowest unemployment rates in Mexico, a cocaine cartel, a constant flow of workers from other cities, Central American immigrants, an urban infrastructure that can't support the level of demographic growth. We have plenty of money and poverty, we have imagination and bureaucracy, we have violence and the desire to work in peace", said Chucho Flores. Oil, thought Fate, but he didn't say it. "What don't you have", he asked. "Time", said Chucho Flores "We haven't got any fucking time." "Time for what?" thought Fate. "Time for this shithole, equal parts lost cemetery and garbage dump, to turn into a kind of Detroit?" (2008, 286)

Escrito en verso no en prosa, la vida no es color de rosa.³⁶

This is the frontier seen through the eyes of Obeja Negra, Dilema, Lady Liz, and Siniestra, founding members of Batallones Femeninos. Initially, this hip-hop group was the musical section of Kolectiva Fronteriza (Border Collective), an all-female collective of artists committed to the anti-femicide movement. Since Batallones Femeninos formed in 2009, many different members have entered and left the group. Murder added herself later to the group, and she is the youngest member. Lady Liz has left the group. So the Juárez members that are still active are Obeja Negra, Siniestra, Dilema, and Murder, but they are not all participating in the music and workshop presentations all the time. The only member who is permanently in Batallones Femeninos is Obeja. During my ethnography Murder was busy with her studies, finishing her Bachelor in Graphic Design, Dilema was pregnant and living currently in El Paso, and Siniestra was working.

“Dulce Tormento” (Sweet Torment) was their first song, written and recorded in 2009, representing the years of curfews, militarization, rise of homicides and femicides during the Chihuahua Joint Operation in Juaritos, as it is popularly called the city. Obeja described the origins of the hip-hop collective during our first stop on the SiempreViva tour, in Torreón, Coahuila:

We said Batallones Femeninos (Women’s Battalions), we need to make a battalion of women because we love life, we want to have fun, enjoy, smile, we love the beauty, but in this city we haven’t got it. Our education in the city is that you are disposable, you are not important, you have no value.

³⁶ I will ask you to imagine for a moment, get melted in the sun covered by the sand of the desert. Listen attentively! It is the border, where life passes, revolves, expects no one. A *coup de grâce* on the temple, reliable feature. I will not give you the pleasure of savoring the rich and warm flavor of a good sword, guilty, all those responsible of the human consumption, around me more people is killed than pigs. Listen to me, I come furious, with a liberator cry, written in verse not in prose. Life is not pink (*my translation*).

As part of the first generation of girls that grew up under the menace, fear of feminicides in Juárez, they are aware how they are socially positioned and represented in society by what Melissa Wright calls “the myth of the disposable third world woman. This figure comes to personify the meaning of human disposability: someone who eventually evolves into a living state of worthlessness” (2006, 2).

This representation of women’s disposability, as Obeja asserts, has been produced, propagated and perpetuated in the city through both the devaluated image of the female maquiladora worker and the victims of feminicides, who are connected “on the basis of her essentially wasting constitution” (Wright 2006, 17). The first way in which this figure is becoming “waste in the making” (Wright 1999) is through the repetitive action of producing valuable products for the global market, which ironically depreciates her human value. The second is when the bodies of girls and women are dumped like trash in the desert, or vacant lots, or public places in the margins of the city. To this crime of becoming disposable is added the scrutinization of young Mexican women’s sexual practices when the authorities blame the victims for the violence inflicted in their bodies, when accusing them of having *a doble vida* (double-life): good factory worker and daughter by day and prostitute by night. It is clear that the myth justifies the violence suffered by its disposable protagonist and positions her as deprived of human value, and therefore justice and voice.³⁷

Dilema, another founder of Batallones Femeninos, now lives in the West of Juárez, and when talking about the risks of walking alone when returning at night from university in downtown Juárez, says:

³⁷ Wright (2006) and Monárrez (2009) expand on this when talking about the State stigmatization practices to the victims of feminicide.

every day I had to walk through downtown (Juárez) where the women's disappearances happened and I was aware I had those characteristics, most of the women were *morenas* (dark skinned), with big eyes, shoulder length hair and I was scared to see on every corner las *pesquisas* of a disappeared women, I had fear... but I did realize I couldn't have fear always because then I would stay locked up and stop doing what I like [to rap].³⁸

The threat of being a potential victim of femicide is not only materialized in Dilema's declaration but also on "Así era ella" (She was like that), the song Dilema composed with Murder, the youngest member of Batallones Femeninos:

Ojos grandes, oscuros, luminosos,
llenos de esperanza, llenos de sueños varios,
de estatura media, de gruesos labios,
de tez morena, delgada, joven y bella,
cabello hasta los hombros.

Así es ella....

Hoy de regreso a casa,
y es como mediodía,
llevo un pantalón azul, sandalias y blusa amarilla.

Noto que me miran, mas no me imaginaba
que el miedo me atraparía
cuando sola caminaba.

Sentí que alguien se acercaba
y aceleré mi paso....

³⁸ Conversation with Batallones Femeninos (30 April 2013 in UAM Xoch). *Pesquisas* refers to the announcements of the girls' disappearances, posted on the walls of the city.

Violada, torturada, amenazada, amordazada,
con lágrimas imploraba
que esto terminara.
“Ayuda”, yo gritaba,
pero lejos estaba.
Y ya no regresé a casa.³⁹

This fear is a fear that dislocates, that paralyses, but overcoming this fear through hip-hop lyrical content and cultural practice functions as a catharsis for these fears. They raise their voice and recuperate the public space, both on the street and in hip-hop. Batallones Femeninos members take up the protagonist microphone in the male-dominated rap scene that relegates them to the function of mere cheerleaders or chorus girls. On the street, the public space is both negated by the State through the “manipulation of the ‘femicides’ as a controlling technology that works to limit the freedom – spatially, temporally, and otherwise – of women and girls in Juarez” (Bejarano 2015, 68).

In this context, some young people from Juárez have begun to use hip-hop culture and travel to different regions of the Mexican territory to denounce the violence in the city and to generate networks of social awareness in relation to femicides and drug violence. This is the case of Barrio Nómada (Nomad Hood), a group to which Obeja Negra also belonged. Formed in 2010, with the name of Zyrko Nómada de Combate (Combat Nomad Circus) and then transformed into Barrio Nómada, this group gathered together jugglers, poets, hip-hop artists, theatre artists

³⁹ Big dark and bright eyes, full of hope, full of several dreams, of average height, thick lips, dark skin, thin, young and beautiful, shoulder length hair She is like that. ... Today at noon when returning home, I am wearing blue jeans, sandals and a yellow blouse. I notice that someone is watching me, but I wouldn't imagine that the fear would imprison me when I was walking alone. I felt that someone was approaching me and accelerated my step. ... I was raped, tortured, threatened, gagged, and with tears I implored this to finish. 'Help', I shouted, but I was very far. And I did not return home (*my translation*).

from the street, and cyberactivists. Formed by young men and women from Juárez, this group travelled México in 2010 and 2011 and even produced a documentary about their experiences called *Barrio Nómada: Viviendo Juaritos* (Nomad Hood: Living-in-Juaritos).⁴⁰ But something more happens when the youth immersed in these political practices are women from working class backgrounds who rap and travel, making networks with other women. When young women from working-class backgrounds live in a city such as Ciudad Juárez that does not situate them as recognisable subjects with rights to exist, but only as disposable ones; how is it possible to construct themselves as the subjects of human rights and political subjects in that sense? When these young women live in a city considered a “denationalized space”, and when consequently the inhabitant of the city becomes a denationalized subject, “what remains most central is the particular nature of the border space as a site of subject formation and political conflict over women’s social value and claims to rights” (Schmidt 2010, 278). Along these lines, I consider that these groups are protesting the idea of their disposability and worthlessness through forms of feminist rap and political activism that situate them in the public male-dominated sphere. The condition as denationalized subject which makes them a potential victim further opens up the possibility of their constructing sorority networks that offer a counterpoint to their experience of continuous violence against women.

Here it is important to note that even though they are constantly at risk because of the context of violence against women’s bodies, and feminized bodies, these women are not simply victims. They can perhaps be understood through Jane Juffer’s discussion of the “precarious subject [which], to recall, is neither incapable of agency nor in a position where he or she can exercise autonomy without some assistance” (2016, 107). Their occupation of the public sphere

⁴⁰ Documentary *Barrio Nómada* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRf6_Uz56uM&t=791s (Accessed 6 February, 2017).

outside and inside the male-dominated hip-hop scene, their travel and the sorority networks constructed through this travel and through autonomous practices, together demonstrate significant political agency, and this is part of their answer to the regime by which female bodies are controlled by the State. Through these practices they experience a continuous transformation of their relation to the image of disposable women, of being potential victims. They seek to become, instead, disruptive bodies, understood along the lines of Bejarano's claim that the "human rights activist [is] a 'disruptive body' since the activist confronts the State, demanding accountability and due process within legal systems", although "As their work is questioned by authorities, they too become subject to surveillance and often harassment" (2015, 75). This female human rights activist would also be understood by Monárrez as an 'alternative subject of justice', one that "make demands on the governments regarding human rights, democratic discourse, and public action on behalf of the diverse citizenry: a citizenry whose bodies, spaces and material conditions have been violated" (2014, 13). Monárrez takes this concept of alternative subject of justice from Saskia Sassen's *Globalization and Its Discontents* (1998), who states: "We are seeing the relocation of various components of sovereignty onto supranational, nongovernmental, or private institutions. This brings with it a potential strengthening of alternative subjects of international law and actors in international relations, for example, the growing voice of nongovernmental organizations and minorities in international fora." (1998, 92).

As I suggested above, the context of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, and the whole country, as well as the violence produced by the War on Drugs, propels these feminists and activists to travel as a form of learning, and as a means of constructing autonomous alliances and sorority networks that collectively use their hip-hop activism as a weapon to raise awareness of femicide and Drug war tactics. It is through travel, and the expansion of their extended

sorority networks, that Batallones Femeninos realized the epidemic extent of the brutal violence against women that has spread throughout México. But it is also their travel, especially their travel through and occupation of public space that allows them to become a disruptive body as part of the answer to the control over female bodies, including where feminicide creates a regime of control over women's bodies. Also traveling in a group of women, just like I did with the Batallones Femeninos crew during my ethnography, is a form of resisting the danger of being alone on the streets.

When I met Batallones Femeninos, in 2016, there had recently been some modifications. They had not only expanded their networks and added more members from different parts of México, but also two cities in the United States. Their political position had also become more openly feminist, and they had released two albums and joined in activism with different social movements, such as the anti-feminicide movement, the teacher's struggle, and the search for the disappeared Ayotzinapa students. If violence exposes the public subject to the voiding of their citizenship, a denial of their rights and citizenship is "partly produced by the practices of the excluded" (Sassen 2005, 84). Through the processes of contesting their exclusion Batallones Femeninos are constantly constructing themselves as political subjects and developing and recuperating their citizenship, particularly through their fight against feminicides via hip-hop culture. In this case hip-hop culture allows them to find forms of expression of political agency through community work, autonomy and sorority networks. In constituting themselves as disruptive bodies while denouncing the violent Mexican context and claiming rights to the city, they are recuperating the rights of the female body in this geographical space, condensed as each woman's right to the city and the safe-circulation of women throughout the country. This is how they construct themselves as political subjects in their own terms, through autonomy practices, *autogestión*, self-government, and sorority

networks, as well as practical manifestations of these principles such as self-defense workshops.

Kolectiva Fronteriza and Batallones Femeninos: from *Juaritos* to *Ciudad Monstruo*, constructing autonomy and sorority networks

Since the very first moment we set foot in the North I knew I was in a different style of Mexican city. Tons of dust on the streets, American-style wide avenues, few tall buildings and mostly one-floor houses, signs and advertisements written in both English and Spanish, and Sorianas and S-marts everywhere.⁴¹ I couldn't agree more with Arreola and Curtis's claim that "the Mexican border cities form a distinctive urban subsystem within Mexico" (1993, xvii). In addition to this physically different urban style of these cities there was an aura of danger. Federal Police wandered the streets of Torreón, Gómez Palacio, and Chihuahua with high caliber weapons, which my companions told me was an increasingly common and naturalized scene of everyday life.

On the penultimate stop of the Siempre Viva Tour, Obeja and I waited in the domestic arrivals section of Chihuahua airport for Torrente, our Chilean friend who would give a self-defense workshop in Juárez. She was coming from Mexico City, after a long bus trip from Chiapas.⁴² During the hours of waiting, Obeja talked with me about the birth of Kolectiva Fronteriza (Border Collective).

⁴¹ Soriana is a Mexican public company and major retailer from the state of Coahuila, and S-mart is a Mexican grocery store chain that competes with Soriana.

⁴² Torrente is her family name and the name by which she is known. In Spanish it means a flood situated in a mountain zone, which she takes as an apt metaphor.

Originating in Juárez in 2009, Kolectiva Fronteriza erected itself as the operative section in the young anti-femicide movement of the city. Batallones Femeninos would become the main members and the music section. Initially Kolectiva Fronteriza was formed by *morras* (girls) from academia in the areas of arts, literature, social sciences, as well as artists from the street, and feminists working in institutions or familiarized with community work in the hood. It became a very strong young female movement in Ciudad Juárez in 2010, with a particular activist focus on femicides. It is important to note that the members have had, since the beginning different classes, educational backgrounds and political affiliations, all of which inform their feminist-oriented cultural practices.

Recently there have been transformations in this collective, including some ruptures among the original members, but also the joining of new ones and the expansion of the network throughout the whole country. On their Facebook official group page Kolectiva Fronteriza identify themselves as:

a group of young women who from their respective spaces have been actively participating in the generation of proposals to eradicate *machista* violence, promote leaderships and autonomy among women, and establish solidarity collaborative networks with *otras* and *otros* (others in feminine and masculine) (*my translation*).

Such promotion of autonomy alongside the construction of solidarity networks, mainly among women, represents the main axes of Kolectiva Fronteriza's work. As Obeja remarks, while talking about the collective: "All our cultural initiatives are directed to finishing violence against women, in this case femicide. To how we can help with *autogestión*, *autonomía*. To do it in a different way, instead of asking for scholarships, sponsorship".

While we continue waiting for Torrente, Obeja gives me this example of their work to generate economic funding. On one occasion, “We wanted to go to Gómez [Gómez Palacio, Durango] to participate in a concert as Batallones Femeninos, and we had a *kermesse*. We sold *discada*, we sold CDs and T-shirts, and we rapped”.⁴³ Such mechanisms for obtaining funding were repeatedly used during the SiempreViva tour, and other concerts in Mexico City and Tlaxcala. We sold CDs, stickers, and t-shirts during each of the different stops in order to generate money to pay the bus fares, for food, and for the Internet that allows the members to continue their digital networking. In these practices, a separation from institutional financial funding, and the construction of solidarity women’s networks within hip-hop culture converge into the concepts of *autonomía* and *autogestión*. But how do they understand *autogestión* and *autonomía*, terms that already have their own very particular conceptual history in the Mexican context? In what ways do they engage with *autogestiva* and autonomy practices? How are these ideas constructed, signified and re-signified in the collaborative solidarity networks formed by these young women and their practices?

To answer these questions, I need to discuss the way these women construct their *autogestivo* and autonomy practices from *el barrio* (the hood) as well as the particular contextualization of these terms in feminist hip-hop in México, and the influence of the concept of autonomy constructed by the Zapatista Movement and its interrelation with the feminist autonomy in Latin America. I will also talk about the history of feminist autonomy in the Latin American region, drawing on the concept of *affidamento* from Italian feminists and the more recent

⁴³ Kermesse, or kermis, is a Dutch term derived from *kerk* (church) and *mis* (mass), originally denoting a mass on the anniversary of the foundation of a church and in honour of the patron. Such celebrations were accompanied by feasting, dancing and sports of all kinds. The term has also had an influence on Ibero-American culture, specifically in Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile. ‘Discada’ is one of the most traditional dishes in Chihuahua. The name derives from the pan used to prepare the meat, resembling a *disco*, or one of the discarded disks from a plow to soil the earth. Discada is made with beef, pork, chorizo, bacon, ham, onion, tomato, jalapeno peppers, and capsicum.

concept of *sororidad* in México - both concepts impact on or inform these solidarity networks among women.

I consider it crucial to connect practices of autogestión and autonomía with the construction of women's autonomous spaces and networks in the Latin American feminist autonomy movement. In this respect, the influence of Italian *affidamento* becomes important. *Affidamento* shares with the feminist autonomy movement the search for a separation from the dominant institutions that have sustained the patriarchal state. To counter this, they focus on collaborative solidarity among women, increasingly understood in México as *sororidad*. This word connotes a political theory that resonates with previous feminist forms of girl networking, such as the riot *grrrl* movement, which expanded into many regions around the world but is mostly identified with its birthplace in the United States in the early 1990s (Kearney 2006). Despite these connections, the importance of autonomía and autogestión for these groups must be understood in their very particular context. Here I want to connect these ideas with the work of *Batallones Femeninos* as the most visible face of *Kolectiva Fronteriza*. Both concepts strongly affect their relations to the music production process and their economic solidarity networks which allow the organization of the music tours that centrally disseminate their anti-femicide message.

During her participation in a conversation related with women and hip-hop artists in CCEMX on August 2016, Obeja asserted that:

We have found in the example of autonomy from the *Zapatista compañerxs* that we can find ways which can confront this idea that says that it cannot be possible (to produce music) without the system, that it cannot be possible if you don't go to the record label.

In this declaration it is very clear that *Batallones Femeninos* understand their autonomous musical production as drawing on the *Zapatista* ideal of autonomy.

Zapatista autonomy materialized in the January 1994 uprising of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, as a protest against the signing of NAFTA. It involved the creation of hundreds of civil “communities in resistance”, otherwise known also as autonomous municipalities that reject the authority of the Mexican state. In these communities, Zapatista autonomy has been implemented on the principle of *mandar-obedeciendo* (rule by obeying). This principle reflects a commitment to following the will of the people and challenging authoritarianism in these communities: “Rule by obeying draws on the community practices of self-organization through assembly that tendentially disperse power” (Reyes and Kaufman 2011, 515-516). Since the beginning, EZLN has been interested in a democratization from below. They created 38 autonomous municipalities linking the rights of indigenous people in Chiapas to calls for an insurrection of civil society and for a global struggle against neoliberalism. This unmaking of traditional sovereignty through “Juntas de Buen Gobierno” (Councils of Good Government) and the creation of a self-organized collective subject in the Zapatista movement resonates in Batallones Femenino’s practices, and they explicitly address it in interviews and in their conversations together. They constantly link their autonomy practices to the Zapatista project, which, in turn, they equate with the notion of autogestión.⁴⁴

Although no direct translation for autogestión exists in English, the term can be defined as a model of radical grassroots democracy, or self-management. Enthusiastically discussed by French scholar Henri Lefebvre after the French student revolts of 1968, the project of

⁴⁴ Juntas de Buen Gobierno or Councils of Good Government is composed by an assembly of local representatives. They were created at the same time of Los Caracoles, in 2003, “after EZLN’s disappointment with the framing of indigenous autonomy as a tool for neoliberal decentralisation, illustrating the predicaments of indigenous peoples in pursuit of autonomy vis-à-vis the state” (Dinerstein 2015).

autogestión could be traced to the anti-statist socialist movements of the XIX century, to Cornelius Castoriadis's journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the 1950s, and to the Algerian Independence and the non-communist and anarchist Left groups of May 1968 in France (see Brenner and Elden 2009, 14). For Lefebvre, "each time a social group... refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence *autogestión* is occurring" (in Brenner and Elden 2009, 135).

Conceived as "the site and the stake of struggle" by Lefebvre, and more specifically class struggle, autogestión could be better understood in terms of what it means for feminist activists in México through its strategic aspect. This particularly materialised for Batallones Femeninos in the construction of economy solidarity networks that generate the possibilities of travelling, of organizing concerts and workshops, and of meeting other women. If the concept of autogestión "is the opening toward the *possible*", in Lefebvre's words, and Zapatista autonomy declares "the world we want is one where many worlds fit", then for Batallones Femeninos it is possible, as they publicly declared during the SiempreViva Tour, "to construct (cultural practices) outside of the system from ourselves in our hood, with our sisters, mothers, and female friends".⁴⁵

The possibility of acting outside the current neoliberal system is a constant aim of the practices of Batallones Femeninos, not only in their autonomous music production, but also in their construction of solidarity networks among women. In this way, solidarity becomes a constant in Batallones Femeninos's discourses and practices. Solidarity in this sense is usually

⁴⁵ In the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, in 1996, the Zapatistas declared "The world we want is one where many worlds fit" (Womack 1999, 303).

understood as something expressed by one group or individual as a supportive relation to another. Solidarity is also a consciously shared and affirmed identity or political project, among a group of people.⁴⁶

But what happens when these solidarity networks are constructed among women? In this case, the word *sororidad* emerges. *Sororidad* comes from the Latin words *soror* and *sororis*, meaning sister, but it also implies a politics. In French, *sororité* is a reply to the concept of *fraternité*; fraternity. In English too, sisterhood is a commonly referenced ideal of feminist politics. In this sense as well *sororidad* is related to the Italian *affidamento*, a feminist theoretical proposition articulated by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. I would like to assert that each of these words have their own histories, theoretical developments and contextualisations that is necessary to properly understand what they might offer to feminist politics. I will particularly address the case of *affidamento* because it is the term that has been most widely theoretically developed across Spanish and English, and then turn to the concept of *sororidad*, which is the one I have decided to use in my own analysis.

Affidamento, or the relation of entrustment between two women, was developed in the 1970s and 1980s in Italy mainly by Luisa Muraro and Lia Cigarini, members of the Milan Women's Bookstore collective. *Affidamento* articulated an Italian theory of sexual difference, and was a radical response to the institutionalization of feminism and the development of feminist consciousness groups under the practices of *autocoscienza* which later would evolve into *affidamento*.⁴⁷ In the foundational text, *Non credere dei avere diritti. La generazione della*

⁴⁶ Philosophically speaking, the term has been addressed from different perspectives by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1997 [1788]), and Baruch Spinoza (2007 [1670]).

⁴⁷ *Autocoscienza* was the term coined by Carla Lonzi for the practice of consciousness-raising groups, which Italian women adapted from North American feminism. These took place in small women's groups as a form of separatist feminism, as De Lauretis explains (1990c).

libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne (Don't think you have any rights. The Engendering of Female Freedom in the Thought and Vicissitudes of a Women's Group, 1987), Muraro and Cigarini describe *affidamento* as a:

feminist practice whereby a woman entrusts herself to another woman by choosing her as a symbolic mother, guide, and mentor... Entrustment, however, is not an equal relationship between two women. Rather, it is based on the mutual recognition of the disparity between them, and the acknowledgement of the higher authority of the symbolic mother (Re 2002, 59).

The vertical and somewhat hierarchical structure of this relationship between two women generated some controversy. Criticism came from scholars such as Carol Lazzaro-Weis, who considered this feminist theory of practice a “rigid system of female networking” (2002, 34), while Rossana Rossanda also criticized the term and, as Lucia Re describes (2002, 59), Christine Battersby even called it “harmful”.

Teresa de Lauretis also agrees that there are controversial aspects of class, age and social and educational disparity implicit within *affidamento*, but remarks that the:

symbolic recognition, the value or valuation of human, gendered worth that each one is capable of conferring upon the other, their formal social differences notwithstanding. Although their roles and symbolic functions with respect to one another may have been as different as their social or personal powers, yet each woman of each pair validates and valorises the other within a frame of reference no longer patriarchal or male-designed, but made up of perceptions, knowledges, attitudes, values, and modes of what the book calls a female genealogy or a female symbolic (1990c, 10).

The symbolic mother-daughter relation in *affidamento* practices is also supported by its articulation in Luce Irigaray's work, which “contributed significantly to the Milanese

theorization of sexual difference as a social-symbolic practice and to their project of delineating of (re) constructing a female symbolic” (De Lauretis 1990c, 17). For Irigaray, the concept rejected the male-identified symbolic order, and the attempt to create a female symbolic around a maternal figure constitutes the core of *afidamento*. This too is supported by the Milan Women’s Bookstore collective members’ interpretation of Irigaray’s work.

Although *afidamento* marked an epistemological rupture in Western thought during the 1980s in Europe, such a hierarchical and dyadic relationship between two women does not completely resonate with the construction of female networks in my research. In the case of the feminist rappers *Batallones Femeninos* and *Mare Advertencia Lirika* there is a search for the construction of a collective and horizontal female networking. Nevertheless, there is a connection through the sharing of knowledge linked to an image of the symbolic mother and the relation between younger and older feminists. This is reflected in Obeja’s declared relation with long time feminists from Chihuahua, who mostly work for the government and are generally known as institutional feminists. In one of our conversations in Chihuahua during the *SiempreViva* tour, Obeja assured me that:

These women are much older than me and I always have found them in trainings (on topics related with gender issues) that they promote and every time we mention we are going to a place [to sing] they always give us money from their pocket.” And she continues: “I criticized them before and I used to say *¡Qué pinches empinadas son!* (So servile they are!) But *¡está muy cabrón!* (It’s fucked up!) Look, Maricela was murdered. They kill you for *ése pedo* (she means activists are murdered for denouncing

femicidas). Like it or not *las morras han sabido llevar la fiesta en paz* (the girls have tried to get along), I know they are combative.⁴⁸

It is inevitable to link the theoretical approximations, in this case, *afidamento*, with resistance to the current violent context that is lived in México, especially in relation with femicides. In Obeja's declarations there is a process of inner-reflection where she makes visible the very risky situation for antifemicide activists and the consequent understanding of the strategic actions of older feminists in her hometown, who in general work for government institutions. There is a declared respect for and recognition of older feminists work and economic support. I consider that *afidamento* practices exist in these relationships, more specifically at the level of ethic ideals and economic support, as well as ways of learning strategic actions to survive in this Mexican necropolitic order, as Mbembe would define it.

In the Latin American context, autonomous feminists also have recognized *afidamento* as part of their genealogy. In the declaration of *Encuentro Feminista Autónomo* (Autonomous Feminist Encounter) in 2009 in Mexico City, they recognized not only its influence on the construction of autonomy but also in “the concession of creative authority among women” (2010, 203 *my translation*), and its importance to resistant feminist action. Mexican anthropologist and politician Marcela Lagarde also recognizes the influence of *afidamento* on *sororidad*, in the sense that they share characteristics of “propitiation of trust, the reciprocal recognition of authority and support among women” (2010b, 126, *my translation*).

⁴⁸ Marisela Escobedo was assassinated the 12th of December of 2010 while she was protesting in front of the government palace in the state of Chihuahua when she was demanding justice for her daughter Ruby Marisol, who was victim of femicide in 2008. There are pink crosses in the place where she was murdered as tribute to her struggle against femicides.

Affidamento and sororidad are two concepts that intersect in my research, but how do they intersect? In what ways, for example, do the debates captured by Irigaray's sexual difference feminism link both concepts? What is the impact of this on the construction of women's networks - crossing differences of class and racial backgrounds – in my research and specifically in the case of Batallones Femeninos? What, further, is sororidad? Why, positively, am I choosing sororidad, which is rightly considered a term that has not been fully conceptualized?

Sororidad as a term does not appear in the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary but recently has gained strength among young feminists in Mexico, especially on digital social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This is especially since the feminist protests of #24A in 2016. Different hashtags with phrases such as *#MiPrimerAcoso* (#MyFirstSexualHarassment) and *#Yositecreo* (#Ibelieveyou) have shown a range of shared experiences of sexual harassment among women, empathy and support among women that may not know each other face to face but are creating support networks via digital social networks.⁴⁹

For me, the shared individual experience that connects with the experiences of other women is the first key aspect of sororidad. Experience is a key concept for feminism and for understanding the site of subject formation (Brah 1996), as was most directly materialized in the consciousness-raising groups of the American feminist movement of 1970s. But this experience, understood as a cultural and social construct brings to discussion notions related with class, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, etc., and the polemic of universalization of the term 'woman' (Butler 2006; Lauretis 1987). For this reason, it is important to address the

⁴⁹ The hashtag #24A means 24 April, the day of the national feminist rally against feminicides in 2016. This protest congregated young feminists with the main slogan #VivasNosQueremos (We Want Us Alive).

construction of women's differences in women's networks. The category of woman must in general be addressed taking into account its differences, "given how the category of women is intersected by class, race, age, and a number of other vectors of power" (Butler 2006).

For Avtar Brah there are four ways in which difference may be conceptualized: difference as experience, difference as social relation, difference as subjectivity and difference as identity. In the case of experience, she remarks that "women's movements have aimed to give a collective voice to women's personal experiences of social and psychic forces that constitute the 'female' into the 'woman'" (1996, 115). This is a set of recognitions that are particularly helpful for engaging with the collective experience of *Batallones Femeninos*. *Batallones Femeninos*'s members share a common class axis background. They come from working class families and neighborhoods from different parts of the country. Although they have different professions and educational levels, they all are young women in their 20s and early 30s that constantly address *el barrio* as an important element of their identity in their conversations and music presentations. There is also a close connection between their hip-hop practice, and feminist and community work in *el barrio*. One example might be that Obeja and Xibalkba are both from different geographical origins – Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City respectively – but their involvement in community work since they were teenagers in *el barrio* serves as shared common ground.

Since 16 years old, Obeja has been part of youth initiatives that had as a primary objective the amelioration of the social conditions of people living in her neighbourhood. The organisers of the workshops were members of different social movements, among them feminists, who were committed to the anti-femicide movement. Through these encounters, Obeja initiated her first contact with feminism, which in Ciudad Juárez was, in general, politically committed to

making young women aware of feminicides. In a personal interview, Obeja shared her story with me:

We initiated in hip-hop culture from el barrio, not from theory. So we come from barrios in Juárez, where hip-hop arrived first to older generations, and we grew up listening to it ... I wanted my feminism to be urban feminism because I do not come from academia, I am not indigenous, I am a *chava* (girl) from the city

Further, during one of my conversations with Obeja in the SiempreViva Tour – on its first stop in Torreón, Coahuila – Obeja told me: “On my way while travelling I do realize that violence against women is not exclusive to the frontier, where it has grown. It is in the whole country”. Travelling and meeting other women’s experiences of violence, as well as their cultural initiatives to eradicate it in the country, makes Obeja reflect on the expansion of feminicide in other states such as Puebla, Aguascalientes, Oaxaca, Estado de México. Obeja’s experiences travelling with Batallones Femeninos are fundamental to her individual experiences that later transform into collective experiences with women. The travel itself blurs and reaffirms women’s differences and this allows the creation of knowledge, empathy and networks among them. This may be understood as an “interweaving of shared collective narratives within feelings of community” which Brah conceptualizes as difference within social relations (1996, 118).

This process of travelling works in three directions: as an understanding of women’s differences and similarities throughout the whole country in relation with violence against their bodies, more specifically feminicide, the travel as a mapping of the country and as a way of becoming feminist. As I mentioned above, Obeja’s experience travelling through the country supported by female networking has impacted on the way she perceives violence against women. Her focus on violence against women and feminicide in Juárez expanded to consider

all of México, with some particular differences in the characteristics of each state. Talking about the different women's experiences of violence that she got to know while travelling, Obeja remarked: "I felt violence against women was even stronger in some states of the South, where women do not eat before the man, or doesn't sit at the table with the man. *Usos y costumbres* (customs and practices) of other regions. And I said to myself, at least in Juárez, we all sit in the table".⁵⁰

México is characterised by a geographical division of the country between the North, the Center, and the South which is also apparent in the different styles of violence lived by women. The North, represented by states such as Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Baja California, all of them frontier states with the United States (except Durango), were many of them stops during the SiempreViva Tour. The Center, represented mainly by Mexico City, State of Mexico, Cuernavaca, Aguascalientes, Querétaro, and Puebla. The South represented by Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero. During the different concerts we went during our travels in the North to Chihuahua, Coahuila and Durango; Mexico City in the Center and Oaxaca in the South of the country. In one of Mare's women's autonomy workshop (see chapter five) during the SiempreViva tour in Torreón, Obeja introduced herself by declaring "Torreón was not in my map, in the sense that I had *una conexión* (I knew) women in this place, because I've been walking for some time, wanting to find only women ...". Obeja creates her own mapping through the construction of women's networks in the whole country. A specific geographical location appears in Obeja's map until she gets to meet women constructing sorority networks who are committed to the antifeminicide movement.

⁵⁰ *Usos y costumbres* is a legal term denoting indigenous customary law. These customs are connected with local forms of self-governance, and juridical practice, which generally limits women's rights and public participation. *Usos y costumbres* are generally traditions located in the Southern states of Mexico.

I also connect to Obeja's statement when talking about the spread of femicide in the country. Immediately after this statement she talked about GeoBrujas's (GeoWitches), a collective of feminist geographers working within feminists' groups in Mexico City. They have been mapping femicides in the country, and uploading the updated map to their Facebook account. "México is blood-stained" Obeja asserted.⁵¹ What is a map? How to map a place? Who has the right to make maps? What is the function of maps? How are connections constructed among women, specifically during such activities as these music tours? Obeja traces her own map of México, while she travels with Batallones Femeninos. This map only makes sense when there is a construction of women's networking through the sharing of personal experiences and creating collective narratives and identities. There is a common objective in Batallones Femeninos's practices during the interweaving of networks, which is to raise consciousness of femicides in the whole country and to share knowledge via hip-hop feminist lyrics, self-defense workshops, and t-shirts and stickers. These networks are constructed among women from the North, the Center and the South of México. This common objective –the fight against femicide – is the second aspect of sororidad.

Once we had participated in Mare's first concert and autonomy workshop, in which women shared their stories as women from the North, Torreón was in Obeja's map, and also in Mare's map, and mine. The extended sorority network was beginning to make sense to me.

For Obeja, travel also marks the before and after of becoming a feminist. "My feminist formation," she told me, "was after travelling and realising that what was happening (she is referring to femicides) in Juárez was not exclusive of Juárez ... Rap has been for me the opportunity to meet *compañeras* (female colleagues) that have creative work deeply concerned

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/geobrujas/> (Accessed 14 November, 2017).

with violence against women”. Travelling is also how Obeja met Xibalba, who joined Batallones Femeninos and expanded their network in Mexico City. Previously, Xibalkba was the founding member of the now dissolved women’s rap collective *Sra de Xibalkba* and shares how she got involved in feminism:

I did not know I was a feminist, until I became part of Batallones Femeninos because I used to say stupidly that feminism was the same as *machismo* and then Obeja asked me if I was a feminist and I answered no, and then she said your actions tell me that you are a feminist ... then Obeja made us read some texts and read what feminism is. Then when we met at the rehearsal, Obeja asked us (all the Mexico City members of Batallones Femeninos) if we were feminists and I said yes I am a feminist but *callejera* (from the street). There are feminist *letradas*, (academic feminists), that became feminists because they read, but I did not become a feminist because I read or because I studied. I became a feminist because I have always worked in *el barrio*. I have become a feminist when trying to change and transform *el barrio* with *los morros*, (kids), the new generations. I think that my feminism comes from experience, from my interest in changing my social context through hip-hop or giving workshops which are also autonomous.

Xibalkba’s process of becoming a feminist had begun even before her participation in Batallones Femeninos. It initiated when she was working on different projects transforming el barrio. Among the most recent is *ArteArma*, a project which aims to bring hip-hop workshops to prisons and which has reunited the collaborations of Batallones Femeninos, Mare Advertencia Lirika and other hip-hop artists. Xibalkba’s training as a *tallerista* (workshop organiser) began when she was 17 years old, participating in sexual health workshops for teenagers in Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud *IMJUVE* (The Mexican Institute of Youth). She has also participated in different youth collectives in the Mexico City borough of Gustavo A.

Madero, where she lives, and she currently works in DGTPA, Dirección General de Tratamiento para los Adolescentes (juvenile detention centres network) teaching Afro-dance and the creation of *alebrijes*, -imaginary creatures of Mexican folk art made of papier-mâché- in workshops, among others.⁵²

‘Street smarts’, or street knowledge, is valued over formal education by activists like Obeja and Xibalkba because their hip-hop and feminist practices are based on everyday experience. Obeja and Xibalba construct their *feminismo callejero*, as Xibalba would call it, using the word *calle*, which in English is translated as street, to name their branch of feminism. This understanding of *feminismo callejero*, for which experience comes first and theory comes second, echoes the autogestivo practices of autonomous Latin American feminists and feminists of color in the U.S., for which struggle also takes place in everyday life. The street, in this sense, also provides a platform for rapper females, at street level, to process and produce feminist ideas (Perry 2004; Phillips 2005; Rose 1994).

As Chang argues in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (2005), rap revolves around everyday life experiences. For the members of Batallones Femeninos and the women's networks connected to them, their daily experiences are intrinsically connected to the violent environment of the country, not only to their gendered bodies but also to the surmounting of fear as the only option for living in Juárez. Since the beginning of the history of Mexican hip-hop, but more widely in the last years when Batallones Femeninos expanded its networks all over the Mexican territory, and some areas of the United States, *el barrio* has been fundamental. *El barrio* is where the rappers come from, and has become an important and cohesive element of this collective

⁵² IMJUVE initiated the 6 of January 1999, as part of the governmental State institutions focused on Mexican youth, their health, employment and training, prevention of addictions and other problems.

identity. El barrio, one of the “so-imagined ‘lawless’ places” (Cacho 2012, 9) crucial to hip-hop’s geography (Perry 2004), have helped determined a strong identification with the lives of working-class women from the frontier and other Mexican geographical locations.

Nominating themselves chavas from the city, who do not belong to an academic institution or an indigenous group, they position themselves within el barrio, a space characterised by its working-class inhabitants generally living in the margins of the cities. Obeja speaks, then, from her particular location, the working-class neighbourhoods of Ciudad Juárez, a context that has made her aware of social problematics in her barrio and especially the long history of feminicides in the city. This consciousness of violence towards women has pushed her to create connections with other women whose experiences are also identified as on the street and whose knowledge also comes primarily from lived experience.

From this comes a communitarian consciousness of inhabiting el barrio, which these activists are occupying and appropriating from a female and feminist position. Women’s organised community work within the Mexican barrios in the city is not, however, something new. It began at least at the end of the 1970s and the 1980s. Many women from working-class background living in Mexico City in low-income areas and barrios became involved with feminist ideas, through the self-consciousness feminist workshops of the 1970s. These workshops were influenced by the second wave American Feminism and Italian feminist collectives and consisted of meetings where women would share their own experiences, often specifically concerned about sexuality and women’s bodies. Feminists that came from leftist political movements decided to broaden the feminist movement in Mexico City by working with *colonas*, working-class women living in barrios, peasants, and factory workers. Later the women’s groups from Mexico City barrios constituted groups that later came to be known as

the *movimiento de mujeres*, (women's movement) (Díaz Barriga 1998; Jelin 1990; Molyneux 2001). In those years some members of movimiento de mujeres did not consider themselves feminists and did not follow a feminist agenda. The debate over allegiance to feminism would reappear at different stages of the *Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters EFLAC). Key to understanding EFLAC debates is the widely embraced but highly contested ideal of feminist autonomy, which is considered as the cornerstone of Latin American feminist identity (Alvarez 1998). Autonomy and *autogestión* constitute nodal points that interweave current Latin American feminist hip-hop and a long history of autonomous Latin American feminisms.

However, theory is not forgotten, it is present in Batallones Femeninos discourses, and although they assume themselves outside of the academia, they have adopted some of the theoretical tools to name some of their practices. During their participation in CCEMX with Silvana Iman, Obeja said: "we are decolonizing ourselves inside this structure". Moreover, she shared her latest reading: *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Cd Juárez* (Territory, Sovereignty, and Crimes of the Second State: The Writing on the Body of Murdered Women) of feminist anthropologist Rita Laura Segato. Obeja's readings and declarations not only show that she is interested in recent academic theorising and publications that have been widely disseminated in the current Latin American feminist movement, but also that it is unavoidable to think about feminism without some theoretical tools that allow the comprehension and defiance of the dominant structure, the patriarchy.

Batallones Femeninos as a female collective, with lyrics denouncing feminicides, supporting women's rights and social movements was immediately categorised by feminist movements as a feminist collective, but actually it took some time until the founding members, among them

Obeja, assumed themselves as feminists. As she said, it was until she began travelling and got to know other committed women within the antifeminicide movement and got immersed into feminist readings that she started to name herself a feminist.

This process of becoming a feminist from their very own context, los barrios, is a collective process, in which the Batallones Femeninos members share their knowledge with each other. Following Xibalkba's words, becoming part of Batallones Femeninos confronted her with some misleading ideas which equate machismo with feminism. Also, these reflections allowed her to realise that most of her everyday practices supporting women rights and community work in her barrio were feminist practices. Obeja's feminist collective reflection is mainly committed to promoting the antifeminicide movement throughout the whole country and, simultaneously, with creating sorority networks.

However, not all Batallones Femeninos members assume themselves to be feminists. Obeja reminds me of this while talking about the case of Murder, the youngest member who is in charge of the music production:

Murder told me 'I am not a feminist' and she was crying. 'I don't understand this, why do we have to divide? Why we can't go to *tokines* (gigs) with the *vatos* (boys)'. And I told her, Murder you are young, for you those things are still important. A long time ago I broke with all that, and said my *compas* (male friends) are shit, they think they are very intelligent and understand many things, but they are blind and deaf to many other things. Murder doesn't like to be on stage when we sing "La cumbia Feminista" or "La Menstruación", she gets off the stage, and she is among the crowd laughing. But I understand it is such a big step (to call yourself a feminist). I understand she fears

to stand from there and I told her, ‘Because the collective assumes one position you do not have to’.

Obeja’s narration of this difficulty opens up three connected discussions: the first relates to Mexican female rappers who dismiss feminism in hip-hop; the second relates to the rejection of the term feminism among some young women; and the third relates to the dilemma of assuming, or not, certain identities within a collective.

To address these topics, I return to *Femcees, alzar la voz: Jornadas de Hip-Hop y Genero* the women’s rap event organized by CCEMX. One of the activities included an open conversation between Obeja from Batallones Femeninos, Swedish rapper Silvana Iman, Swedish pop singer Beatrice Eli; Jessy P, founder of Mujeres Trabajando, and Afromega, both of them very well-known Mexican female rappers. During the conversation the women discussed the difficulties they have experienced as female rappers within hip-hop, the panel moderator asked the participants if they would consider their artistic practice as framed by feminism. This question brought a heated debate surrounding feminism and rap. Jessy P said: “Let’s forget names such as female rap, feminist rap, and rap made by women, let’s simply say rap”. While Afromega asserts: “I have no problem with men”. I couldn’t avoid seeing Obeja’s discomfort when listening to those asseverations. These asseverations, in which feminism is identified as a political positioning that rejects men *de facto*, replicate Obeja’s narration related to Murder’s rejection of feminism. I consider Jessy P’s rejection of the feminist position within hip-hop is intimately connected with her experience being a teenager during the NGOization of feminism during the first years of effervescence in the rap music scene in Mexico City during the 1990s. In those years, feminism was recently linked to institutionalisation, cooptation of the women’s rights movement by the State and international agencies. In the 1990s, more specifically 1996, Jessy P along with Ximbo, emerged as the more well-known femcees in Mexico City and its

metropolitan area. They were also founders of the first female rap crew in México called *Mujeres Trabajando* in 2009. However, the collective did not represent a feminist position, although they were supporting only female rappers. *Mare Advertencia Lirika* participated in the collective for some time.

During the CCEMX open conversation, what I experienced was the clash among older and newer generations of femcees over the acceptance or rejection of feminism. It cannot be denied that some women belonging to the younger generation born at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s do not feel part of feminism, as is the case of *Murder*. This polemic surrounding the acceptance or rejection of feminism takes us back in time to the 1990s with the global rise of individualism, neoliberalism, and institutionalisation of women's movements. Some of the female rappers that became well known in the hip-hop scene in that decade did not want to be connected to the feminist movement. Despite being heirs of the achievements of the militancy of the first and second wave feminists that materialised their main struggles around women's right to vote, and access to education, they did not feel related.

Although many female rappers that began their careers during the 1990s are positive regarding egalitarian gender attitudes within and outside hip-hop world, they tend to be unwilling to identify as feminists (Williams 1997; Schnittker 2003). Ximena Bustamante (2004) and Marta Lamas (1996, 2014), suggest the fundamental reason feminism has not had sufficient impact on young women in México are that they only identify within their groups; and the second wave feminist speeches that promote their participation are politically ineffective. Lamas mentions that the distancing of young women obeys the discredit, ridicule and stigmatisation associated with feminist postures, as well as the "veil of equality" preventing them from questioning different forms of oppression. For Lamas, the "veil of equality", states that

feminism is unnecessary because men and women supposedly now have equal access to education, work and women's vote, among other rights.

This "veil of equality" resonates with the polemic term "post-feminism", which has been widely addressed by different authors, especially in the Anglophone context (McRobbie 2009; Gill 2016; Fuller 2015). Angela McRobbie writes that:

Post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (McRobbie 2004, 255).

The equality that had supposedly been achieved has added to the disappointment of many young women after the institutionalisation of women's movements in Latin America. The institutionalisation came after a series of international conferences organised by United Nations, such as the International Conference on development and population in Cairo in 1994 and the World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995. The monitoring of the implementation of the accorded women's programs gave rise to feminist NGOs, supported by the *institucionalizadas*, feminists that believed insertion into the political system automatically led to improving women's rights. Autonomous feminists denounced the UN Conferences as an international hegemonic project only useful to the neoliberal patriarchy post-dictatorships.

The divergence among *autónomas* and *institucionalizadas* would be in line with the gradual return of civilian and electoral democracies, the positioning of economic neoliberalism in Latin America and the consequent NGOization of Latin American Feminisms, as Sonia Alvarez explains:

On the one hand, dominant institutions incorporated select items of that agenda (feminist agenda), in part because growing numbers of feminist activists have devoted

their organizational energies to that end over the course of the past decade. On the other hand, the very creation of governmental and intergovernmental institutions dealing with ‘women’s issues’, the proliferation of legislation targeting women, and other forms of institutionalization of the feminist transformational agenda during the 1980s generated increased demand for extragovernmental institutions that could produce specialized information about women’s status to be more readily and effectively ‘fed into’ the policy process –something that the autonomous feminist groups or collectives of yesteryear, guided by the more informal, antihierarchical, functionally undifferentiated ‘feminist culture’ so aptly summarized by Heilborn and Arruda (1995) would have been hard presses to accomplish (1998, 306)

In comparison to the 1990s which represented feminist institutionalisation and the post-feminism period which negatively impacted on the first generation of femcees, feminist positioning among young female rappers has increased in recent years in Latin America. This new position has been traced by national and international media coverage (BBC, The Guardian, Al Jazeera) with a new self-proclaimed feminist movement within hip-hop culture and the more recent and incipient theorisation of the movement. Currently, young female rappers among other young female creative artists are returning to identify with the autonomous feminist movement and its ideal of autonomy and collective action, which has been at the heart of the feminist movement.

The current generation, which became politically involved in hip-hop and feminism after 2010, is living in a Mexican context characterised by the rise of feminicides, forced disappearances, problems caused by the narco-violence, the resurgence of the Zapatista movement, indigenous movements against hydroelectric environmental damage and its communitarian struggles.

There is also a wide circulation of decolonial and communitarian feminisms as well as the participation of women from different identities, ethnicities, class, educational backgrounds, denouncing coloniality and the promoting collective work among women, resulting in the construction of sorority networks.

The different provenances of the women that interact locally with the members of Batallones Femeninos during their travels locate them in a multiplicity of subject positions that mark identities. As Brah argues, “difference is not always a marker of hierarchy and oppression. Therefore, it is a contextually contingent question whether difference pans out as inequity, exploitation and oppression or as egalitarianism, diversity and democratic forms of political agency” (Brah 1996, 126). This involves the construction of group identities among women from the North, the Center, and the South of the country, mainly from urban contexts, but also indigenous contexts. Such formation can be traced in the organization of the SiempreViva tour, which was initially conceived as Mare’s music tour to present her latest music production, SiempreViva, in the North.

Hip-hop culture functions as the space of dialogue between the different class, race, educational, age, geographical backgrounds of Batallones Femeninos’s members and the extended sorority network that participates with them. Its specific usefulness draws on a generation of shared knowledge within the antifeminicide movement. As Obeja said, “We come from barrios, we come from the violence, we come from the *narcotráfico* (narcotraffic), we all come from different contexts, some of us are feminists, and some of us aren’t”. Here Obeja is talking about the large extended Kolectiva Fronteriza and Batallones Femeninos sorority network, and their use of rap. Obeja makes clear that what makes them stick together is that no matter if they come from the North, the Center or the South, the sorority networks

that work with Batallones Femeninos all come from the barrio, whether they are feminists or not. They are aware of the context by which violence is integrated within culture, money and geography in México, and the consequences of this in women's lives.

In relation to the funding of Batallones Femeninos's activities through the operational branch of Kolectiva Fronteriza, Obeja tells me: "I had a harsh attitude towards my *compas* (female friends). I didn't want to do anything with them because they brought *feria* (money) from different places, but then I talked with myself and I said if we don't accompany each other in our own particular ways, this [violence against women] will continue happening". Obeja makes her rejection to institutional funding evident, but at the same time she respects the different contexts of the members of Batallones Femeninos and Kolectiva Fronteriza, which include both autonomous and institutional feminists. The main goal is to denounce femicide and create consciousness through hip-hop culture and create solid women's networks. Consequently, there is a construction of extended sorority networks in which different feminisms intersect and collaboration involves respecting some forms of difference.

Thus, supported by an economic network that in many ways resembles the riot grrrls' countercultural DIY (Do It Yourself) economic strategies in the 1990s in the United States, the members of Batallones Femeninos transformed this DIY mentality into a DIO (Do It by Ourselves) attitude. "We have created our own styles," Poly, a member of the Mexico City Batallones Femeninos network tells me, "and in this way we have shared with other women, to do it by ourselves with other women". Described by Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) as the first entrepreneurial feminist youth culture, riot grrrls mixed punk subcultural practices with feminism, in the same way that Batallones Femeninos mix hip hop with feminism, mainly influenced by autonomous feminism in Latin America and the particular Mexican context as

the heirs of colonization. These feminist youth movements share similarities in their use of a networked media economy and in the subcultural origin of their music culture. Kearney notes that *riot grrrls* “were not as explicitly politicized as the activists of the mid-twentieth century ... the primary realm for their practices was culture, not politics” (2006, 55). They were not directly related with formal politics, in the sense of lobbying with politicians for public policy, but they were committed to the transformation of cultural practices and attitudes in the creation of young women’s political participation. In the case of Batallones Femeninos and their feminist practices they are openly feminist political agents. At least at the music level, because the operative larger Kolectiva Fronteriza works with feminists, some others that are in the process of becoming feminists and some others that do not necessarily call themselves feminists.

The feminist politics of these young women, then, is informed by their individual and collective experiences of everyday practices in a profoundly feminicidal Mexican State. Their feminism is nurtured by their travels throughout the country, meeting women from different backgrounds and the political, economic, social specificity of Latin America. This includes its colonized past, rapid urbanization, a mixture of a multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds, and strong economic inequalities and political unrest in the feminicidal State, but also tremendous counter-political and cultural vitality. In this sense I understand sororidad as a political project: a consciously feminist project of alliance among women from different political, economic, geographical cultural backgrounds with a conjunctural and common objective, which in this case in México is the antifeminicide movement. I understand conjunctural as the sum of forces that intersect in a particular time and context. I want to consider whether it would be possible to call this conjunctural and common objective, an agenda, a term that Marcela Lagarde discusses in her conceptualization of sororidad.

Obeja constructs relations of empathy and empowerment with different women, and not only within her artist networks – with the woman that are selling *tortillas* in the market, or weaving embroidery, or with whom Obeja *truequea* (swaps) some bracelets she made, just as easily and with as much significance as with women in the antifeminicide movement and other female rappers.

In her journal article titled “Pacto entre mujeres. Sororidad” (Pact among women. Sorority 2010b), Lagarde outlines her thinking on sororidad. She states that “for a long time, women no longer only support each other to live in an underground gender tuning. We have been negotiating and our pacts have had language” (2010b, 124, *my translation*). Since the very beginning, Lagarde declares, women’s networks have been moving from the private to the public sphere. She elaborates that the private sphere was where women traditionally established support networks in comparison to the public space, which has been male dominated. To discuss feminist interventions in the public, however, Lagarde turns to a discussion of the language of “pact” and “agenda”. For her there is an interconnection between the possibility of a political feminist pact and sororidad. Lagarde supports her conceptualization on the following triad of political concepts - pact, agenda and citizenship – as follows:

The agenda specifies the pact. It is not a coincidence that women make pacts when we find ourselves in the public sphere, and there it is the language and the ways of relating to achieve the agreement to intervene, propose, promote or execute so many things. Pact, agenda and citizenship go hand in hand. They have their antecedents in the direct

solidarity support, private, many times, clandestine and subversive between *una y otra* (one and another in female)” (2010b, 124, *my translation*).⁵³

I want here to consider which terms on which the pact, the agenda and citizenship are socially understood, more specifically in the political, geographical context of México in cities like Juárez. Centrally, I want to ask how the terms of pact, agenda and citizenship would be constructed among women in the specific Mexican case of Batallones Femeninos.

Citizenship is generally understood to be a role in the public sphere, a public sphere where the subjects of social contract are understood as equals, under universalist ideals of liberty and equality. This ideal citizenship was designed by and for the European male, and women were historically excluded and relegated to the private realm. The acquisition of “women’s citizenship” materialised later in the right to vote and thus based in a nationality experienced within a patriarchal structure of power. Feminist theorists have often argued that this women’s citizenship continues to relegate women to a place of non-recognition. According to this model of the world, the “social contract” is a pact that considers only one subject of citizenship, by default the male European figure represented in the Social Contract established in the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762) and John Locke (1689).

Feminists like Irigaray (1993) have criticized the patriarchal structure of this modern state, stressing the existence of a singular citizenship subject of rights, which is masculine, but also the lack of mechanisms to establish an autonomous female subjectivity and of philosophic, political parameters for constructing two sexually differentiated juridical subjects not

⁵³ Marcela Lagarde has been active politically in the development of laws to eradicate violence against women in Mexico, more specifically femicide, a term that she introduced during her legislative work in 2003. The same year, the LIX Mexican Chamber of Deputies established a Special Commission on Femicide, which adopted in 2006, the term femicide, that it points to the State’s responsibility. In 2009 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a verdict against México condemning the failure to protect the lives of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez.

subordinated one to the other. Irigaray's concerns with the rethinking of equality through sexual difference brought her to construct her notion of the 'double universal' (1985), which conduits for the full affirmation of two sexes. This idea has often been criticized, as being essentialist, because it only contemplates two genders. "What is important, on the other hand, is to define the values of belonging to a gender, valid for each of the two genders" (1993, 12). In this way, Irigaray began to think about how sexual difference could form the basis for the wholesale transformation of civil society on the basis of two sexually differentiated subjects living in intersubjectivity. "Equality between men and women, cannot be achieved without a *theory of gender as sexed* and a rewriting of the rights and obligations of each sex, *qua different*, in social rights and obligations' (1993, 13).

Citizenship as a modern term emerged from the Liberal state, usually first associated with post-revolutionary France and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). In the French context, women's claim to citizenship was initiated in 1791 with the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, written by Olympe de Gouges, which made clear that women were not included in the elaboration of the Social Contract. Joan Scott (1996) has explored the work of different pioneers of French feminism, among them de Gouges, and argues that from the French Revolution of 1789 until 1944 (when French women obtained the right to vote), citizens were men. In France the exclusion of women was attributed variously to the weaknesses of their bodies and minds, to physical divisions of labor which made women fit only for reproduction and domesticity, and to emotional susceptibilities that drove them either to sexual excess or to religious fanaticism.

Sororidad, in Lagarde's terms, challenges the Social Contract as outlined by Rousseau, in which the European Male is the protagonist. Nevertheless, Lagarde did not openly broach the

fact that seventeenth and eighteenth-century Social Contract discourse not only legitimizes the modern political subject exclusively as a European man but also ignores the process of constituting modern citizenship and capitalism together through the colonization of America, Africa, Australia, and other parts of the world. This notion of the modern subject must be understood in the global framework of colonial modernity (Quijano 2000; Espinosa 2014).

Rita Laura Segato (2003), too, asserts that in Latin America the Social Contract does not consider sexual difference, very much along the same lines as Carole Pateman had already stated in *The Sexual Contract* (1988). However, she does not consider the intersections of gender, race, social class that reconfigure women and their privileges and conditions of subordination in relation to a history of violence and colonization. The sexual contract by which women are subordinated to the power of a sexual colonial system must also be understood through the framework of decoloniality which allows critique of any universalization of the experiences of domination by women. Approaching the violent context of Latin America, and more specifically México, we must pay attention to the fact that organized crime does not respect the social contract and this situation has direct implications for the sexual social contract. Forced prostitution, feminicides, drug-related violence, forced disappearances, and corruption are all expressions of rupture with the social and sexual contract, and often in complicity with the State.

To better understand the elements of pact, agenda and citizenship within sororidad, following on from Lagarde's reflections, I want to suggest that this could also help us understand Batallones Femeninos' travels, and their networking with other women through concerts, workshops, and other activities, as the "pact" itself between the different women that are part of the sorority network, inserted within hip-hop culture. Drawing on Lagarde's

conceptualization I consider that, for Batallones Femeninos, a pact is constructed within hip-hop culture. Hip-hop takes the form of the pact, the space of dialogue, while the agenda is the shared project of the antifeminicide movement more broadly. But in this case citizenship is constructed while the members of Batallones Femeninos travel, occupy public spaces, construct networks with other women and raise awareness about women's violent context in their lyrics. They seek a feminist cultural citizenship that questions the established European male-centered idea, as well as other models of citizenship prior to colonization.

Different indigenous and mestizo feminists have addressed the existence of a double patriarchy in which colonial patriarchy is mixed up with the patriarchy of the indigenous communities. Mayan indigenous Lorena Cabnal (2010) and Aymara indigenous Julieta Paredes (2010) calls it *entronque patriarcal* (patriarcal junction) to describe the existence of an originary patriarchy in the Abya Yala region. Rita Segato (2013) analyses how gender relations are being modified historically by colonialism, based on the assumption that gender relations pre-exist the Conquest. She calls this preexistent patriarchy *patriarcado de baja intensidad* (low intensity patriarchy) in comparison to the European Colonial *patriarcado de alta intensidad* (high intensity patriarchy).

The construction of networks among women is also reflected on by Poly, member of the Mexico City Batallones Femeninos collective when she emphasizes:

We are working with women that work against feminicide in Juárez and Mexico City, women who participate with *autogestivas* collectives, from a vegan kitchen to a communitarian radio or working with jail populations. These are part of the activities the women who participate in Batallones Femeninos.

Poly herself has been an active participant in Radio Zapote, an autogestiva community radio station in Mexico City, since the beginning of the 2000s. Now she is a member of Batallones Femeninos and also works in a vegan community kitchen in Mexico City with Jimena, another member of the female rap collective in the city. Such activities that transgress the boundaries between hip hop and feminist communities as well as other forms of activism are common. MC Xibakbal, works in the juvenile prison system giving cultural workshops. Members' different professional areas and experiences inform feminist and hip-hop practices within Batallones Femeninos.

Batallones Femeninos began the Mexico City network in 2014 when they came together at an art exhibition called *Espacios Comunes: la toma del CCEMX* (Spaces in Common: taking CCEMX), which took place from 4th November 2014 to the 25th January 2015 in CCEMX the Spanish Cultural Centre in downtown Mexico City. This exhibition focused on the cultural work of artists from Ciudad Juárez, on the areas of architecture, audio-visuals, urban art, music and literature, who seek to construct collaborative communitarian networks. “We were very disconnected with the reality of feminicides and the rise of *desapariciones forzadas* (forced disappearances) in the North”, Poly tells me, adding that the art exhibition helped to make them conscious about the violence taking place in the country, especially in the North and its risky environment for women. The female MCs from the Mexico City network already knew Batallones Femeninos from previous meetings, but it was not until the art exhibition in Mexico City that they decided to work together. Their first musical event was in the World Festival of Resistance and Rebellion Against Capitalism, organized by EZLN in Chiapas between December 3 and January 3, 2014.

This women's hip-hop feminist alliance transcends geographies and provenances, all in tune with the anti-femicide movement in México, and I argue that, in the Latin American region, this is an example of the construction of what I have called *redes extendidas de sororidad* (extended sorority networks). In times of extreme violence, women appeal to such women's networks that go beyond friendship, because sororidad can be practiced with women that are not necessarily your friends but are similarly committed, in this case to the cessation of femicides and forced disappearances. I think sororidad's meaning is being constructed *in situ* in the current political and feminist context of México. Batallones Femeninos' production of knowledge and consciousness in relation to femicides emerges through autonomy, self-defense workshops, hip-hop concerts and travelling with women from different contexts as an ongoing example of sororidad. While travelling they are also producing knowledge through map making; a map that is the representation of their experiences as women on an individual and collective level, especially in relation to women's violence and femicide. They are constantly constructing this new map of México via their sororidad networks as they tour. This is a map that seeks and represents difference in women's backgrounds and trajectories, it features red spotlights that mark femicides, and interweaves sounds, experiences, biographies and feelings. This map-making performed throughout the SiempreViva Tour, and all their musical events, is a feminist, political and artistic challenge to the European male centred right to map making and the femicidal Mexican state. Such feminist map making through hip-hop culture also reminds the women that participate that they are not alone; that there are other women just like you in other geographies resisting because #VivasNosQueremos! (#WeWantUsAlive!).

Disruptive bodies on the stage

Charred remains of cargo trucks, blocked roads and protest graffiti under a grey sky reminiscent of the Nochixtlán clashes appear before our eyes. Gabo Revuelta from Mexican

Sound System, Obeja Negra, Mare Advertencia Lirika and Akil Ammar begin to rap: “Educación al servicio del poder o educación para el pueblo que la viene a defender, nacimos sin nada no tenemos que perder, no a la privatización, no al abuso de la ley”.⁵⁴

We are watching the beginnings of the music video “En Pie de Lucha” (On the struggle), in which Obeja and Mare participated supporting the teachers struggle against the Education Reform.⁵⁵ This is the way the first concert of the SiempreViva tour begins, in Torreón, Coahuila. Obeja and Mare had decided to project the video as an introduction to their presentation before a dozen young people, some of them young women that have participated in the women’s autonomy workshop (see Chapter 5) the previous day. The rest of the audience is composed of some families that are walking that Friday evening in Alameda Zaragoza, the downtown plaza of Torreón.

Selene, one of the girls that went to Mare’s workshop and whose family has given us accommodation as part of the extended sorority network in which Batallones Femeninos participate, tells me that she didn’t know Mare and Obeja until her mother showed her the video “En Pie de Lucha”. Selene’s mother is a primary school teacher, just like her, and is committed to the teacher’s movement. In most cases, the way people get to know these female rappers is via social movements for which Batallones Femeninos and Mare have become the artistic support. Examples of these social struggles include the teacher’s movement, the feminist movement against feminicides, the defense of journalistic free speech, among

⁵⁴ “Education at the service of power, or education for the people who come to defend it; We were born with nothing we have nothing to lose; Not to the privatization, not to the abuse of the law” (*my translation*)

⁵⁵ The video was launched on the 18th of July 2016, one month after clashes in Nochixtlán. The artists participating were Obeja Negra from Batallones Femeninos, Akil Ammar, Tapacamino Colectivo Musiquero, Mexikan Sound System, Mare Advertencia Lirika and Bungalo Dub. The video is part of the project of Gran Om Video and Discourse, Episode 06. On this project, Videoclip & Discourse they sympathize with the teacher’s struggle: “From our perspective the Educational Reform has every intention of dismantling a strong and organized movement like the Teachers Syndicate CNTE and section 22”. The video was filmed in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca, in the Huajuapán Teacher’s College, also in the community radio station *Tu un Ñuu Savi*, as well as in a tent in downtown Oaxaca.

others. Batallones Femenino's disruptive nature is recognised by other social actors that have invited them to perform and participate in their political actions. When the video of the song "En Pie de Lucha" is projected, Obeja appears on screen, fiercely staring down the camera while she raps, having as background the teacher's protest tent in downtown Oaxaca. As she walks by the tent a group of teachers surrounds her, lifting their fists in support. The audience in the plaza keeps silent and attentive to Obeja's lyrics:

Viejo conocido, asesino narcoestado,
Heteropatriarcado, impositivo, machista
Fascista, neoliberal, feminicida
Ecocida, Banco Mundial, militarización global.
No es solo una sección, un grupo solo de oposición
Somos las de abajo y vamos por los de arriba
Muerte al mal gobierno, muerte a la reforma dizque educativa
Pacto por México, pacto del terror
Pacto entre partidos al servicio del mejor postor.⁵⁶

The Mexican State is at the centre of Obeja's denunciations. Her accusatory epithets resonate in our ears and memories, recalling the various crimes in which the Mexican government is implicated, such as femicide, militarization, the War on Drugs, forced disappearances, and damage to the environment via dams and transnational hydroelectrics. She also makes clear her mistrust in the Education Reform, rapping "*muerte a la reforma dizque educativa*" (Death to the so-called education reform). All of these postures are also situated from a female perspective. When declaring "*Somos las de abajo y vamos por los de arriba*" (We are the

⁵⁶ "Old acquaintance, murderer Narco-State; Heteropatriarchy, impositive, *machista*; Fascist, neoliberal, *feminicida*; *Ecocida*, World Bank, global militarization; It is not just a section a single opposition group; We are the underdogs (in female) and we are going for the mighty ones; Death to the bad government, death to the so-called educational reform; Pact for Mexico, Pact of Terror; Pact between political parties at the service of the highest bidder" (*my translation*).

underdogs [female] and we are going for the mighty ones), the female protagonist takes the main role in dismantling power.

This is not the first time Obeja has sung against the Mexican State, but it is the first time she has raised her voice with other rappers in a music video with a conjunctural social demand, the teacher's movement, positioning her as a disruptive body that confronts the State. She also frames her denunciations within a broader structure, the whole Mexican territory, not only from her own specific province of Ciudad Juárez. This is a sign of Batallones Femeninos' covering broader issues that affect wider Mexican society, such as their song "Ayotzinapa", included in their most recent music album *Vivas Nos Queremos* (2016).

This is evident in their most recent music album which has stronger feminist positioning and covers broader social struggles than on their first album, *Informacion Nutri-Mental* (2014). *Vivas Nos Queremos* (figure 6), is not only the title of the album but a constant slogan of current feminism, with the album cover depicting a young dark-skinned woman with high cheekbones, and fierce posture. She is wearing a pink kerchief covering her mouth that allow us to see her fierce stare, a pink t-shirt with the printed message, *Vivas Nos Queremos*, and pink boxing gloves. Her figure is surrounded by an aureole that emulates the luminous cloud that usually surrounds Our Lady of Guadalupe in popular Mexican iconography. The art for the album was produced by Peruvian artist Amapolay, who designed a series of illustrations as part of the visual and graphic movement *Vivas Nos Queremos*.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Amapolay Manufacturas Autonomas is a Peruvian artist with a feminist and anti-colonialist position in her work. *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, also known as the Virgin of Guadalupe is the patroness of Mexico and has been the model of ideal womanhood for all Catholics of Latin America, particularly Mexicans, for over 400 years. She is traditionally superficially depicted as mild and submissive in relation to her virginity; the embodiment of what a woman should be like. On December 12, Mexican Catholics celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe. These celebrations commemorate the day she appeared to indigenous peasant Juan Diego on Mexico City's Tepeyac Hill in 1531. There have been different artistic interpretations of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, including different feminist, queer, anti-colonialist, and Chicano nationalism positions. Among the most important and polemic is Alma López's work with her digital collage "Our Lady". She depicts a young Latina confidently staring back at

There are also new musical collaborations in *Vivas Nos Queremos*, showing the expansion of Batallones Femeninos' sorority networks, such as the song "Sin Miedo", (Without fear) in which Mare Advertencia Lirika collaborates. The subjects of these songs continue to emphasise the rejection of feminicide and the different forms of violence directed towards women throughout México. This is a posture of feminist self-defense, and they continually rap and sing about social movements that impact the whole country.

In their previous production, *Información Nutri-Mental* (figure 7), the Batallones Femeninos collective – which in those days was only composed of female rappers from Ciudad Juárez – focused on the very local conflicts of their frontier city, principally feminicides and the local War on Drugs. The labour of production and cover art was made by the members of Batallones Femeninos, and especially by Dilema, who is a graphic designer. Emulating the design of a nutritional facts label they enumerated the ingredients, special ingredient, and bar code, of their album, having as an ingredient 'Hip-hop', among the other special ingredients: justice, love, dedication, sorority, union, passion, etc. They positioned in a circular graphic the four elements of hip-hop culture: breaking, illustrated with a pair of tennis shoes, an LP representing djing, a paint spray-can aerosol valve, representing graffiti, and a microphone, representing rap. These icons are encircled with the word in capital letters, CIUDAD JUAREZ. Every time Batallones Femeninos opens a concert singing one of the songs from that music album they say out loud: "Informacion Nutri-mental para sus oidos" (Nutri-mental information for your ears).

the viewer, hands on hips, clad only in roses, exalted by a bare-breasted butterfly angel. Her cloak is covered in images of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess. Our Lady was shown at the Museum of International Folk Art in New Mexico, in 2001. Immediately the museum began receiving angry phone calls from community activists and Catholic leaders who demanded that the image not be displayed. Protest rallies, prayer vigils, and death threats ensued. In response to this protest Lopez Lopez wrote a book entitled *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez's "Irreverent" Apparition* (2001). In this book she explains that *Our Lady of Guadalupe* also served as symbols in art work for the Chicano Movement in the United States and the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico.

The expansion of the subjects of the songs is related with the current social movements, such as the case of the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. Obeja spent a whole year in the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College creating a serigraphy workshop among the students. In the same year the rest of the collective members established contact and alliances with other artists supporting the families of the disappeared students, and as part of an homage they wrote *Ayotzinapa*, a song that begins with the phrase "Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos" (*They were taken alive, we want them back alive*).⁵⁸ The song was recorded by Obeja and the Mexico City Batallones Femeninos's collective, following their experiences when visiting and staying in Ayotzinapa, in the municipality of Tixtla in the state of Guerrero. The whole collective began by rapping:

Ayotzinapa, crimen de narco estado,
simulacros de gobierno, caos, terrorismo televisado.
Hoy es la meta mantenerme firme en el camino,
sembrando abre caminos con Batallones Femeninos
Salimos a la carretera no sabíamos si íbamos directo a la hoguera,
Lucio Cabañas como estandarte, la cara arriba,
la lucha en el corazón, los ideales bien definidos
hasta la muerte no seré vencido"⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College, best known as Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College, is a higher-level institution for males only, located in Ayotzinapa, in the municipality of Tixtla in the Mexican state of Guerrero. It is part of the rural teacher's school system that was created as part of an ambitious mass education plan implemented by the state in the 1920s.

⁵⁹ Ayotzinapa, narcostate crime, simulation of government, chaos, televised terrorism. Today the goal is to remain firm in the path, planting opens roads with Batallones Femeninos "We went out to the road, we did not know if we were going straight to the stake, Lucio Cabañas as a banner, face up, the battle in the heart, well defined ideals until death I will not be defeated" (*my translation*).

These lyrics reference a local symbol of struggle. Lucio Cabañas, the legendary guerrilla leader and schoolteacher, who also studied in the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College and started a guerrilla movement in Guerrero between 1967 and 1974. There is also a double reference in the phrase "no sabíamos si íbamos directo a la hoguera" (we didn't know if we were going straight to the stake), which shows the risks of supporting this social movement, but also they refer to the image of the witch to be burnt at the stake is somewhat illustrated in one of Obeja's experiences during her time at the teacher's school. She was told by one of the rural teacher's college students during her stay in Ayotzinapa that because of Batallones Femeninos's lyrics and feminist positioning she would 'be burnt', "because in my *pueblo*, a woman saying what you say is not accepted". Nevertheless, Obeja declares "I think we can do readings, share things, because they are still *morros* (young)". There is hope in Obeja's declaration, especially because she had the opportunity to engage in different social activities with the all-male students, but she remains aware of the deep patriarchal structure. The reception of their lyrical content varies widely, depending on the audience. In this case the possibility of engaging with the male rural teacher's college students was mediated by Batallones Femeninos's commitment to the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students and the creation of a serigraphy workshop where the students can learn to print messages that express their social demands to the Mexican State.

Generally, the audience during the different concerts of the SiempreViva tour and the subsequent concerts in Mexico City Batallones Femeninos and Tlaxcala, is comprised of activists, feminists, university students from the Social Sciences departments, and young people within the hip hop scene. Most of them were already familiar with the lyrical content – which are all under collective authorship- and even some of them, especially the feminists from autonomous spaces, knew each song by heart. But during the concerts in public plazas the public varied and expanded to seniors with their grandkids, whole families, and even the armed

militia ‘patrolling’ the plaza during the Gómez Palacio concert. Everytime Obeja got on the stage during the Siempre Viva tour, she declared out loud: “Desde la frontera, en representacion de Batallones Femeninos” (From the frontier, in representation of Batallones Femeninos). Obeja was the only member at the concert, due to a lack of economic resources and work commitments that did not allow the other members of Batallones Femeninos to attend. There was a constant geographic enunciation of Ciudad Juárez and Obeja’s representation of the whole Batallones Femeninos’s crew.

The Siempre Viva tour collaboration between Obeja from Batallones Femeninos and Mare Advertencia Lirika was not limited to Mare’s workshops and songs but also spontaneous improvisations, such as the following which she created during a radio interview:

Nací mujer en un mundo de machitos, nací poeta y ahora voy gritando hip-hop, contra la violencia de Estado y en mi estado. Fuerza y Unión en mi canto lo declaro. Yo no canto por cantar, canto porque quiero despertar las conciencias en todo mi pueblo. Ante el odio y la avaricia, este canto se levanta contra toda esa inmundicia. Somos mujeres, creadoras de vida y la protegeremos contra toda esa injusticia. Vamos sin prisa, con calma y con cuidado, uniendo fuerzas con las que caminan a mi lado, cantando al mundo porque es lo que nos toca, comunicando de los triunfos y derrotas y aunque somos pocas eso no es pretexto, dejamos claro que una mujer nunca es menos. Somos dos somos fuerza, somos vida y libertad obras plasmadas y letras, más que una alerta entre verdades realidades mira detente y observa.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ “I was born a woman in a world full of *machitos*, I was born a poet and now I’m shouting hip-hop, against the State violence and in my state. I declare force and union in my song. I do not sing for sing, I sing because I want to wake up the consciences in my entire *pueblo*. This song rises against hatred and avarice, against all that filth. We are women, creators of life and we will protect it against all that injustice. We go slowly, calmly and carefully, joining forces with those who walk by my side, singing to the world because it is what we have to do, communicating the triumphs and defeats and although we are few, it is not excuse; we make it clear that a woman is never less. We are two we are strength, we are life and freedom, artwork and lyrics, more than an alert among truths and realities look up, stop and observe” (*my translation*).

Both rappers created collective knowledge and materialized their shared hip-hop and feminist positions in this improvised cipher. In this song, they position themselves as women born in a patriarchal world, and as poets defying State violence. Also, there is an evocation of Chilean Songwriter Victor Jara's song "Manifiesto". In the first verse Jara sings: "Yo no canto por cantar, ni por tener buena voz, canto porque la guitarra tiene sentido y razón". Meanwhile, Mare and Obeja sing "Yo no canto por cantar, canto porque quiero despertar las conciencias en todo mi pueblo".⁶¹

Obeja and Mare's hip hop lyrics resonate within the long history of socially committed music in Latin America, such as la *Nueva Canción* (The New Song Movement). Originating during the 1960s and 1970s, nueva canción contested the political dictatorships in the South American region and had an important role in social and political change. Violeta Parra and Victor Jara from Chile would be two important figures in this movement. In the same way, female rappers are using hip hop as a tool to raise consciousness, contest the Mexican State, and create sorority networks. Thus "the singing is a way of articulating a right to free expression, to freedom of assembly, and to the broader rights of citizenship" (Butler 2009a, 5).

In addition, Batallones Femeninos's music collaboration with other female artists is not restricted to hip hop culture. They have also expanded their sounds to cumbia and son jarocho, especially with their most recent collaboration with the female group Las Brujas Sonfusion.⁶²

⁶¹ Jara: I do not sing to sing, nor having a good voice, I sing because the guitar makes sense and reason ... Mare and Obeja: I do not sing for sing, I sing because I want to wake up the consciences of my entire *pueblo*. (*my translation*).

⁶² Cumbia is a popular music genre originated in Colombia Since the late 1940s, Colombian cumbia has moved beyond its borders, mainly to Latin America. In the seventies cumbia was introduced by Colombian travelers who were on their way to the United States. In each part to which cumbia arrived, cumbia mixed with local sounds, rhythms and identities, generating its own styles in each region. In the late 60's and 70's, in Peru and Mexico began to adapt to local styles of music and in some cases with rock n roll influences (for example, the use of electric guitar). Son jarocho is a regional folk musical style from Veracruz, Mexico and represents a fusion of indigenous (primarily Huastecan), Spanish, and African musical elements, reflecting the population which

They met in 2015 and decided to work together after their participation in the Jornadas Feministas del Sur in Chiapas (Feminist Journeys of the South) held on October 2nd 2016. Las Brujas Sonfusion is a Mexico City collective of five young women playing, as the name of the group dictates, a fusion of different sounds and rhythms with drums, bass, guitar, and jarana. The mixture of different sounds and instruments from Latin America enriches the rap songs of Batallones Femeninos. This is an example of how hip-hop culture adapts to local styles of music, in this case cumbia and son. The lyrics of Las Brujas Sonfusion also denounce feminicides, the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students, and other social issues.

As I have already mentioned, Batallones Femeninos produced a song together with Las Brujas Sonfusion for the independent media network Desinformémonos, supporting free media, and they shared the stage in Mexico City during the BBC 100 Women event on November 2016. Among the songs they played together were covers and re-interpretations of famous Colombian cumbias, such as “La Cumbia del Amor” (Cumbia Lovesong), by Lisandro Mesa, and “El Pescador” (The Fisherman) by the multinational group Los Wawanco.⁶³ The latter song was modified in the sense that the main character of a fisherman was transformed into a fisherwoman, “La Pescadora”. In addition, parts of the lyrics were modified and some other words were added, in order to adapt it to a feminist posture and rap tempo. The result of the transformation of the original lyrics of “El pescador” is as follows:

Va subiendo la corriente con chinchorro y atarraya,

La canoa del bareque para llegar a la playa...

evolved in the region from Spanish colonial times. The term jarocho is a colloquial term for people from the port city of Veracruz.

⁶³ Lisandro Meza is a Colombian musician and songwriter which music ranges from the traditional Colombian cumbia, and vallenato. Los Wawancó is a multinational group of tropical music formed in Argentina, the members coming from diverse nationalities such as Chilean, Peruvian, Colombian and Argentinian. The Female Singer Toto la Momposina sings also “El Pescador.”

La pescadora habla con la luna La pescadora habla con la playa

La pescadora no tiene fortuna solo su atarraya

[Rap]

La pescadora pescando sus sueños y anhelos

creando la unidad (..) ampliando los horizontes, la libertad,

el sentimiento de conciencia

Como es eso de que nos quieren callar y matar?

Comunidad justicia y sororidad.⁶⁴

A popular cumbia song is thus transformed into a feminist song, having as main character a fisherwoman and her conversation with the moon. The moon, as a symbol of women's menstrual cycles, gains strength and a deep symbolism from this transformation.

This enunciated sorority is not only materialized in such lyrical and music collaborations but also while supporting recent campaigns against sexual harassment within universities. On the 26th of August 2016 Batallones Femeninos held a concert on the campus of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in support of the campaign #Construyendocomunidad and as part of the United Nations campaign HeforShe. This campaign was focused on sexual harassment inside the university. The UNAM campaign is not an isolated one, but reflects the recent escalation of denunciations of sexual harassment perpetuated by male academics and students in three very well-known Mexican universities, two of them public and one private: UNAM, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (The

⁶⁴ "It goes up the stream with a small boat and a fishing net, The canoe made of bareque will reach the beach, The fisherwoman speaks with the moon The fisherman speaks with the beach The fisherwoman has no fortune only her fishing net"; "The fisherwoman is fishing her dreams and desires Creating unity ... broading her horizons, freedom, The feeling of consciousness How is possible that they want to silence us up and kill us? Community Justice and Sorority! "(my translation)

Metropolitan Autonomous University UAM), and Universidad Iberoamericana (The Ibero-American University IBERO).⁶⁵

Canvas prints cover the walls of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at UNAM. They read “Si no denuncias la violencia se vuelve infinita” (If you don’t denounce, violence becomes infinite); “El acoso verbal no es gracioso” (Verbal harassment is not funny); “No somos *mamacitas*” (We are not *mamacitas* [Sweet Momma]). Batallones Femeninos’s rap lyrics resonate in the distance while I am approaching the main quad of this Faculty and staring at the posters hanging on the walls.

A small group of young women dance and sing Batallones Femeninos’ songs, while the larger audience of male and female students silently stare at Batallones Femeninos’ performance. Suddenly, an alarm began to sound during the concert. A warning alarm, coming from the female toilets, I was told by one of the organizers. The members of Batallones Femeninos continue singing, and the alarm stops. The Faculty had decided to install warning buttons inside the female toilets stalls, after a series of denunciations of men taking photographs of the female students inside the toilets. My first response was to be surprised and angry that apparently women do not even have a secure and private place to pee in this university. Later, when going to the toilet, I would find, close to the door, this famous red warning button, with which some students are not yet familiar and so have sometimes have pushed by accident, as happened during the concert.

⁶⁵ In the case of The Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), on the 30th May 2017, a collective of female students publicly denounced sexual harassment perpetrated by male staff (see <https://www.laquearde.org/2016/06/06/lo-academico-no-quita-lo-machista-muro-de-denuncia-al-acoso-en-la-uam-x/>). On the 29th August, The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) signed an agreement with United Nations campaign HeforShe to stop sexual harassment inside the university. After these signature a series of violent acts towards female students still occurred and were denounced in different rallies against male teachers (see <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/metropoli/cdmx/2016/09/2/marchan-en-la-unam-contra-violencia-las-mujeres>). Female students from The Ibero-American University (IBERO) on November 2016 also denounced sexual violence within the university through installations (<http://distintaslatitudes.net/protestan-rector-la-ibero-violencia-sexual-la-universidad>).

Obeja Negra, Xibalkba, Luna Negra, and Poly, are coming to the end of their concert. They respectfully raise their fists in honor of the victims of feminicides and sexual harassment, inviting the audience to do the same. Such practices challenge the silence that victims habitually keep in the face of this kind of violence, and Batallones Femeninos pursue the end of this silence through conscious music, conscious hip hop. Alongside the making public of victim testimonies, and the legal denunciations, such conscious rap supporting women's struggles all invite young women to realize that in order to survive we have to become *manada* – Batallones Femeninos.

CHAPTER 4 MARE ADVERTENCIA LIRIKA

The interwoven of the personal and the collective

Tonight is the 16th of September, 2016. Mare and I are walking in the streets of downtown Oaxaca. Tricolour (green, red, white) flags and photographs of heroic national figures from last night's celebrations of Mexican Independence still cover the government buildings and *kioskos*, while some families are gathered near the cathedral, enjoying celebratory fireworks. On the opposite side of the Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción (Our Lady of the Assumption), a teacher's camp stands fiercely against the current educational reforms. These have generated protests and outright rejection because of the consequences for teachers including increased administration and labor. Suddenly, a small spark from the fireworks leaps out and catches my left hand, leaving a small burn, but what is really on fire right now is the teachers' struggle.

Since 2016 the government has pursued a new model of Education Reform designed to break from union power, eliminate rural education and get rid of teachers as social leaders in their communities. This is not the first time the Oaxacan teachers' union has protested education reform initiatives coming from the government. Ten years ago, Oaxaca's *zócalo* was not only occupied by the teacher's camp demanding a salary increase but was also full of barricades. In 2006, a large number of the Oaxacan population joined forces with the teachers' union, 'Section 22', demanding the removal of Ulises Ruiz, the Oaxacan governor, and member of the long-reigning Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Their discontent was focused on the fraudulent election of Ulises Ruíz as governor; the destruction of historical sites; the diversion of public funds towards Roberto Madrazo's presidential campaign; the government's failure to

deal with social demands such as better conditions and salaries to the teacher's; the dispossession of indigenous lands and the intensification of repression of Oaxacan peoples.⁶⁶ A group of dissident teachers from the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Coordinator of Education Workers Union, CNTE) demanded better wages and labor conditions. CNTE first emerged in Chiapas, in December 1979, as a democratic vein within the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Education Workers, SNTE) criticizing the union subordination to the State. The SNTE was founded in 1943 and divided into 58 sections across the Mexican states. Some states have two sections. That is the case in Chiapas, with sections 7 and 40. Oaxaca is represented by Section 22 and this represents CNTE's main force. They took the control of Section 22 in 1982, and since then have grown to 70, 000 members emancipated from the PRI.

In April 2006, negotiations over better labor conditions intensified, carrying on into the middle of May without results. On the 22th of May, tens of thousands of school teachers marched in protest to the *zócalo*, just as they had done every year since 1980. Every year (generally in May) downtown Oaxaca becomes an enormous camp site for protesting teachers. On the 14th of June 2006, police stormed the teacher's camp using tear gas. After these events, the teacher's protest became a popular movement and barricades sprung up on many streets throughout Oaxaca. It was the rise of a community-based and self-organized movement that materialized in Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the Towns in Oaxaca, APPO), which declared a formal constitution on the 19th of June 2006. The members were part

⁶⁶ The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) is a political party founded in 1929, which held power uninterrupted power in the country for 71 years (1929-2000). Currently the Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto (Presiden 2012-2018) comes from the PRI. In 2006, Roberto Madrazo was the PRI presidential candidate, but he lost and the elected candidate was Felipe Calderon from the PAN.

of the teacher's union Section 22, representatives of the academic sector, and left political groups.⁶⁷

This led to the governor Ulises Ruíz fleeing Oaxaca City, the Oaxacan capital, for three months. After a series of massive mega-marches in Oaxacan City, the movement was met with violent repression. Participants were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. The 25th November 2006 was the most tragic day, when a brutal confrontation between APPO and the federal forces of Ulises Ruiz took place. According to the Comisión Civil Internacional de Observación por los Derechos Humanos (Civil International Commission for the Observation of Human Rights CCIODH) the repression in Oaxaca resulted in 31 people disappeared, 203 arrested, 26 people killed, hundreds tortured and a city destroyed and militarized (Osorno 2007; Lapierre 2008). APPO was a coalition of more than 300 organizations, having as its main protagonist the teacher's union, Section 22, and in 2006 it disrupted the functions of Oaxaca's government for six months. This would not have been possible without the collaboration of the long-time Oaxacan indigenous resistance movement and its historical forms of organization already present in the state's communities, known as *comunalidad*, or (a communal way of life).

In the year of the APPO uprising, Mare Advertencia Lirika was 19 years old and a member of the first all-female Oaxacan rap collective, Advertencia Lirika, which she formed with Luna and Itza in 2003. They began to actively support the teacher's movement with their lyrics, demanding the release of political prisoners. For Mare, this context "was an opportunity to

⁶⁷ Political groups such as Frente Popular Revolucionario FPR (Popular Revolutionary Front), Frente Amplio de Lucha Popular FALP (Broad Front of Popular Struggle), Consejo de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo Codep (Defense of the People's Rights); Union de Organizaciones de la Sierra de Juarez Unosjo (Union of *Organizations* of the Sierra Juarez), Servicios del pueblo mixe SER, Consejo Indígena Popular de Oaxaca "Ricardo Flores Magón CIPO-RFM (Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca *Ricardo Flores Magón*), Consejo de ancianos Yalalag (Council of Elders *Yalálag*), Servicios Comunitarios Ñuu Savi (Communitarian Services Ñuu Savi); *Union de Comunidades de la Region del Istmo UCIRI (Union of Indigenous Communities of the Isthmus Region)*; *Unión de Mujeres Yalaltecas (Yalaltecas Union of Women)*; students, among others.

break with the State and the start of an independent hip-hop scene in Oaxaca with more politically conscious, critical lens” (interview). This context generated a bridge between youth-oriented cultural practices such as hip-hop and political social movements that would be reflected in the social justice lyrics of Advertencia Lirika’s two albums: *3 Reinas* (3 Queens) (2007) and *Mujer de Maíz* (Women of Maize) (2008). In 2009, the collective separated and Mare began her solo career, renaming herself Mare Advertencia Lirika.

The southern Mexican state of Oaxaca – together with the nearby states Michoacán, Chiapas, and Guerrero - is considered the dissident Mexican state par excellence and thus fitting as Mare’s birthplace. This is where she dreams, writes, composes her rap lyrics, and participates in different political struggles. The fact that she grew up within a matriarchal family, with indigenous Zapotec roots, in the working-class neighborhoods of Oaxaca City, and that her family migrated there from Latuvi in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, impacts profoundly on Mare’s political identity, her connection with community, and her reasons for being immersed into hip-hop culture. Located in the south of México, and bordered by the states of Puebla, Veracruz, Chiapas and Guerrero, Oaxaca has the largest indigenous population in the country and has been the cradle of diverse and continuous social movements. These range from the resistances of *pueblos originarios* (first nations) against colonization, through the emergence of guerrilla movements, to the current teacher’s movements and indigenous land dispossession struggles.

Mare’s experience of different social movements and particularly her first contact with protest poetry deeply influenced her. Mare directly connects her hip-hop cultural production to this extended history of resistance, especially the teacher’s movement. As she remarked during one of our conversations, “The community assumes *la lucha de los maestros* (the teacher’s fight),

because the teachers are part of the community”. Mare is deeply committed to the construction of community and to the historical indigenous resistances in Oaxaca, materialized in the concept of *comunalidad*. She makes this explicit in her declarations recorded in the documentary *Cuando una mujer avanza* (When a Woman Steps Forward, 2012):

The idea of not only doing it for me, not to get caught up in the individual self, but to return to *comunalidad*, to return to that history. At least, to remember, you are not alone. You are with the world, you are with the nature, and you are with your community. In this way it becomes our history and not the history of each of us separately, not to be *individuales* but to be *comunales* again.

I want to consider the history of *comunalidad* to which Mare refers here, and how her musical production is related to the Oaxacan indigenous and communities’ resistance. I would like to begin by giving a political, historical and geographical contextualization of *comunalidad* in this southern Mexican state, understanding it as a political project, an epistemological idea and part of everyday life in Oaxacan indigenous communities.

Named Antequera during the Spanish colonization, and called Huāxyacac in náhuatl, the word which later Oaxaca was later derived from, this state is characterized by a rough terrain composed of the convergence of the Sierra Madre del Sur, the Sierra Madre Oriental, and the Sierra Atravesada, into a mountainous region called the Oaxaca Complex. This “wrinkled landscape”, as Fray Antonio Gay would call it in *Historia de Oaxaca* (1881), does not have plains to guarantee an elevated level of agricultural productivity, which partly explains its pattern of *organización comunal* (communal organization). Oaxaca is also home to two of the most biologically diverse areas in México: the Chimalapas and the Sierra Norte. Practically all of the Mexican ecosystems are present in the 95,000 km of Oaxaca territory, which comprises eight geographical regions: Cañada, Costa, Istmo, Mixteca, Papaloapam, Sierra Sur, Sierra

Norte and Valles Centrales.

Each of these regions has their own cultural particularities, but of the 3.5 million inhabitants of Oaxaca, according to Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples 2010), more than one-third of Oaxaca's population is of indigenous origin (1,165,186 individuals). This population consists of more than 65 pueblos originarios, among them the Zapotecos, Mixtecos, Mixes, Chontales, Huaves, and Triquis. These peoples live throughout Oaxaca's eight regions, encompassing 17 languages with between 30 to 50 variants. A language such as Zapotec, which Mare is learning from her grandmother, may more accurately be considered a language family, for its variants, such as Zapotec of the Tehuantepec Isthmus and Zapotec of the Sierra, are as different one from another as Spanish is from Italian, and Italian from Portuguese.⁶⁸

These forms of diversity have persisted thanks to more than five hundred years of indigenous resistance and collectivism. This first involved resistance to the colonial Spanish regime but more recently involves resistance to the Mexican state that has constructed its mestizo national identity based on the cultural destruction and assimilation of pueblos originarios as well as the dispossession of *propiedad comunal* (communal land). The Mexican nationalist mestizo identity was constructed in the post-revolutionary years (1920-1940). Among the main promoters of this ideology was the Oaxaca-born writer and politician José Vasconcelos. He created the concept of *raza cósmica*, (cosmic race), that disseminated the myth of *mestizaje*, in which the Mexican mestizo was understood to constitute a new race which combined the

⁶⁸ The number of languages and their variants spoken in Oaxaca is disputed. It is commonly reported that there are between fourteen and seventeen languages with between thirty to fifty variants, though some say the number of variants may be as many as ninety. The different indigenous groups are zapoteco, mixteco, mazateco, chinanteco, mixe, afromexicano, chatino, triqui, huave, cuicateco, zoque, chontal, amuzgo, tzotzil, chochoiteco, ixcateco, and also the mestizo, a mixture of Afro-mexican, indigenous and occidental. (Barabas 2004).

virtues of indigenous and Europeans. This posture denied the existence of any African roots and overvalued European input.

The gradual dispossession of communal land in México began during the colonial era when the Spanish crown established the *encomienda* system, under pressure from the conquistadors. This system consisted of the distribution of vast domains of land, comprising indigenous villages and its inhabitants, to the Spanish conquistadors and to settlers for services rendered to the crown. Indigenous people were supposed to provide tribute to these new land-owners, in the form of gold, silver, crops, animals or anything else the land produced. The word *encomienda* comes from the Spanish word *encomendar*, ('to entrust'). Under the *encomienda* system, then, conquistadors 'were entrusted' with indigenous communities. As a key part of this entrustment they were responsible for converting the indigenous people to the Catholic faith. The owners of the *encomiendas* were not, however, expected to ever visit the *encomienda* lands, therefore the lands were run by the *cacique*, an indigenous or mestizo authority, designated by the Spanish master. The *cacique* system was perpetuated after Mexican Independence as a form of social organization based on *latifundio*, an extensive parcel of privately owned land, and this *latifundio* system was especially important under Porfirio Díaz, who served as President of México from 1876 to 1911 (Chevalier 1999). Under the Díaz regime, *haciendas* formed large residential estates that generated profit from enterprises such as plantations, mines or factories, for *hacendados* (land owner).⁶⁹

After the Mexican Revolution, *caciques* began to work into more lucrative activities such as banking, commerce, and industry. *Caciquismo* in this sense still continues in México, and a

⁶⁹ Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) was a Oaxacan mestizo of Mixtec heritage, general and dictator in power from 1876-1911. Díaz sought to promote capitalist development and to unify Mexicans by forging a secular national identity. Porfirian epoch consolidated the idealization of things European.

conflict is ongoing between the indigenous peoples that fight for their lands and the caciques as local potentates supported by the State (Bonfil 1994; Chevalier 1999).

There are thus both continuities and discontinuities between the colonial era and the new Mexican state. Emerging after Independence in 1810, the Mexican state was constructed on the basis of the liberal European state model and driven by the *criollo* (creole) and mestizo elite. The Constitution of 1857 thus supported private property and declared that ecclesiastical property and communal land were no longer held in perpetuity. This model required the denial of the various indigenous nations within Mexican territory and the dispossession of the *propiedad comunal* of the indigenous people recognised by the Spanish crown.⁷⁰

Although confiscating church property under these Reform laws limited the privileges of the Roman Catholic Church and sought a secular state, it also prohibited indigenous communities from collectively holding land, resulting in the destruction of communal land and the encouragement of private enterprise. This is what Jaime Martínez Luna describes as

The tendency towards the establishment of private property, originating in the colonial period and driven mainly by the Spanish *hacendados*, enemies of the indigenous community, found a strong ally in Benito Juárez, who when assuming power and issuing the Reform laws alienated the goods monopolized by the Church and also the goods of the communities. This fact, which was the result of the pressure exerted by the *criollos hacendados*, became the worst enemy that the indigenous community could have faced throughout its existence (Martínez Luna 2013, 146, *my translation*)

⁷⁰ It is important to clarify that the Spanish Crown used the word nation to distinguish the different indigenous peoples of Mexico. In the texts of Padre Díaz de la Vega he uses the word nation to distinguish different indigenous populations within Mexico: “The Yndios generally in all their nations” and enumerates “the mexican nation (the aztecs), the tlaxcalteca nation and the otomi nation” (Lafaye 1974, 5 *my translation*).

Benito Juárez, the first and only indigenous Mexican president from Oaxaca, imposed a liberal government that denied the multiplicity of indigenous nations within the Mexican territory and confiscated their lands. His declared aim was the progress of national homogeneity, which supposed that diverse indigenous sovereignties hindered the process of the capitalist development that the liberals requested and that the system of *propiedad communal* impeded the process of accumulation. Despite the attacks on *propiedad communal*, the Oaxacan indigenous communities have fought constantly for their *autodeterminación* (self-determination). The previous *encomienda* system instituted by the Spanish Crown had recognized, in a limited form, *los derechos de autodeterminación* (the free self-determination) of indigenous peoples, which was later negated in the birth of the Mexican state. Although limited, this free self-determination had been based on the principle of *propiedad communal* uniting the indigenous community as the place where indigenous peoples could maintain or revive their social, political and cultural structure. The *propiedad communal* belonged to everyone. There was no private property under such a system; not even small plots were sold and no one could buy the land. Any transference of land was done through a transfer of land rights rather than ownership and all such transfers had to go through the indigenous assembly. There was thus a relationship with the land that was not mercantile – a relationship that was presumed to be one of sharing and caring by which the indigenous communities were linked to the land not only for organic sustenance but also for spiritual and symbolic sustenance.

Martínez Luna, a Zapotec anthropologist, traces the origins of community in Oaxaca to colonial times in these terms. For him “*la comunidad* (the community) is a Colonial product, because the Spanish Crown formed it by its interest in maintaining an iron control and also the organized extraction of tributes” (2013, 139, *my translation*). This can be traced to the famous Ordenanza of Viceroy Marqués of Falces who in 1567, as third viceroy of New Spain, issued

an executive decree to establish protective peripheries around all Indian corporate pueblo settlements in New Spain. These indigenous peoples were given a *fundo legal* (land legally held by the indigenous community), about ‘500 varas’, roughly 600 meters in radius. This inner circle became the area where indigenous peoples consolidated their *propiedad comunal*. This decision, came from the Spanish crown and:⁷¹

aspires to the formation of a despotic-tributary structure. Because of this, the Crown defends the indigenous community, restrains the feudal or bourgeois expansion of the colonizers and extends its rule, which derives from the king’s appointment and grace and not from independently accumulated wealth and power (Semo 1973, 67, *my translation*).

This “despotic-tributary structure” allowed the existence and consolidation of the indigenous community that persists nowadays in Oaxaca. A result of this is that almost 70% of Oaxacan territory is collectively owned, which situates the Mexican state as having the largest extension of *propiedad comunal* in Latin America (Coatsworth 1988; Katz 1988).

The long-time resistance of the indigenous people to recuperation of their communal land in Oaxaca can be traced back to 1824. This is when the government initiated political measures to dissolve indigenous rights to communal land, which resulted in many disputes and protests. In July 1824, for example, the governorship of Villa Alta, in Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, was taken by inhabitants of six Mixe villages, that demanded an action against the dispossession of lands, and requested *una vista de ojos* (an eyesight) to define the line that separated them from other

⁷¹ Gastón Carrillo de Peralta y Bosquete, 3rd Marquis of Falces (1510–1587) was a Spanish nobleman who was the Viceroyalty of New Spain (colonial México) from October 16, 1566 to March 10, 1568. “The Ordenanza del Marqués de Falces, established an area of protection of indigenous lands and it is considered the antecedent of *Fundo legal* in Mexico. But historians have interpreted the ordinance of 1567 and the whole process in a different way, mainly because the original text of the decree has remained virtually unknown. The whole issue has produced a terrible jumble in the colonial historiography of New Spain”. (García 2014) <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/jbla.2002.39.issue1/jbla.2002.39.1.163/jbla.2002.39.1.163.pdf> (Accessed 12 August, 2017).

communities (Arrijoa 2008; Menegus 2009; Pastor 1987). One of these revolts was published by Oaxacan local newspaper *El Monitor Republicano* in November 1894. In San Agustín de las Juntas, Valles Centrales, the resistance of indigenous groups to a *deslinde*, which is a survey demarcating the *linderos*, or boundaries between areas of land, carried out mainly by the governmental authorities: "... it was of course to carry out *el deslinde*, the group of indigenous people increased, and with provocative attitude they began to throw stones and even shot without result the weapons they were carrying" (Reina 2004, 142, *my translation*). In spite of the declared privatization of the indigenous lands in 1857, the subsequent dispossession of land during *Porfiriato*, Porfirio Díaz regime from 1876 to 1911, and Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the assimilation program of nationalism has continued, driven by the following post-revolutionary governments, and the *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War) during the 1970s. Indigenous resistances have also continued.

During the second half of the twentieth century, in which Oaxaca was subject to the Dirty War, the indigenous resistance increased with the emergence of guerrilla movements and social leaders in the 1960s and 1970s. Among the most remarkable events were the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City, the disappearance of Víctor Yodo, an important social leader in Oaxaca and the murder of one of its most prominent leaders, the rural teacher Lucio Cabañas. In Guerrero, in 1967, Cabañas founded the *Partido de los Pobres* (Party of the Poor PdIP). This party was disbanded in 1974 and later reconstituted in Oaxaca under the name Partido Revolucionario Obrero Clandestino Unión del Pueblo (Revolutionary Clandestine Workers' Union Party of the People Procup-PdIP). After Cabañas' assassination in 1974 by governmental forces, he was considered one of the most important *guerrilleros* in the country. Víctor Yodo was also a member of Coalición Obrero Campesino Estudiantil del Istmo de Tehuantepec (The Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus COCEI), and

was victim of forced disappearance by the government in 1978. More recently, another well-known guerrilla movement has been Ejército Popular Revolucionario (The Popular Revolutionary Army EPR) that operates mainly in southern-México states, including Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala and Veracruz. EPR announced its existence on June 28, 1996, at a commemoration of the 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre (Gibler, 2014).

Drawing on this context of ongoing resistance, *propiedad comunal* and indigenous memory are crucial resources for the power of indigenous people. Their cultural resistance has also taken refuge in traditions and customs inherited from earlier ages. Such resistance has reflected on the defence of their language, of their land and territory, of their *usos y costumbres* (customs and practices) of their *cosmovision* (view of the nature of the cosmos). Currently, indigenous groups continue reproducing their specific cultures in search of autonomy within the Mexican State, but collectively following in part the proposals emerging from the Zapatista indigenous rebellion of Chiapas in 1994.

Martinez Luna, one of the developers of the theory of *comunalidad*, remarks that:

The history of Oaxaca has been interwoven with principles and values that display its deeply rooted *comunalidad*. For the Oaxacan people across many centuries, this has meant integrating a process of cultural, economic, and political resistance of great importance. In Oaxaca, the vitality of *comunalidad* as it presents itself, witnesses the integration of four basic elements: territory, governance, labor, and enjoyment (*fiesta*). The principles and values that articulate these elements are respect and reciprocity (2015, 1).

From a similarly anthropological framework, indigenous thinkers have theoretically developed the concept of *comunalidad* since the 1980s, working within ethno-political organizations.⁷² The theorists include: Floriberto Díaz Gomez, Mixe from Tlahuitoltepec (2003); Juan José Rendon Monzón (2003); Jaime Martínez Luna, Zapotec from Guelatao (2013; 2015); Carlos Manzo, Zapotec from Isthmus of Tehuantepec (2011); and Benjamin Maldonado (2010; 2013). As these writers all suggest, *comunalidad* is an essential concept in Oaxacan thought, which in general terms is understood as the set of elements that cover the language, *usos y costumbres*, and assemblies that allow a community to exist within their own cultural organization.

Usos y costumbres, is the name assigned to *comunalidad* by the Mexican State, where it is widely designated as CAP (after the Anglophone customs and practices). Feminist indigenous *K'iche* of the Maya peoples from Guatemala, Gladys Tzul Tzul, notes that the State does not recognize *comunalidad* as an alternative form to liberal politics because “the State does not understand community politics, [it] sees it as custom, tradition, as folklore” (Riesco 2015, 2, *my translation*). Martínez Luna also prefers the term *comunalidad* and also does not agree with the CAP concept, because it “is a pejorative concept, yet there is no other state in the Republic of Mexico that enjoys this self-determination” (2015, 7). That is, despite its conceptual shortcomings and pejorative tone, CAP nevertheless attributes some recognized value and importance to indigenous culture. In 1995, all these municipalities’ normative systems of *usos y costumbres* were legally recognized in Oaxaca’s state congress. This self-determination is materialized in the 418 Oaxacan municipalities (out of 570) that are politically self-governed under *usos y costumbres*.

⁷² Among these ethno-political organizations are: Organización para la Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y Desarrollo Social de la Sierra Juárez (Sierra de Juárez Organization for the Defence of Natural Resources and Social Development Odrenasij) ; Comité de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y Humanos Mixes (Mixe Natural and Human Resources Defence Committee Codremi); Comité Organizador y de Consulta para la Unión de los Pueblos de la Sierra Norte de Oaxaca (Union of Peoples of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca Codeco) (Maldonado 2003, 17).

Vazquez-Garcia argues that

The CAP system lies on three major pillars: assembly decision-making power, *tequio* (unpaid community labor) and *escalafón* (traditional promotion ladder). In order to be recognized as a CAP municipality, local authorities have to acknowledge the community assembly as the main body for decision making and post designation (Vazquez-Garcia 2013, 318).

The concept of *comunalidad* more specifically was also written into the Oaxacan State Education Act of 1995, as the fourth guiding principle of education (democracy, nationalism, humanism and *comunalidad*). This openness on the part of the Mexican government to legalizing the first state indigenous forms of self-government in Oaxaca was itself a response to fears generated by the Zapatista uprising of 1994.⁷³

Comunalidad represents both a theory and a practice, understood mostly as a theory still in development and also as a very old practice among indigenous groups in Oaxaca. In raw terms, *comunalidad* is the form of naming and understanding indigenous collectivism, as constructed and reproduced within a specific territory, the *propiedad comunal*. The fundamental elements of *comunalidad* are *territorio* (territory); *poder político comunal* (governance); *tequio* (collective work); *asamblea* (assembly) and *fiestas comunales* (enjoyment) (Rendón 2003, 39-45). It should be acknowledged, for my argument, that a feminist critique of the practice of *comunalidad* has been made, centered on the fact that *usos y costumbres* often exclude women from municipal elections. Verónica Vazquez-Garcia notes, “Only heads of households (married men and single mothers) can access community land, attend assemblies and assume municipal posts. The CAP system reproduces gender inequality by denying citizen rights to

⁷³ These amendments were followed by the Law on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Communities passed in 1998 by the local congress (EDUCA, 2010).

most adult women” (2013, 317). However, other elements of life in this region affect this structural bias, including political mobilization, men’s and women’s migration, women’s increasing access to formal education and work, and the development of women’s indigenous public policy. Currently, in “60% of Oaxaca CAP municipalities women can vote and hold government positions, albeit at very low rates: only 8.5% of all CAP municipalities have female councils “(Vazquez-Garcia 2013, 317). Moreover, in Oaxaca there has also recently been an increasing development of women’s organizations and feminist organizations. An example of this is Grupo de rescate de la lengua chocholteca; *Unión de Comunidades* de la Región del Istmo UCIRI (*Union of Indigenous Communities* of the Isthmus Region); Organización Et naaxwiihy (Organization, *Et Naaxwiihy*); Red de Mujeres Mixe (Network of *Mixe* Women); el Centro para los Derechos de la Mujer Naaxwiin; Servicios Comunitarios Ñuu Savi Mixe (Communitarian Services Ñuu Savi Mixe) and Asamblea de Mujeres Indigenas de Oaxaca AMIO (The Indigenous Women’s Assembly of Oaxaca).

This does not mean that the relation between gendered community life and state policy is not marked by conflict (see Dalton 2005; Bautista et al. 2007; Martinez Cruz 2014; Morales 2007; Vazquez et al 2007; Worthen 2015; Zafra 2009). Indigenous Mayan women from Guatemala can be identified as trail-blazers in the development of their own positioning in relation to racism and exclusion from both the patriarchal indigenous communities and the State. Among them, Tzul Tzul remarks, *comunalidad* is:

an alternative way to liberal politics, where what matters is not so much the form of participation but the way in which the decision-making takes place, not so much the assembly, but the community framework to dismantle the forms of patriarchal domination (Riesco 2015, 1, *my translation*).

This insight also helps me understand the political role of Mare's hip-hop practice, which is interwoven with *comunalidad* and with the history of resistances of Oaxacan indigenous communities against the Mexican State. I want to bring this context to considering, even more importantly, how Mare negotiates her multiple identities as a woman, a Zapotec, a migrant, and a feminist, within hip-hop cultural practice and with reference to the *comunalidad* perspective.

Mare told me:

Before I claimed myself a feminist I had to be in the process of claiming myself a Zapotec, a woman, a migrant... also a lot of my consciousness came from hip-hop. Hip-hop talks about community, just like the *pueblos originarios* talk about community.

Her first public 'coming out' as a feminist was the 13th of August, 2014, when she published the following statement on her Facebook account: "Only when I understood what patriarchy had taken away from me, only then, I could claim myself a feminist". One year later she would publicly declare she was a feminist with Zapotec indigenous roots. Not long after, she was invited to speak on an episode of television program *Especiales Musicales Central Once*. The TV program dedicated to her work was recorded on July 12, 2014 and was broadcast on January 11, 2015. In the program, she said:

Feminism is one of the categories I have recently claimed, but has also been a process. First to understand the role I play as a person within society and then understand what it means to be a woman from Oaxaca within society.⁷⁴

At first sight, Mare's summary of identities and enunciative positioning might seem to bring together irreconcilable dissociated paths: indigenous, feminist, and rapper. Nevertheless, it is

⁷⁴ Canal Once is a Mexican public television channel belonging to Instituto Politécnico Nacional, one the largest national public universities in the country. *Especiales Musicales Central Once* Mare Advertencia Lirika Corazón Zapoteca <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=248BofBkl78> (Accessed 25 January, 2015).

this multiplicity of political identities that intersect in Mare's work, which allows us to understand the complexity of her feminism at both an individual and collective level and in its connection with her indigenous roots.

Mare's simultaneous positionalities as a woman, a migrant, and a Zapotec defy the Western feminist universalist subject of 'woman' and invite us to think not in terms of separated identity categories but through the cross-linking of categories. Mare's different identities are not fixed, and they are also part of a process of self-narration where identity is neither natural nor stable. In this sense identity is, as Stuart Hall helps us to understand, "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990, 222). In a case like Mare's, the limits of identity politics unfold before our eyes and show us that the homogenization of women's struggle movement by second-wave feminism fails when it tries "to account adequately for the fact that all women are not the same" (Elam 1994, 73). Thus it is important to address the duality of identity politics, which on one side opens the possibility to recognise the situated experiences of social subjects and the constitution of radical subjectivities but, on the other, might lead us to essentialisms. Therefore "it is important that the construction of female political subjects is inserted both in the reaffirmation and deconstruction of identities" (Curiel 2003, 15).

It is thus important to be careful with the risks involved in any hierarchy of oppression, for which there is an accumulation of oppressed identities that are judged so that one is deemed more politically important than another. This hierarchy only creates divisions, immobilisation, and destructiveness, and does not make visible the complexity of the entanglement of different identities (Parmar 1990). For this necessary work, the analysis of Mare's different positionalities and experiences demands a decolonial feminist framework, as well as what is

now widely referred to as the intersectionality perspective, inscribed within the epistemic decolonial perspective. Intersectional analysis allows for understanding the multiplicity of sexist, racist, and classist experiences lived by different women.

Decolonial feminisms offer conceptual keys for thinking about transformative actions located in the Latin American context. Among the contributions of Latin American feminists to highlighting the ongoing consequences of colonialism, an essential part of the construction of decolonial feminism is the contribution of feminists of color such as Audre Lorde (1982, 1984), Cherríe Moraga (1983), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), not only in the form of academic texts but also poetic and narrative ones that question the colonial patterns that impose rules on their bodies and relations. In this, decolonial feminism recovers previous critical currents from feminism around the world, such as Black Feminism, feminism of color, postcolonial feminism, as well as French materialist feminism and part of the contributions of post-structuralist feminism.

For María Lugones, the colonisation of thought and ideas through the introduction of the Western sex/ gender system was essential for the disorganisation and domination of colonised cultures. She criticises the lack of a feminist approach in decolonial studies, and she proposes instead a decolonial feminism that adds a feminist point of view to colonial criticism:

I call the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression ‘the coloniality of gender’.

I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender ‘decolonial feminism’.

The coloniality of gender enables me to understand the oppressive imposition as a complex interaction of economic, racializing, and gendering systems in which every person in the colonial encounter can be found as a live, historical, fully described being (2010, 747).

Modern models of power have at their foundation a hierarchy between man and woman as well as between heterosexual and non-heterosexual. As Lugones also argues (2008), these hierarchies make those categories of being universally applicable, meaning that sexual difference and the place of reproduction for sexuality in modernity is decisive for the constitution and maintenance of the exercise of modern power.

Ochy Curiel (2009) in turn affirms that, for some feminists, decolonization is a political position, which constructs their knowledge and reflection. Their positions are based on concrete experiences, traversed by individual and collective actions, bodies, sexualities, and ways of being and acting in the world. This form of thinking requires questioning the colonial patterns of knowledge that are still dominant in Latin America, including racism and gender ideology. “I also believe that decoloniality implies analyzing the contexts, understanding the current particularities of Latin America. It means to analyze militarism... the logic of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)... the current levels of poverty, the supposedly Leftist governments in many Latin American countries... There is an implementation of a neoliberal policy that is affecting women and I say women in a particular way because I believe they are one of the sectors that have been most affected by those policies and obviously, poor racialized men, as well as poor and racialized women. Decolonization is understanding all this and acting to transform it” (2011, 190).

Rita Laura Segato (2010) adds an essential point to this discussion, arguing that the idea of gender was not wholly new to, or different from, the pre-colonial world, which was characterized by what she calls ‘low-intensity patriarchy’. This style of patriarchy, inserted into the colonization process, intensified the division and hierarchy between the public and the private, becoming extremely violent. Gender relations have been modified by colonialism.

“These realities [pre-colonial patriarchy] continued to walk... alongside the world of the colonial modernity. But, somehow, were influenced by the metropolitan and then republican colonizing process. They were harmed above all in one fundamental aspect: they exacerbated and made much more perverse and authoritarian the hierarchies that already contained in their interior, which are basically those of caste, status and gender” (2013, 78).

Julieta Paredes (2010), self-consciously representing communitarian feminism, writes of an *entronque patriarcal* (confluence of patriarchies), which would be the encounter between indigenous patriarchy and the patriarchy of the European coloniser:

That means recognizing that the unjust relationships between men and women here in our country [Bolivia], also occurred before the colony and it is not only a colonial heritage. There is also a Bolivian, indigenous and popular patriarchy and machismo. Decolonizing gender, in this sense, means recovering the memory of our great-great-grandmothers who fought against a patriarchy that was established before the colonial invasion. Decolonizing the genre means saying that gender oppression did not only come with the Spanish colonizers, but that there was also a version of gender oppression in pre-colonial cultures and societies. When the Spanish arrived, both visions came together for the disgrace of the women who inhabit Bolivia.

This is the patriarchal connection we are talking about (2010, 6-7, *my translation*).

Finally, Yuderkys Espinosa’s decolonial point of view (2009; 2014) emphasizes, as does Lugones (2008), the fundamental role that sexism and heterosexism have played in the construction of colonial oppression, which creates racialised bodies. This reflection adds to Mohanty’s criticisms of the colonising effects on women’s actions and discourses of first world feminisms. Mohanty reflects on the problematic of discursive otherness in unequal power relations; for example, white feminists in the ‘first world’ writing about women of color and

presenting them as victims with no capacity for change (2008).

Mare's own feminist positioning involves a series of coexisting aspects of identity that are entangled and give her the power/agency to articulate her own enunciative acts. The act of naming herself a Zapotec woman and a feminist is an act of subversive reaffirmation, investing legitimizing dignity in her multiple and enriching roots. To understand Mare's feminist positioning it is crucial to know how she apprehends her family history, which has allowed her to first assume her identity as an indigenous Zapotec woman from the state of Oaxaca, and then also as a migrant:

In the beginning, I assumed I was a *mestiza* because I did not feel I was part of another root, and when I began to grow up I became aware that there were different systemic violences that were attacking me in different ways. The fact that my family could not assume themselves to be Zapotecs, or that my grandmother did not teach us Zapotec, was related with the discrimination that my family experienced. It was related to the process of migration that we had to live through, not because of an election but because in the local community there were no resources when there was the need for medical attention. We had to go to Mexico City to get it because there was no family in Oaxaca that could give us support, and the only sister of my grandmother was in *Neza* (Nezahualcóyotl, municipality of the State of Mexico, close to Mexico City).

The famous feminist phrase “the personal is political” materialises in Mare's family experience and its impact on her construction of a feminist identity from her indigenous roots, “because the political becomes personal by way of its subjective effects through the subject's experience” (De Lauretis 1990, 115).

The rescuing of Mare's familial Zapotec language became part of her individual and collective fight with the assimilationist Mexican State. It also becomes part of various fights in defence of indigenous territory, communal land, education, and natural resources. Mare's grandmother and mother still speak the Zapotec language and currently she is learning this from her grandmother, who patiently corrects Mare's pronunciation while having dinner and asking for beans and tortillas... *gueta* (tortillas), *bizaa* (beans). Such knowledge inherited from female ancestors, and their resistances within their communities and the state, help construct Mare's individual and collective historical memory. In her most recent music album, *SiempreViva* (2016), Mare wrote "Luna" (Moon) as a personal reconciliation with her maternal lineage and also as homage to all women's female ancestors. Every time Mare sang "Luna" during the *SiempreViva* tour she addressed her female audience, saying, "this is an enchantment for all the witches who were before us; this is in their homage... I want to hear the screams of all my witches". The lyrics include:

Luna dame inspiración por un instante,
llévale el calor de mi palabras,
dame inspiración por un instante...
Eres misterio, para muchos inexplicable,
condenada, en una sociedad que adora la sangre,
¡qué ironía! que te obliguen a no existir,
cuando tú eres en sí la vida y todo proviene de ti.
Eres testiga de nuestro poder y de nuestra fuerza,
ciclo de la vida que nos limpia y renueva,
prueba certera de que estamos vivas,
nos enseñaron a odiarte... pero hoy cambia la perspectiva.
En la oscuridad quieren mantenerte presa,

pero nadie puede detener tu naturaleza,
tu inspiración, es conspiración secreta,
nos quisieron controlar, pero hoy, las brujas andan sueltas.⁷⁵

Mare's lyrics represent a clear connection between the menstrual cycle and the moon, and this connection and its relation to knowledge inherited from female ancestors are materialized in the music video for this song. Launched in July 2017, the video shows Mare engaged in different healing rituals with women, including using traditional herbs and massages with suction cups, and also features a connection between the menstrual and moon cycles. Traditional midwives and female healers, young women learning self-care from their female ancestors and among each other, are collectively portrayed creating a women's community. In this way Mare constructs a bridge between the collective *comunalidad* and the individual. Her discourse is not, however, essentialist. It is not only indigenous or feminist; it is a mixture of both. It also blends the importance of the collective and of the individual subject in the way Mare collectivizes her own struggles. The lyrics work on a personal, individual level, where she positions the multiplicity of her simultaneous identities as a woman, a Zapotec, a migrant and a feminist, and also on a collective level where she acknowledges that her experiences are shared by other women in her community and from other different ethnic, political, and geographical backgrounds. The different women's struggles are not isolated but shared and collectivized.

⁷⁵ "Moon give me inspiration for an instant, Carry the heat of my words, Give me inspiration for an instant... You are mysterious, to many inexplicable, Condemned in a society that adores blood, how ironic! That you are compelled not to exist, When you are life itself and everything comes from you. You are witness of our power and our strength, Cycle of life that cleans and renews us, Accurate proof that we are alive, They taught us to hate you ... but today the perspective changes. In the darkness they want to keep you trapped, But no one can stop your nature, Your inspiration, it's a secret conspiracy, They wanted to control us, but today the witches are loose" (*my translation*).

The experience of discrimination that allowed Mare to assume her identity as a Zapotec indigenous woman has already raised the question of the mestizo Mexican identity inherited from Post-revolutionary times, and which has dominated Mexican nationalist discourse. In this discourse, as I have suggested before this chapter, Mexicans are constructed as a mixture of European and Indigenous, while giving more significance to European roots over Indigenous ones. This critique is at the heart of Latin American autonomous feminists who imported the debate surrounding the subject of the homogeneous woman within feminism and at the end of the 1980s added a further questioning of the hegemony of the Latin-American, urban, *blanco-mestiza* (white mestiza). One of the legacies of colonialism, inherent in the project of modernity, is the way in which Latin-American and Caribbean nations were formed through the ideology of mestizaje, which was “based on exploitation and rape of indigenous and black women” (Curiel 2007, 98). Later, in the 1990s, with the emergence of indigenous and afro-descendant women’s movements, the necessity arose to articulate more clearly the relations between gender, race and coloniality (Masson 2009).

In the Mexican case there is clearly a plurality of feminisms that might be available – autonomous, radical, institutional, lesbian, among others – but as Sabine Masson declares, Mexican feminists remain predominantly mestizas (2009). Aida Hernández (2012) would call them *feminismos mestizos or feminism hegemónico* (mestizo feminisms of hegemonic feminism) clearly equating one to the other. For her, mestizo feminisms replicate at a certain level the colonial heritage and its dominant national mestizaje identity. In counterpoint to these *feminismos mestizos*, various indigenous feminisms have emerged which cannot be homogenised because there is not a single, unique indigenous feminism (Gargallo 2012). In the decade of the 1990s, a series of women’s indigenous movements were initiated in the region, and some of these did not identify as feminists. The 500 Year Anniversary of

Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance in the Latin American and Caribbean region occurred in 1992, positioned against the celebration of the colonial conquest. The Zapatista insurrection in México, and its Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws, among other indigenous mobilisations, denounced the long mestizo assimilationist project and the barriers to the political participation of indigenous women (Masson 2009; Hernández 2010; Millan 2011).

In indigenous women's movements, some branches are more focused on sex-gender issues and others place more emphasis on the united struggle of their people's indigenous communities. This marks a difference from mestizo urban feminists, in the sense that indigenous women have both an individual and collective struggle, one as a woman and the other as part of specific indigenous communities under siege. And of course that does not preclude their being others as indigenous from a particular indigenous language and group. Indigenous women have been confronted by the difference between a broader indigenous movement that denies the recognition of sexism and the urban mestizo feminist movement that does not always recognise its ethnocentrism. They have thus often "created specific spaces to reflect on their experiences of exclusion as women and as indigenous people" (Hernández 2010, 542).

As an indigenous woman, Mare has created networks not only with urban mestizo women but also with other indigenous women, and with them she began to construct her feminism from her very particular context:

I began to find other *compañeras* that assumed themselves as feminists and were also fighting for the defence of the *pueblos* autonomy, the territory, and the political decisions that criminalise free choice. When we say free choice, we are talking about women's bodies, male bodies, the autonomous territory of the *pueblos* originarios.

Mare's recollection here reminds me of what she was reading during our conversations: *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1979) co-authored by Mariarosa Dalla Acosta and Selma James. These authors' positions on domestic work and their redefinition of housework as labour necessary for the capitalist system, resonate in Mare's critique of capitalism when she integrates it into articulating a defence of indigenous communities and the self-determination of pueblos originarios.

Mare's identity as an indigenous Zapotec woman from the state of Oaxaca could make us think that hers is indigenous feminism, but that is not the case for Mare, as she made clear to me:

I think that feminisms from which I have learned a lot is lesbian feminism. This is a feminism constructed not only from women, but also from different gender sexual identity. This is a very radical position that we share as pueblos originarios. Because we were born women but also as women belonging to indigenous peoples which makes us vulnerable in different ways. Those are identities that make us more vulnerable, and all these identities together make us recognise all the injustices and violences within the system.

For Mare, there is a connection between the construction of community of pueblos originarios and lesbian feminism. Her position here demonstrates that indigenous woman does not necessarily have a purist indigenous or feminist thought, but a speaking position that is nourished by different discourses. Espinosa (2007), Mendoza (2010) and Curiel (2013), have also discussed the normative heterosexuality of the Latin American feminist movement. Radical autonomous feminism also thus finds similarities with the pueblos originarios, or indigenous communities, in their struggle against compulsory heterosexuality (Espinosa 2014). I also find some similarity between the struggle of indigenous movements and lesbian feminisms with the rejection, at least in the Mexican Lesbian Feminist Movement which

emerged in 1975, of the institutionalisation of the LGBT movement and its constant search of autonomy.

This collectivization of Oaxacan struggles is also portrayed in a series of resistances, denunciations seen through the eyes of Mare, in *Huaxcayac*, a song which appears in her first album, *¡Qué mujer!* (2010):

Este es mi pueblo, su grandeza y su miseria
Descendiente de guerreros, aunque nos llamen guerrilla
Seguimos siendo los segundos en pobreza,
Aunque quieran olvidarlo, cuando otro partido ingresa
Multiculturales aunque nadie reconozca,
tenemos un pueblo negro, que de derechos no goza
es muy bonito aquel doble discurso de sentirnos orgullosos
aunque no sepamos mucho de la realidad
en la que viven nuestros pueblos
pero seguimos invitando a que vengan a conocernos
Para todo mal mezcal y para todo bien también
Y sí que estamos mal, 70 pobres de cada 100
Nuestro Centro Histórico, patrimonio cultural
Y de Pizza Hut y de Burguer King ahí puedes disfrutar
Sigue comprando toda nuestra artesanía
Aunque sigas regateando y pagando una porquería
Se ha hablado mucho del Benemérito de América
aunque es el responsable de la extinción de muchas lenguas
Trajes típicos convertidos ahora en moda

Santo Domingo donde gringos y españoles hacen su boda
Nuestros usos y costumbres una celebración
Aunque los pueblos autónomos les llegue la represión
Centro turístico, nuestra cultura nos une
Aunque no te hablen del saqueo y la violencia que difunden.
Grandes pueblos viviendo en pobreza extrema
Somos el número uno en emigrar a la frontera
Paseo por nuestro zócalo lleno de policías
Harp Helu ahora es dueño de lo que fue nuestro un día
Nos hablan de cultura y diversidad
Privilegiados y jodidos esa es nuestra realidad
Siguen vendiendo el territorio y la riqueza de los pueblos.⁷⁶

Oaxaca's current political context with all its dualisms, historical indigenous resistances and demystification of national figures unfold in Mare's lyrics. From the title of the song she refers to her hometown in its náhuatl name, Huaxcayacac, which brings us back to its indigenous roots. Her denunciation of the 'society double' discourse that on one hand celebrates the ancient indigenous roots and on the other hand depreciates and represses indigenous people,

⁷⁶ This is my people, their greatness and their misery; Descendants of warriors, even if they call us guerrilla; We are still in the second place in poverty; Although they want to forget it, when another political party enters; We are multicultural although nobody recognizes that; We have black people, who do not enjoy rights; It is very nice that double speech of being proud (of our indigenous peoples); Although we do not know much of the reality; In which our (indigenous) peoples live; But we continue to invite you to come and meet us; For all evil mezcal and for all good, mezcal too; And yes we are in very bad conditions, 70 poor in every 100; Our historical downtown, with cultural heritage; And there you can enjoy Pizza Hut and Burger King; Keep on buying all our artesanía /crafts; Even if you keep haggling and paying a crap; much has been said of the Benemerito de las Americas (Benito Juárez); Although he is responsible for the extinction of many languages; Traditional costumes now turned into fashion; Santo Domingo (Templo de *Santo Domingo* de Guzmán, downtown Oaxaca); where gringos and Spaniards make their wedding; Our uses and customs a celebration; Although the autonomous peoples receive repression; Tourist center, our culture unites us; Even if they (the State) do not tell you about the looting and violence they (the State) spread; Large pueblos living in extreme poverty; We are the number one (state) to emigrate to the frontier; Walk through our zocalo full of police; Harp Helú (Mexican businessman) now owns what was ours one day; We are told about culture and diversity; Privileged and fucked, that is our reality; They (the State) continue to sell the territory and the wealth of the pueblos (*my translation*).

makes visible the contradictions and deep injustices in the territory. Situating herself within Oaxacan historicity translates her individual denunciations into collective ones.

As Mare says, “It isn’t only rap, is to talk about your community. It means to be proud of your origins, but also of the resistances of your community”. In this sense, for Mare, hip hop culture’s community is an extension of the *comunalidad* in Oaxaca and women’s struggle to live a dignified life and the recuperation of the knowledge of their female ancestors. Among Mare’s other identities, it is fundamental to highlight her role as a female rapper within the male-dominated hip-hop scene. Firstly, she says:

We are women, we have to be better than the rest; we need to show that we deserve our place within the spaces and the other is that because of *cuota de género* (gender quota), it is said oh yeah there are women. Women are not in the same space as men’s groups, in some way we are not included, so when there are women, men say oh cool, although they don’t know what we do if it’s good or bad or if we are doing copycat, so they assumed us as something different, not part of their group. They see us as a novelty.

The *cuota de género* (gender quota) was promoted by policymakers in Latin America throughout the 1990s and 2000s, but rarely implemented. This compulsory measurement requires political parties to nominate a certain percentage of women (generally 50%) to run for Congress to balance the sex-gender positions within politics. This gender quota discourse has permeated all areas of society, and Mare herself has moved the gender quota discourse within formal politics to the hip-hop scene and thus makes the vacuity of the gender quota discourse evident. She also talks about the lack of commitment to the inclusive quota of indigenous and afro groups in México. For her, there is a double discourse. On one side there is an interest in

making visible the different indigenous and afro groups in the country as well as the violences experienced by women, but there is no real transformation.

It is not only about *cuotas de inclusión* (inclusive quota) but how to generate and strengthen the networks of the pueblos originarios. Without a real inclusion or recognition of the violences that these vulnerable groups (among them women) are living nothing changes in their everyday lives

For this reason, for Mare, it is fundamental to construct networks with other women in female-only spaces, which sees as:

spaces where energy flows very different; there is a more real sorority. It is very different when there are men with whom we also have to compete because it is a requirement we need to prove that we deserve to be in those spaces with them.

Constructing and consolidating female-only spaces from a feminist perspective within hip-hop has been a challenge from Mare. The nodal point in which her hip-hop practices and feminisms intersect and construct sorority networks is her commitment with the cessation of violence towards women.

Grito Feminista

From a very early hour I could feel a disruptive atmosphere surrounding the 206th anniversary of Mexico's Independence. It was the 15th of September, 2016, one night before our arrival in Oaxaca and this day not only the traditional *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores or Cry of Independence) was expected in Mexico City, but also large anti-government protests and, more importantly for me, Mare's *Grito Feminista* (Feminist Cry). This year's anniversary ceremony followed a mass protest march on Thursday afternoon in Mexico City in which around 10,000 protesters demanded President Enrique Peña Nieto's resignation. Among other things, they accused the president of failing to properly investigate the notorious disappearance of 43 trainee teachers in 2014, the Ayotzinapa students, in Guerrero. Also the protest was the then

visit of the U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump, who has made highly controversial remarks about Mexican migrants and vowed to build a wall on the U.S.-México border. The largely peaceful demonstration ended with some scuffles involving protesters and anti-riot police who were blocking the protesters access to the zócalo, where a large crowd was already gathering for the Grito ceremony. Just a couple of blocks away from Mexico City's zócalo main square, where President Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN), had given the traditional *Grito* of Independence before tens of thousands of people, most of them *acarreados*, almost a hundred people waited for the first *Grito Feminista* in Punto Gozadera, a feminist venue of Mexico City.⁷⁷

At twelve o'clock at night Mare gave a *Grito* that aimed to dismantle the patriarchal, mestizo, and assimilationist identity of the Mexican nation:

“¡Fuera EPN!”

¡Vivas Las Brujas, ¡Viva Las Putas!

¡Viva Las Abortistas, ¡Viva Las Lesbianas!

¡Viva Las Feministas, ¡Viva Las Mujeres sin Miedo!

¡Viva Las Mujeres Libres, ¡Viva Las Mujeres Libres!,

¡Viva Las Mujeres Libres!⁷⁸

“¡Que vivan!” the crowd, dressed in purple, shouted twice, then three times. The traditional Vivas for the nation's ‘heroes’ of independence, where substituted by the Vivas for the women without fear, the free women, the marginalized women. In this *Grito*, no one sang the *Himno*

⁷⁷ *Acarreados* is a popular term for “supporters” who show up to political rallies in exchange for cash or food.

⁷⁸ In reply to the traditional Grito: “¡Mexicanos!; ¡Vivan los héroes que nos dieron patria!; ¡Viva Hidalgo!; ¡Viva Morelos!; ¡Viva Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez!; ¡Viva Allende!; ¡Vivan Aldama y Matamoros!; ¡Viva la independencia nacional!; ¡Viva México! ¡Viva México! ¡Viva México!” with “Get Out EPN! ‘Viva the witches; Viva The prostitutes!; Viva the abortionists; Viva the lesbians; Viva the women; Viva the women without Fear; Viva the free women; Viva the free women; Viva the free women” (*my translation*).

Nacional Mexicano (national anthem), nor waved a single Mexican flag. Quite the opposite; the public sang Mare's feminist songs and waved feminist purple and pink, blue and white transgender flags.

A national historical celebration which commemorates the birth of the independent Mexican nation was transformed into a feminist disruption, a questioning of the national identity and effacement of the short and long term Mexican historical memory. Memory represents where indigenous people's power resides and survives. Days later, once we were in Oaxaca, Mare would remember the Grito feminista, and would tell me something that made me think in new ways about my own family roots:

most of the people that are celebrating México (Independence) is because they do not have *una raíz*, (a root) to which they can return. For me, the reflection was that if I celebrate a nation it signifies I forgot all the history of my family.

México is a nation historically consolidated as mestiza, a product of the supposed mixture of the "best" features of the indigenous root and the European. Mare's asseveration and Grito Feminista makes a profound rupture in the national birth myth of mestizaje. This is a myth that conceals the reality of the overvaluation of the European heritage over the indigenous root and the effacement of our third root, the African. This racial and ethnic homogenization under the nationalistic project of mestizaje has resulted in the State validation of the disappearance of indigenous communities and afro descendants. The fight for territory, language, identity and the historical struggles of indigenous communities and afro-descendants, as well as the fight for the recognition of women's rights within their communities and the State, consolidates Mare's questioning of the Mexican construction of nation.

“Not only words in the air”

“... Mountains!, m of mujer (woman)!, two cones!, a crown!, fangs!!”, cried the young women in the room. Around twenty female voices struggled to describe the meaning of a handmade image placed on the floor. After a brainstorm of ideas, the result was as varied as the different contexts of the assistants to the workshop. This was the beginning of Mare’s Women’s Autonomy workshop during the first stop of the SiempreViva tour in Torreón. Chosen among three different workshops proposed by Mare, the women’s autonomy workshop received an enthusiastic welcome among the Comarca Lagunera women, who met in the autonomous venue, *Juárez Librería y Artes*.⁷⁹

The diverse perspectives on this image were repeated when Mare asked the participants what autonomy meant to them. The specific context of each of the participants impacted on their concept of autonomy and this was even more complicated for those who participated within collectives in different social movements. This initiated a conversation on the importance of reflecting on their individual and collective action within mixed collectives (women and men) and its effect on social movements. “For a long time I just made music, and for me the music was just to give a message but suddenly I did realize that also the music has a limit”, Mare tells me, while talking about her workshops. Unfolding before my eyes, she refers to herself in the third person and continues:

What Mare is doing [with the music] could help them [the people] in their personal history, so how do I land what I am saying in music? And that it really touches people,

⁷⁹ The Comarca Lagunera is the 9th largest metropolitan area in Mexico, and is located between two states, Coahuila and Durango. It occupies almost the full width of southern Coahuila and extends westward across the Durango border. In early times the heart of the Laguna (lake) was an oasis of marsh, lake, and perennial streams, surrounded on three sides by relatively grim desert. Nowadays the term Laguna applies to a zone which is predominantly desert.

so people can assume it [the message] as theirs and not only words in the air, and that's the reason I began doing the workshops

Mare's venture in constructing these workshops is not something new, it developed a long time ago. At 12 years old she began her training in the NGO Colonias Unidas de Oaxaca, where she learned how to run the workshops. As part of the health workshop De Niño a Niño (From Kid to Kid) she was taught about sickness, first aid, and how to take care of other children. The program was part of Colonias Unidas de Oaxaca, which was funded by Fondo Para Niños de México (ChildFund Mexico) that belonged to the Christian Children Fund International and subsequently to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The program was an answer to the large number of older brothers and sisters who had charge of their younger siblings in her neighbourhood. Years later she would put the knowledge learned from these workshops, and her university teaching pedagogy career, into practice with the development of her own series of workshops.⁸⁰

The two-and-a-half-hour women's autonomy workshop covered three activities. The first one was an exploration of one's main needs in the search of autonomy, using the Maslow hierarchy of needs, represented as a pyramid. The second was a reflection on the negative and positive reactions we have towards women's autonomy, and the last was the drawing of our own representation of women's autonomy. These activities were focused on reflecting on women's participation in social movements and their role as women, as well as the social constructions that diminish or avoid the construction of solidarity networks among women.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The different workshops Mare has been giving lately include: Women's Autonomy; Everyday poetry; Vocal Experimentation, Knowing me and Hip-hop culture.

⁸¹ Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Maslow used the terms physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, self-actualization, and self-transcendence to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through. (Maslow 2013).

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation, represented as a hierarchical five level pyramid of needs was the start point. The four levels (lower-order needs) are considered physiological needs, while the top level of the pyramid is considered to contain growth needs. The lower level needs must be satisfied before higher-order needs can influence behavior. The levels are as follows: self-actualization (the highest level); esteem; belongingness; safety; physiological. A theory that at first sight might seem simple to understand, was revealed before my eyes in all its complexity. Mare drew on a white piece of cardboard a large pyramid divided in five sections. The goal was to fill the pyramid with the different need levels and discuss them. We began talking about how to fulfil our basic needs, such as food, drinking water, shelter, all of them belonging to the physiologic level. Immediately the next level, security, appeared. In order to obtain those first necessities, we need to secure them. In the case of food, the question arose: "How do we obtain our food?" and most of the participants said: 'You go to the market or Aurrera'. Another option could be to produce it by ourselves or exchange for other goods.⁸²

What was evident in this situation was the necessity of people that produce goods we cannot produce by ourselves; in this case food. For this we agreed about the need for belonging to a community, as the third level. Because we are not completely self-sufficient we depend on the people around us to cover many of our necessities. There's a need to be part of a group, to connect with other people. We were advancing in the construction of our pyramid. The family, the school, the political collectives, and society in general emerged as examples of groups to which we generally belong. During the discussion we concluded that within those groups, we learn to be loved, to love others, and ourselves, but also we learn certain behaviours, ethics, and concepts related to love, respect, discrimination, and hate.

⁸² Mexican small store mini-grocer owned by large American retailer WalMart.

The participants said that sometimes, within those groups, the idea emerges that a person has more value than another because of certain racial, economic, political characteristics or because they have been born in a certain territory or share different traditions to the majority. At this stage we arrived at the fourth level, esteem, which is constructed in relation to the concept of belongingness. To reflect on the source of the complicated tangle of preconceived ideas imposed by society, as well as gaining self-esteem and security, is a challenge, which would take us to the fifth level, self-actualization.

Some of the participants gave examples of self-actualization: obtaining a scholarly degree, learning a new skill, buying a car, and more importantly feeling more confident about themselves as well as being able to make decisions. At this point, Mare invited us to reflect on a more collective level. What do we do once we have achieved the self-actualization level? What do we do in order to generate wellbeing for other people; the community? These questions would take us to the main question of this workshop. Where are we located in the pyramid? “Where are we located as women in the pyramid? Where are our girlfriends, sisters, female relatives situated? Where are we situated within society? What’s the role we play as women in society?” Mare asked the women in the workshop. One of the girls said,

lately there are more circles of women, they are doing brands of clothing and some other things. We were very insecure here in Torreón, we had a very difficult period of violence. Now cafeterias, bars are opening. From my perspective now, we walk more securely on the streets. We need to learn from other women and help us and then as a society.

During these exercises I noticed some of the girls in the workshop already knew each other from different events in *Juárez Librería y Artes*. Some others met during the exercises, which were mainly attended by young women in their twenties, some brought with them their little

children. Amid the short breaks between one exercise and another, the more common conversations were related to the War on Drugs in Torreón and how it affected them. Sadly, some of them had been directly affected by forced disappearance in their families and shared their experiences.

In the second exercise, we worked in couples and divided a piece of paper in two parts. In one part we wrote five positive things in our everyday life by which we support women's autonomy. On the second side we wrote five things we do that harm the construction of women's autonomy. Supporting phrases, empathetic relations to other women's work and goals emerged during this exercise. But also the prejudices, the popular phrases and sayings, such as: *Entre mujeres podemos despedazarnos pero nunca hacernos daño*, (Women, we can tear ourselves apart but never hurt us) *Mujeres juntas, ni difuntas* (Women together, neither dead nor alive). What is the basis of these popular sayings that validate hostility among women? What leads us to prevent the intellectual, personal growth of other women? Is it me? Is it society? Is it a mixture of both? The first and the second person emerged in our questionings. Such proverbs are considered popular wisdom. This wisdom reflects myths, beliefs and traditions that have been perpetuated in different cultures from generation to generation, and have been pillars that have allowed inequality and discrimination, mainly against women. Prejudice and sexism, including where women are judged for their reclusive or liberated sexual behavior, as well as learned negative conduct among ourselves, are present in proverbs that have added to the different aggressions against women, among them feminicides.⁸³

⁸³ Some more famous sayings in Mexico: *Cuando jóvenes las mujeres son uvas, cuando viejas son pasas* (When young, women are grapes, when old women are raisins); *La suerte de la fea la bonita la desea* (The beautiful wants the luck of the ugly one); *A las mujeres, ni todo el amor ni todo el dinero* (Not all love or money to women); *La mujer cuando piensa sola, mal piensa* (When a woman thinks alone, she thinks badly); *Apenas les dicen "mi alma" y ya quieren casa aparte* (You just tell them – to women – 'my soul' and they already want house apart); *Aunque la mona se vista de seda, mona se queda* (Although the monkey dresses in silk, monkey stays); *Mujer*

In her song *¡Qué Mujer!* (What a Woman!) Mare had already talked about these topics. In her lyrics she urged women to combat these stereotypes and confronts their own prejudices, then overcome them and empower themselves.⁸⁴

Qué belleza la que tú presentas bajo ese traje
Qué belleza mujer, pero que sea más tu coraje
No dejes que nadie te pise, que no te manden
Que lo mejor de ti no lo oculte el maquillaje...
Creer, vencer, tener, poder
Mujer no te limites a lo que te piden ser
Sentir, pedir, salir, huir
No dejes que en tu vida otros quieran decidir...
No ataques a otras mujeres con tus comentarios
Que aunque sean entre nosotras si pueden dañarnos
La lucha por igualdad empezó hace años
¿Por qué seguimos entonces con doctrinas de antaño?
No reproduzcas en casa la opresión que hay afuera
No llames puta a otras mujeres
No las quemes en la hoguera

que sabe latín no encuentra marido ni tiene buen fin (A woman who knows Latin neither has a husband nor comes to a good end). (my translation).

⁸⁴ This song appears in her music album *Experimental Prole* (2013) At the beginning of the song she uses the musical bass and first phrase of the song *Mujer Oaxaqueña* (Oaxacan Woman) of Rodolfo Villegas: *¡Qué belleza la que tú presentas bajo ese traje* (What beauty you present beneath your costume). Mare changes the lyrics of the original song making a feminist statement. “What beauty you present beneath your dress; What a beautiful woman, but let your courage be stronger; Do not let anyone step on you, do not let anyone give orders to you; do not hide the best of you under the makeup; (inserted What beauty you present under that suit, the first line of the Oaxacan Woman song by Rodolfo Villegas); To believe, to overcome, to have, power; Woman do not limit yourself to what you are asked to be; to feel, to ask, to leave, to run away; Do not let others decide in your life; Do not attack other women with your comments; Although it is among us they can harm us; The struggle for equality started years ago; So why are we still with old fashioned doctrines?; Do not reproduce at home the oppression that is outside; Do not call other women whore; Do not burn them at the stake; Barbie was never like you why do you want to be like her?; why do you care so much to be tall, skinny or *güera*; It is about being equal but respecting the difference” (my translation).

Barbie jamás fue como tú porque tú si como ella

Porque te importa tanto ser alta, flaca o güera

Se trata de ser iguales pero en la diferencia

These reflections culminated in the third exercise which was a creative activity. Mare gave us some paper circles and told us that on one side we were going to draw our own representation of autonomy in a horizontal way, and on the other side we would write vertically from side to side the negative things that stop our autonomy. We punched holes on both ends of the circle and used elastic in the extremes, recreating the illusion of motion as we spin the two sides of the disc, each depicting a different phase of the motion. We learned to create a thaumatrope, also known as wonder turner, an optical toy that was popular in the 19th century. The goal was to reflect on the optical illusion which showed how our desire for autonomy gets imprisoned by negative actions. Some girls draw flowers, trees, houses, and relatives as their representation of autonomy. I draw a girl flying with the help of a balloon and some grass and flowers. My imprisoning words were shyness, and getting frustrated with myself when not learning quickly.

This exercise exemplifies Mare's process of thinking about autonomy from the individual to the collective level, and also her commitments to other women. She also creates a bridge between the communitarian, the collective, and individual practices and women's struggles. First there is recognition of the individual value of a person, as a woman, to dignify yourself via connection with your historical memory and your female ancestors, as well as being proud of your community. Then you make visible the different oppressions you live with, and fight for your rights not only at the individual but at the collective level, in the case of women's groups, constructing extended sorority networks. Finally, you collectively demand your rights

from the state, including the “right to talk and represent oneself and one’s community is a fundamental aspect of citizenship” (Morgan 2005, 436).

This workshop follows the model of the Yoorusiidi’ Guendaxilatexti’ cagunaa’’, Escuela para la Libertad de las Mujeres (School for Women’s Liberation), which Mare also attends. *Siembra autonomía, cosecha libertad!!* (Sow autonomy, harvest freedom!!), is the slogan of the feminist school, initiated in 2015 in Oaxaca and run by a lesbian feminist training initiative.⁸⁵ This program, which is free, covers technical, manual training and consciousness-raising for women. Divided into four sections (Self-awareness, Self-defense, Art of Disobedience, and Basic Home Repairs), the feminist school aims to contribute to the eradication of the conditions of social, economic and labor exclusion and also to reducing the rates of *lesbofobia* (lesbo-homophobia) and femicidal violence that women live with in Oaxaca. Mare participates in the Art of Disobedience stream with a workshop titled “De Musas a Creadoras” (From Muses to Creators). During this workshop, the assistants analyse cultural products, transform them, and then create some other new ones. For example, through popular love songs from the 60s to the present, the assistants deconstruct the myths of romantic love. As a result of this workshop in 2015, the female assistants created and recorded a rap song.⁸⁶

In this kind of feminist consciousness raising group, which echoes the practices of the 1960s and 1970s feminist movements, Mare initiates reflection on the individual and collective participation of women within society. Women from different ethnic, class, and racial

⁸⁵ Yoorusiidi’Guendaxilatexti’cagunaa’’ in Zapotec language. This program is supported by Nazioarteko Elkartasuna (International Solidarity), the municipality of Vitoria-Gasteiz from the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain; the Defensoría de los Derechos Humanos de Pueblo de Oaxaca DDHPO (Office for the Defense of *Human Rights* of the People of *Oaxaca*).

⁸⁶ Soundcloud song *Escuela para la Libertad de las Mujeres* <https://soundcloud.com/mare-advertencia-lirika/mujeres-sembrando-escuela-para-la-libertad-de-las-muferes-1a-generacion-2015> (Accessed 15 May, 2017)

backgrounds come together in Mare's practices, having as their main interests to combat feminicide, sexual violence, and reflect on the discriminatory policy measures of the nation state towards working-class, indigenous and afro women. Mare's workshops refute the idea that feminist street activism and consciousness-raising groups belong to the past, or to second-wave feminist ideas. In this sense, feminism as a political theory and political praxis within Mexican feminist movements are renewed by such activities.

Rap composition is another important element of Mare's workshops. In "Poesía del Día a Día" (Everyday Poetry) she explores the power of the oral tradition, experimentation in writing about our everyday lives, and how knowledge is also constructed everywhere. This workshop was given during our second stop in the SiempreViva tour in *Casa Madero*, at an independent art gallery in Gómez Palacio, Durango. Mare gathered around 25 participants, among them young men and women, some of them with experience doing rap. The attendees came from different locations in Gómez Palacio, and its sister city Torreón, which is located 20 minutes driving distance away. On this occasion there were equal amounts of men and women in the workshop, and some of them knew each other from the hip-hop scene and had even shared the stage. At the beginning Mare distributed to each of the participants *lotería* cards, a popular Mexican game of chance. I got a card with a *nopal*, a Mexican succulent with green leaves, and the girl beside me had a tree. The first exercise was to construct rhymes with the images, and finally a collective poem that will be spoken to music. For this we began to count the number of syllables per line. It was a rediscovering of versification classes from primary school. After a brief review of the different rules for rhyme, and scansion, we began the construction of our own verses.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Spanish poetry is typically based on the number of syllables (*sílabas*) per line (*verso*), and not the number and type of "feet" per line as in English poetry. When a word ends in a vowel and the following word begins with a vowel, the two vowels are normally joined into a single syllable for purposes of counting poetic syllables. This

The most difficult part came when we added rhythm to our words. Juggling the rhythm, the metre and the rhyme was anything but easy. Mare gave us a beat from her iPod as a base to our lyrics, but we also used the musicality of our body (clapping, whistling, and drumming with our fingers).

What comes first when composing a rap song? The lyrics? The beat? The message? Mare says that, in her case, an idea might come up at any moment and she writes it down on paper. At other moments she already has the beat and she composes the lyrics following the rhythm. More recently, when she writes, she sings and records the first melodies of the song, but “There are no rules, sometimes the lyrics will come first, other times the sound will come first, but when you record with another person in a collaboration, it is a different process. You have to sit down, talk about the ideas with each other”. These ideas in Mare’s case are always connected with her political commitments to women’s issues and indigenous struggles, both linked to oral tradition.

Alicia Lemus (2011) refers to the oral forms of transmission of traditions in the living indigenous world. She calls it ‘the transmission of history through orality’. For Martinez Luna “orality is maintained in songs, in theatre, dance, guaranteeing the reproduction of values and is part of the communal manifestations” (2013, 296, *my translation*). Sylvia Marcos also reflects on the importance of poetry and oral tradition, pointing out:

The rhymes and vocal rhymes transform poetry into memorization. Its cadences illuminate, nourish the spirit and invoke, reproducing, the cosmic rhythmic forces of the universe. They vigorously attract and, through them, traditions can be preserved

linking of vowels across word boundaries is called synalepha, or *sinalefa* in Spanish. In Spanish there are abundant rhymes both assonant and consonant. Metrica is rhythm adjusted to poetry.

and shared. The verbal forms in the presentations of indigenous women, in their statements in meetings and workshops, frequently turn into poetic words and phonemes (Marcos 2014, 28-29, *my translation*).

If there is a way to preserve a tradition, to fight against oblivion in resistance to colonialism and the State, it is through memory. Memory that has been conserved thanks to the orality, which maintained traditions and our ancestor's histories for years. In this way, "oral history ... is a de-alienation collective exercise" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2006, 20, *my translation*).

Such de-alienation is materialised in Mare's own rap, which is musicalized poetry. Her individual experiences as a young woman, as a Zapotec, and as a feminist, are collectivized through the collective and ongoing history they draw and help create. But also through the workshops she is giving the value her composition process deserves. We as participants learn that knowledge produced outside the academy is valid, and it deserves its rightful value. At the same time, we learn to give voice to our daily experiences and reflections. This voice that comprises an extension of our body was explored by Mare in her last workshop during the SiempreViva tour in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Titled "Experimentación Vocal" (Vocal experimentation) the workshop was attended by young women and 11 and 12-year-old boys in *La Promesa*, a communitarian house with a lot of history. Located in one of the most conflictive areas in Juárez, the cultural center is organized by Colectiva Arte, Comunidad y Equidad, under the direction of feminist Verónica Corchado.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ La Promesa is both an art project of Mexican artist Teresa Margolles (1963) and an autonomous cultural Centre in the working class areas of Ciudad Juárez. As an art project *La promesa* (2012) consisted in the demolition of an abandoned house in Ciudad Juárez and the subsequent reconstruction of the ruins in a museum (MUAC, Mexico City), giving to them the shape of a long wall to symbolize the power concentrated in the collective work. Each day, during the exhibition, volunteers scratched a little of that ephemeral monument, and in that slow erosion the poetics of memory were expressed. Margolles work focuses on the collective turmoil of the Northern Mexican social experience where drug-related organized crime has resulted in widespread violence and murder. In La Promesa project she focuses on the more than 120,000 houses have been abandoned in Ciudad Juárez because of drug related violence, since 2007, specially in working class areas and the periphery. In this case the house in the northern west of Juárez that was dismantled was abandoned by a family whose daughter was murdered in crossfire. The house was bought by Margolles, then used during her project and finally the land was donated by her to the

“I thought about creating this workshop for the moments when we have to use the voice beyond the common activities, such as singing, giving an oral presentation, participating in protests even as a method of self-defence”, Mare tells us at the beginning of the workshop. She approaches the subject of the voice from two directions. The first one from a technique she learned from taking singing lessons: breathing techniques and warming up exercises. The second, as a tool of self-defense after her own experiences of sexual harassment in the city as well as other misogynist experiences of other women. After talking about the diaphragm function, we begin the breathing exercises. We place our hands on our belly buttons and breathe (inhale) and our hands rise. Now we breathe out (exhale) and our hands lower. A seemingly simple exercise was actually a bit complicated for some of us. It’s possible that unconsciously we have been repeating the wrong breathing exercises of “*Firmes, Ya*”, from *Honours to the flag* and the girl’s traditional command ¡*Mete la panza!* (Tuck in your belly!).⁸⁹ Once we mastered our diaphragm movement we did some facial muscle exercises. Mare drew on the white board: *na o e i u*, and we began producing voice with the vowels. “*Nahhhhhhhhhhhhh, ooooooo* (we formed an O with our mouth ohhhhh), *eeeeeeeee* (ehhhh), *iiiiiiiiii* (eeeeee), *uuuuuuu* (*uhhhh*)”. The room filled up with our vocal sounds.

Later Mare shared an experience of sexual harassment in the subway as an example of the voice as a tool of self-defense. “Shhhht, shhht, shhht”, spit a voice from the corner. The voice

community. Veronica Corchado a feminist social activist became the director of the house, which was called *La Promesa* in clear allusion to the deranged promises by narco violence, but also as she says : “When there is such a bloodshed, small promises emerged, fulfilled like this one”. The house has funding from Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo de la UNAM; FundacionFord; Colectiva: Arte, Equidad y Género A.C; ALA+S Arquitectura. Since October 2016 Corchado began working as the director of Instituto Municipal de la Mujer Juarense (IMMJ), Municipal Juarez Women’s Institute.

⁸⁹ Each Monday basic education schools celebrate “Honours to the flag”, a nationalist event where students sing *Juramento a la Bandera* (Call of Flag), a small piece about fidelity to the flag. The climax of the ritual Monday event is the recitation of the Mexican pledge of allegiance and the singing of the Mexican National anthem, while La Escolta, a group of selected students march with the national flag. In Mexico, Flag Day is celebrated each February 24th.

was low but loud enough so Mare could be the only one to hear it in the almost empty subway station stairs. “What do you want?” Mare screamed out loud. Immediately the small amount of people around turned their heads towards the high-toned voice. A questioning look appeared on the subway users’ foreheads. “What’s happening?” they asked themselves. Suddenly all eyes were on the corner, where the diminished man turned his back on the people and tried to blend himself into the wall. “When we talk it is also the way we project ourselves in the space” Mare announces. And she begins to sing, “Porque cuando todo el mundo espera que calles; se quejaron de tu voz, no importa que tan bajo hables; ¡así que a gritos reclamo mi existencia!”. If what we are saying is going to disturb, better say it loudly to make people feel uncomfortable. In this way the voice functions as an extension of our bodies and the tone of our voice defines how we inhabit the space.⁹⁰

“What you do not name, does not exist”

We are in the middle of the desert, in the heart of Comarca Lagunera. Anahi, who is part of the extended sorority networks, has just picked us – Mare and I – up from Torreón airport and we are driving along Ávila Camacho Avenue, where an *Adelita* with a Mauser in her right hand and the bandoliers across her chest welcome us to the industrialized city.⁹¹

⁹⁰ One extract from her song “Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista”): “... Because everytime they expect you to shut up; they will complain of your voice, no matter how low you speak; So crying out loud I claim my existence!”
(my translation)

⁹¹ The statue of *Adelita* is located in the intersection of Ávila Camacho and Saltillo 400 Avenue. Adelita stands with her *mauser*, bandoliers and wrapped in her *rebozo* (shawl), although some of them were wearing late-Edwardian dresses. *Adelita* or *Soldadera* as it is more commonly named was the woman who participated in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). She transformed into a popular female icon as an archetype of a warrior woman. There is a romantic ballad titled *Adelita* (Arce 2016).

An unusually heavy period of rain, for a northern Mexican summer, accompanied the whole SiempreViva tour. During a radio interview in Gómez Palacio, Mare notes that in Oaxaca it was raining to which Obeja playfully replies, “Why did you bring the rain here?” and then expresses her thankfulness because “water is a blessing, especially in the desert”. Mare’s latest music production *SiempreViva* (2016) (figure 8), names the whole tour, mainly organized by Obeja from BF and in which she also participates. The SiempreViva flower, which takes the Latin name of *Sempervivum* and literally means ‘forever alive’,⁹² takes on a special meaning in Mare’s personal and collective growth:

This music album is very personal, so the person that listens to it will get to know more about Mare Advertencia Lirika because it symbolizes an advance within music as an artist but it also symbolises the closing of a cycle. Understanding the loses, the pain, *el duelo* (the grief), how we continue living nevertheless the pain, the sadness, the death, in the personal level but also as generation, as the historical moment we are living in. There is a humanitarian crisis in the world that is making us indifferent to what other people is living but also there are so many people who are dragging pain, suffering. For me Siempreviva represents how to continue life despite death and it is symbolized by the Siempreviva flower. In Oaxaca Siempreviva is taken to the death, when the flower is cut it maintains its colour, its life, so it is like the music, the essence of people.⁹³

La flor inmortal, (the immortal flower), as it is known in Oaxaca, decorates the SiempreViva album artwork, which was designed from Mare’s concept by the urban art collective Gran OM

⁹² The name *Sempervivum* has its origin in the Latin *semper* (“always”) and *vivus* (“living”). It is a succulent perennial genus flowering plant. Their ability to store water in their thick leaves allows them to live on sunny rocks and stony places in the mountain, subalpine and alpine belts because this perennial plant keeps its leaves in winter and is very resistant to difficult conditions of growth.

⁹³ Mare is referencing the Ofrenda de Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead). The word *ofrenda* means offering in Spanish and is set up to remember and honor the memory of our ancestors.

& El Dante. The album art conjures up the linoleum printing technique and political graphics that have made Oaxaca famous.⁹⁴

On the cover of the album, a group of Siempreviva flowers hide half Mare's face in substitution for a rebel kerchief. The focus of attention is on Mare's deep gaze framed by the flowers on a pink background. Once we open the album the following legend appears: "Este material queda libre para su reproducción y distribución sin fines gubernamentales o de lucro".⁹⁵ This legend is accompanied by Mare's hand holding a red apple, which makes reference to Latuvi, Mare's family community of origin and its fame as the main apple producers in the Sierra Norte, as well as the traditional association of teachers with apples. The second interior of the album has a written acknowledgement and the image of a candle over a tree stump. The acknowledgement reads:

Siempreviva es un homenaje y un reconocimiento a todas esas personas que han marcado mi vida, quienes se han ido y con quienes hasta el día de hoy sigo compartiendo camino. Gracias a la gente dentro del arte y el activismo, que desde cada trinchera me brindan su luz y su fuerza, a mis hermanas feministas y mis hermanxs hip hop en todas partes del mundo, por seguir creyendo en esta locura. Gracias a mi familia de sangre y la elegida por su apoyo y compañía. Comparto con ustedes este disco que representa el cierre de un ciclo y el comienzo de uno nuevo, motivada por la vida, la

⁹⁴ An important pioneer of the political graphic in Mexico is *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (People's Graphic Workshop), an artist's print collective founded in 1937 by artists Leopoldo Mendez, Pablo O'Higgins and Luis Arenal. The main objective of the collective was to use art for revolutionary social causes, after the dissolution of Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR, Revolutionary Writers' and Artists' League), a group who had supported the Mexican Revolution. Currently ASARO, the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca, is a contemporary Mexican artists' collective working in wood and linoleum block prints, large-scale graffiti murals, stencils and digital media. The group formed in 2006 following the social movement of APPO during the government of Ulises Ruiz in Oaxaca.

⁹⁵ This material is for free reproduction and distribution without governmental or profit purposes (*my translation*).

creación, los sueños y que mejor manera de llevarlos a cabo y compartirlos que por medio de la música.⁹⁶

The fifteen songs on the album enumerated on the back cover and framed by *Siempreviva* flowers and monarch butterflies cover a wide range of topics and music collaborations: Oaxacan sound landscapes; personal and collective struggles; the Global South networking; *ofrendas* to female ancestors and beloved ones; denunciation of the Mexican State; denunciation of sexual harassment and femicide and a Feminist Manifesto.

“*Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista)*” (Annoying Woman, Feminist Manifesto) emerged as an individual but also collective public stance against the silencing of women in every corner of the world and also to position the female voice as a tool of self-defence. As Mare remarks “whether you speak out or not you will be attacked, therefore is much better to raise the voice, to speak out loud”. This is such an important representation of Mare’s position that I want to include a very long quotation:

La mula no era arisca, pero la hicieron,
la niña no era feminista, pero aquí nos vemos,
compas creemos, machitos no sabemos,
porque es normal que los lobos vistan piel de cordero.
Y es que hay que ver quien critica, bajo qué normas,
si soy yo la que está mal o eres tú, quién se conforma,
si no quieres saber nada de mí, por mi pensar,
si es más fácil, desde tu privilegio, juzgar mi andar.

⁹⁶ *Siempreviva* is a tribute and recognition to all those people who have marked my life, who have left and with whom I continue to share my way. Thanks to the people within the art and activism, who from every trench give me their light and strength, my feminist sisters and my hip hop hermanas in all parts of the world, to continue believing in this madness. Thanks to my family of blood and the one chosen for their support and company. I share with you this album that represents the closing of a cycle and the beginning of a new one, motivated by life, creation, dreams and what better way to carry them out and share them than through music. (*my translation*)

Y qué más da, una asesinada más,
si seguro mi protesta es pa' quitarte tú lugar,
qué irracional, mi discurso radical,
exigir que las minorías tengamos respeto igual.
Suenan increíble pensar que somos personas,
siendo la mitad del mundo, en minoría, nos transforman,
si la violencia, es tan normal bajo sus normas,
no queremos sus derechos ¡exigimos los de nosotras!
No te equivoques, no soy un caso aislado,
no es exageración, ni una mentira lo que te hablo.
Sólo te cuento las verdades incómodas,
de una sociedad, que con nosotras, es hipócrita.
No te equivoques, no soy un caso aislado,
no es exageración, ni una mentira lo que te hablo.
Sólo te cuento las verdades incómodas,
de una sociedad, que con nosotras, es hipócrita.
Una aparente libertad, donde limitan mi existencia,
donde no importa cuanta conciencia tengas,
si en el diario andar, no eres capaz de darte cuenta,
que no todo aquel que se diga libre, es que lo sea.
Hay quien se acata y quien sale de las reglas,
y parece que desobediente soy de éste sistema,
no es que yo lo prefiera, quisiera ser lo que esperan,
pero el sexismo hace tiempo no me educa ¡oops quéépena!
Porque cuando todo el mundo espera que calles,

se quejaron de tu voz, no importa que tan bajo hables,

¡así que a gritos reclamo mi existencia!

Te contaré nuestra historia, no verdades a medias.

Dejé las treguas y me tragué unos tragos,

de dignidad y empoderamiento, y ahora hago estragos,

contra el machismo, contra ése patriarcado,

mujeres en la lucha, ¡oídos necios reventando!

Ya nos cansamos de esperar bajo las sombras,

Ya no caminamos detrás de nadie, ahora caminamos junto a nosotras,

abran paso, porque éstas mujeres, ya no dan ni un paso atrás

¡Ni una menos! ¡ni una asesinada más!⁹⁷

This feminist statement represents Mare's exposure of, and challenge to, the feminicides and forced disappearances in Oaxaca. In December 2014, she launched her music video "Devuélvanmelas" (Bring them back to me), where she denounces the feminization of forced disappearances and the lack of political commitment by the Mexican State to solve these crimes.

⁹⁷ "The mule was not easily frightened, it was was made; the girl was not feminist, but here we are; *compas* friends we believe; *machitos* we didn't imagine; because it is normal for wolves to wear lambskin. It is necessary to see who criticizes, under which laws/rules; if I am the one who is wrong or you are, who is satisfied/*se conforma*; if you do not want to know anything about me, because of my way of thinking; if it is easier, from your privilege, to judge my walk. *que mas da?*, one more female murdered; if surely my protest has the purpose to take your place; very/so irrational, my radical speech; to demand that minorities have equal respect. It sounds incredible to think that we (women) are people; being the half of the world, in minority, we are transformed (by men); if violence, is so normal under your rules/laws; we do not want your rights, we demand those of us/our rights! Chorus: Make no mistake, I'm not an isolated case; it's not exaggeration, not a single lie what I'm talking about. I am only telling you the uncomfortable truths; of a society, which, with us (women), is hypocritical. An apparent freedom, where they limit my existence; where no matter how much consciousness you have; if in the daily walk, you are not able to realize, that not everyone who says is free, is. There are those who obey and those others that go out the laws/ rules, and it seems that I am *desobediente* of this system; is not that I prefer it, I would like to be what they expect me to be; but it's been some time that sexism does not educates anymore, oops what a pity! Because everytime they expect you to shut up they will complain of your voice, no matter how low you speak; So crying out loud I claim my existence! I'll tell you our story, not half-truths. I left the truces and I swallow a few drinks, of dignity and empowerment, and now I do damage, against *machismo*, against that patriarchy; women in the fight, stubborn ears bursting! We got tired of waiting under the shadows, We no longer walk behind anyone, now we walk next to each other (female); open the way, because these women, no longer take a step back; Not one less! Not one more female murdered!" (*my translation*)

In international human rights law, a forced disappearance or enforced disappearance occurs when a person is secretly abducted or imprisoned by a State or political organization or by a third party with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of a state or political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the person's fate and whereabouts, with the intent of placing the victim outside the protection of the law. The term of enforced disappearance is conceptualized in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Article 7, on Crimes against Humanity, paragraph 1 states: "Enforced disappearance of persons means the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time" (1998, 5).⁹⁸

Remembering how she got involved with the topic of disappearances, Mare says, "In 2013 the disappearances hit me hard, because I remember in Oaxaca we did not see disappearances so much. It was not a crime that you would see commonly and I remember that the first month of January 2013 I counted on the streets 5 posters of women who had disappeared and another 3 men in a single month ... and I said to myself what is happening?" Focusing on the case of the indigenous Triqui sisters, Daniela and Virginia Ortiz, who were victims of political forced disappearance in 2007 in Oaxaca, Mare denounced the more than 30,000 forced disappearances registered since 2006 in the whole country.

Historically, San Juan Copala was considered a free municipality by the state of Oaxaca until Oaxaca removed its autonomy and classified it as "a municipal agency of Juxtlahuaca" in 1948.

⁹⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aeff7-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf (Accessed 10 September, 2017).

The conflict in San Juan Copala has existed since the 1960s but during the 1980s got worse when the Mexican State removed territory from this municipality. In response to agrarian conflicts and forced displacement, the indigenous Triqui community has divided themselves against the Mexican State. During the 90s the Mexican State created the paramilitary group Unión de Bienestar Social de la Región Triqui Ubisort (Union of Social Welfare of the Triqui Region). Nowadays there are three groups in conflict for Triqui autonomy: Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui (Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle MULT); Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui Independiente (Unified Independent Movement for the Triqui Liberation MULTI) and Unión de Bienestar Social de la Región Triqui (Union of Social Welfare of the Triqui Region Ubisort). In 2010 the conflict of Copala got recognition on an international level with the assassinations of Bety Cariño and Finnish citizen Jyri Jaakkola.

Daniela and Virginia Ortiz are part of MULT, the group in political conflict with MULTI and UNISORT. This is the main reason their case has been considered a political case of forced disappearance, in contrast with other forced disappearances which are connected with organized crime and drug-related violence. Mare's music video "Devuélvanmelas", accompanying the lyrics, shows data related to their case and to other disappearances in Oaxaca. From the text on the screen we learn that only the state of Oaxaca has witnessed at least two disappearances of women per month in recent years. In most cases, the ages of the disappeared range from 11 to 30 years old. This data is added to the different forms of violence experienced by women in Oaxaca, which in 2015 occupied the first place in gun-related violence towards women. The feminist organization Consorcio para el Dialogo Parlamentario y Equidad Oaxaca (Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity) have recorded 1,324 feminicides in Oaxaca by May 2017 (429 during Jose Murat's government 1998-2004; 285

under Ulises Ruiz 2004-2010; 527 under Gabino Cué 2010-2016; and 83 under Alejandro Murat Hinojosa 2016-present).⁹⁹

“Devuélvanmelas” (Bring them back to me)

No es una más, es una menos

¿Dónde están? Las queremos de regreso

No hay porque callar ni tampoco olvidar

No es una cifra y ya

Es una mujer que conmigo no esta.¹⁰⁰

The six-minute music video for “Devuélvanmelas” also constitutes a very detailed denunciation of the forced disappearances of Daniela and Virginia inserted in the generalized violent environment of the country. The lyrics challenge the State discourse that situate the victims of forced disappearance only as numbers; the image of Antonia Ramírez, Daniela and Virginia’s mother and the Triqui women supporting her in the search for the girls is a sign of *acompañamiento* (accompaniment) and agency of the voice of the indigenous women who are barely or never heard by the State; the information shows us the large number of forced disappearances in the country and in Oaxaca, as well as the complicated relationship with Mexican justice institutions when Antonia denounces the forced disappearances in Spanish, her second language, under the laws of the state. The well-known tactic of the Mexican State’s biopower discourse which snatches away the names and presence of disappeared people is reversed in Mare’s video and lyrics. The disappeared people recuperate their condition of human beings and their voice.

⁹⁹ See <http://consorciooaxaca.org.mx/>; <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2015/05/mexico-en-el-top-10-de-paises-con-mas-femicidios-por-armas-de-fuego-del-mundo/> (Accessed 20 August, 2017).

¹⁰⁰ “It isn’t one more, is one less; Where are they? We want them back; There is no reason to be silent nor to forget; It is not only a figure ; It’s a woman who is not with me” (*my translation*).

The power mechanisms over life that Foucault has explained using the concept of biopower, and that are exercised by the State in order to control the conduct of citizens, are materialized in the discourses that construct subjectivities and function as vehicles of power. Foucault writes:

I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is what I have called biopower (1978, 1).

The Mexican State discourse that denies the humanity of the disappeared people is transformed into women's agency in Mare's lyrics and images, and thus constitutes a strong denunciation of the State. "The violence within this conflict has been directly targeted towards women, women are the ones that have been disappeared, the ones that have been raped, the ones that have suffered more from the conflict", Mare affirms, when she talks about the case of the Triqui sisters.

The denunciation of forced disappearances and femicide were the main topics that brought together Mare, Obeja from Batallones Femeninos, Torrente, and many more women on this SiempreViva tour. Obeja tells me about the purpose of the tour:

We can create altogether something that allows us to stop the beast that continues killing us, disappearing us and that is not exclusively from the frontier. I go to Mare's barrio and there's a reality of violence against women. I know Torrente and she tells me that in Chile also the circumstances are against women. In Mexico City there are high levels of violence against women and sadly I see that the cancer has spread or that

it has always been spread but the situation of acquiring the conscience implies responsibility of constructing a solution.

In Plaza de Armas, in Gómez Palacio, Mare and Obeja will give their second concert. It is a sunny Sunday evening and the plaza is full of families that gather for a stroll; children with their grandparents, girls and boys playing with balloons and some women dancing *cumbias* close to the *kiosko*. Street food stalls selling *lonches*, *duritos*, *tostitos*, *gorditas* and strawberry, lime and Jamaica fresh water surround the plaza. Military men deployed as police also walk in the plaza with their high caliber weapons, keeping us aware that we are still being impacted by the War on Drugs.¹⁰¹

About 120 black chairs laid out in six rows in front of the *kiosko* begin to be occupied. Following the same order from the previous concert in Torreon, Obeja from Batallones Femeninos appears on stage with Mare, singing “En Pie de Lucha” (On the struggle). The song is dedicated in support of the teacher’s struggle across the country, but mostly in Oaxaca after the Nochixtlán clashes. Obeja and Mare began to sing together and their words resonate in the whole plaza. Mare’s part in “En Pie de Lucha” enters after Obeja’s words:

Los que no reconocen la diversidad del pueblo

Son esos que piensan que la educación

Se puede unificar pero un ejemplo

Es Oaxaca y el PTEO

Porque quien trabaja desde el aula

Es quien la puede transformar

Educación laica y gratuita es el principio

Luego criticar las bases del sistema educativo

¹⁰¹ *Lonches*, *duritos*, *tostitos*, and *gorditas* are popular snack food from the north of Mexico.

Adaptar los contenidos al contexto y territorio
Y no se quede solamente en un papel puesto en el escritorio
Ser incluyente de la cosmovisión, del lenguaje
Porque la labor docente va más allá de dar clases
Involucrar a la comunidad entera
Y el proceso de aprendizaje
No es exclusivo de la escuela
Usos y costumbres, tradición y medio ambiente
Dejar la competencia y apoyar la comunidad
Eso vuelve a las personas responsables de su gente
Si esto no incluye su reforma
Entonces ¿qué quieren cambiar?¹⁰²

In Mare's lyrics, the principle of *comunalidad* in education emerges when she mentions Plan para la Transformación de la Educación de Oaxaca (Oaxaca's Education Transformation Plan, PTEO) as an example of educational transformation. PTEO is a proposal by Oaxaca's Section 22 presented on the 7th of February of 2012, to recuperate the cultural roots of Oaxaca's peoples. The Oaxaca teachers' movement took the idea of *comunalidad* as the guiding principle in their proposals for elementary education, aiming to promote education as a mode of

¹⁰² "Those who do not recognize the diversity of the people; They are those who think that education; It can be unified but an example; It is Oaxaca and the PTEO; Because who works from the classroom; Is who can transform it; Lay and free education is the beginning; Then criticize the foundations of the educational system; Adapt the contents to the context and territory; And do not just stay on paper put on the desk; Be inclusive of the worldview of the language; Because the teaching work goes beyond teaching; Involve the entire community; And the learning process; Not exclusive to the school; Uses and customs, tradition and environment; Leave the competition and support the community; That makes the people responsible for their people; If this does not include your retirement; So, what do you want to change?" (*my translation*).

resistance and foster discussion around a different educational model within the Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca (Oaxaca State Public Education Institute).¹⁰³

Mare appears on the stage all by herself singing “Soy yo” and “¡Qué Mujer!” from her first album (2010); then “Algodón de azúcar” from her 2013 album, among other songs; and finally “Bienvendx” and “Libres y Vivas”, from her most recent album. Suddenly a man in his fifties approaches and asks me, while signaling at the stage: “What’s her name?” I answer Mare Advertencia Lirika, and then he continues “Is it protest rap?” and I answer, yes, it is politically conscious rap. Mare’s close relationship with protest poetry since her teenage years follows her. One of her earliest memories in relation to protest poetry is from the critical adaptation of “México creo en ti” (Mexico I believe in you), by poet Ricardo López Méndez. The poem was transformed by a teacher into “México ¿cómo creer en ti?” (México, how can I believe in you?). The original “México, creo en ti, porque escribes tu nombre con la X que algo tiene de cruz y calvario” transformed into, “México no creo en ti porque escribes tu nombre con la sangre de campesinos y a veces de estudiantes”.¹⁰⁴

Her encounter with this poem impacted significantly on Mare’s political thinking. Protest poetry became a tool of political consciousness in those years and have accompanied her rap songs since then. Her personal struggles became collective ones, and the understanding of what was happening in her family, in her community, in her territory and how it affects everyday lives, became central in her career.

¹⁰³ Plan para la Transformación de la Educación de Oaxaca
<http://indicadorpolitico.mx/images/pdfs/cuadernos/pteo-2012.pdf> (Accessed 19 September, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Mexico, I believe you, because you write your name with the X that has something of cross and calvary; Mexico I do not believe in you because you write your name with the blood of peasants and sometimes of students (*my translation*).

Almost at the end of the concert, Mare addresses the audience saying, “We have to start naming things because if we do not, we will not be able to transform them. We have to start naming fear”. Immediately she returns to one of her strong premises *Lo que no se nombra no existe* (What you do not name, does not exist) and begins singing “Dale su nombre” (Give it, its name), the tenth song of the album *Siempre Viva*. This phrase is in popular use among feminists, and as part of Mare’s feminist ethos she shares it constantly with the public. Once the concert finishes and Mare is off stage the same man that asked me about her name approaches and asks her: “How do you see Oaxaca?” Mare responds: “The whole country is in a difficult situation, but in the North people are conformists, they have fear, and in the South people took away the fear”. The man nods with a thoughtful look.

It’s late and getting dark. The street food stalls turn their lights on, girls pose with a *quinceañera* (a girl celebrating her 15th birthday) holding their Jamaica fresh water, b-boys dance while some rap music is still playing, the soldiers wander in the plaza, and Mare begins to sell her *Siempre Viva* album among the audience. A boy of about six years old approaches Mare asking for an autograph and the cost of the music CD. “100 pesos” (\$AUD 7) she responds, while signing the autograph. Immediately the boy asks his parents for the money. They do not look sure about buying it for that price, so Mare says that is not necessarily 100 pesos. Finally, the father asked if it would be possible to pay 50 pesos (\$AUD 3) before his son’s expectant eyes. Mare accepts, and the boy is thrilled.

Talking about her career, the launching of the *Siempre Viva* album, and its distribution, Mare tells me that:

The project of Mare Advertencia Lirika is *autogestivo* and has been growing because it has had the support of many people, organizations, collectives, independent *banda*

(people). They felt that what I was saying represented them and they invited me to their events, and supported me.

This concept of autogestión is related to the *caracter colectivista* (collectivist character) of the indigenous people in Oaxaca (Rendón Monzón 2003), and therefore to *comunalidad*. As Maldonado argues,

Collective participation is anywhere the basis of autogestión. Comunalidad mobilizes its members around an autogestionario (self-management) and responsible exercise of power, economy, care of the environment, health, social reproduction, conflict resolution, and so on. That is why [*autogestión*] is the basis for the reorganization of the nation based on autonomy (Maldonado 2016, 9, *my translation*).

This acknowledgment of collective participation in Mare's autogestivo project is materialized in different forms on the *SiempreViva* album. This includes the donation of the cover art by Gran OM and Dante; the unpaid music production by Dj T-Bear; and the different music collaborations from national and international artists.

People from different backgrounds and emphasizing different social struggles have supported and accompanied Mare's project. In return, she gives her workshops and uploads her albums to be freely downloaded from her official webpage and streamed from her Soundcloud account. Although she sells her *SiempreViva* album at the end of every concert, she is also, as I indicated above, flexible with the price and the reason for this is also her position that "Music's goal is to be shared. I won't know the scope of the project if I limit it. The people that can pay me, they pay for the shows and *los viáticos* (money for the travelling), and there are other events regarding which I am told *queremos que nos eches paro* (we want you to help us)". This is the case with the *SiempreViva* tour, which Obeja organized with her extended sorority network in the north of the country. A spirit of reciprocity characteristic of *tequio* (collective work), one

of the elements of *comunalidad*, thus permeates Mare's actions. In this context "reciprocity is both a right and a social obligation. In principle it is the right of every member of the community to be helped by others when they need it. And that same right supposes the obligation to help to any other *comunero* exposed to that situation" (Rendon Monzón 2003, 41, *my translation*). It is important to note that even though *tequio* was eliminated as a legal precept by Benito Juárez with his liberal Constitution, it still continues in everyday practices inside local communities. As Martínez Luna describes it, "Tequio, to date is a collective work institution that holds on its shoulders the maintenance and physical and spiritual development of the indigenous community" (2013, 148, *my translation*).

Mare's project is an example of this practical emphasis on reciprocity. In Mare's case reciprocity involves the right and obligation to create dialogues among members of the hip-hop scene, the feminist and indigenous movement, and the broader public that is open to listening to such stories and engaging in such reciprocity. From her participation in Campaña Nacional en Defensa de la Madre Tierra y el Territorio in Oaxaca (National Campaign in Defense of Mother Earth and the Territory in Oaxaca) from the 21 to the 22th of July 2016; 1er Festival para No Olvidar (First Festival for Not Forgetting) #JusticiaNarvarte, the SiempreViva tour in the north of the country, and the *ArteArma* project organized by Xibakbal from Batallones Femeninos which brings hip-hop to the prisons in México, to the collaboration with different artists from different musical genres (mainly hip-hop, *son veracruzano*, *cumbia*), Mare interweaves solidarity and sorority networks in the interchange of knowledge based upon reciprocity.

Mare's solidarity in interweaving her hip hop with the musical expression of *son veracruzano*, or *son jarocho* as it is better known, dates back to 2012, with the documentary *Cuando una*

Mujer Avanza. “¿Y tú que esperas?”, is a collaborative song between Mare and Colectivo Altepee, a *son jarocho* group of young men and women from southern Veracruz “who see *música de cuerdas* (strings) as a tool of social consciousness in a shared environment: the fandango, a traditional celebration of our indigenous communities” (Colectivo Altepee 2012). Originating in the port state of Veracruz, “*son jarocho* is one of Mexico’s most traditional musical genres that is a product of the Afro-Mestizo universe that has been fashioning itself since the sixteenth century” (Arce 2016, 32). Regarding the musical genre of *son*, Arturo Warman Gryj and Irene Vasquez have documented the following six regions as areas of the different son-types. First, the *tierra caliente* (hotlands) of Guerrero. Second, tierra caliente of Michoacán. Third, Jalisco, both lowlands and highlands. Fourth, the isthmus of Tehuantepec. Fifth, Huasteca, including Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, Hidalgo and Puebla. And finally the coastal plain of Veracruz. Each of these regions developed its own son tradition (Arce 2016, 229).

In *La población negra de México* (1946), Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán explained jarocho, stressing:

He claims that the etymological origin of the word stems from the epithet “jaro”, which in Muslim Spain meant wild pig, to which they added the pejorative ending “cho”. This was the term Spanish apparently used to describe those Veracruzanos who were “mulatos” and “pardos”, intending to call them wild pigs due to their multiple racial combinations (Arce 2016, 228).

Mare’s collaborative work with son jarocho began when Colectivo Altepee visited Oaxaca in early 2010s. *Zapateado* (percussive dance executed by the feet on a wooden platform), *jaranas*, and *guitarra grande* (big guitar) are the primary instruments of son jarocho, and they accompany Mare’s lyrics in a reciprocal exchange of knowledge. She raps:

“Y tú ¿qué esperas?”
Nací mujer en los tiempos del cáncer de mama
Cuando el machismo mato a muchas hermanas
Cuando fueron perseguidas como brujas las lesbianas
Entre abortos clandestinos, SIDA y trata de blancas.
Una de tantas, de tantas y tan pocas
De las que como yo han sufrido las derrotas
Siempre tan igual y tan diferente a mis otras
Y si somos mayoría es sólo en las cifras rojas.
Y ¿tú qué esperas para contar tu verdad?
La vida se va extinguiendo en medio de la oscuridad
Y ¿tú qué esperas para dejar de esperar?
Hazlo por ti y por nosotras, avanza ya.¹⁰⁵

Mare participates with different groups of son jarocho and is involved in *fandango* with *Los Cojolites* from Veracruz. Fandango is the festive space, the meeting of a lot of people where “afro” musical traditions come together. According to Alfredo Delgado Calderón, the fandango is the catalyst for music, dance, and poetry that creates community:

The communal expression of the son jarocho is the fandango, where musicians, dancers and poets converge; music and dance is improvised around a wooden platform. There is no specific time to do a fandango: it could be during the day, after a wedding or

¹⁰⁵ “I was born a woman in times of breast cancer; when sexism killed many sisters; when lesbians were hunted as witches; among secret abortions, AIDS, and sex slavery; I am one among so many and the few; who like me, have suffered defeats/failures; Always so same and so different from the others (female otras); we are the majority, only when it comes to statistics; what are you waiting for to tell your truth?; Life itself is going extinct in the middle of darkness; what are you waiting for, stop waiting?; Do it for yourself and for all the women, take a step forward” (*my translation*).

baptism, or at night during a local holiday or at a veiling ceremony, to bid farewell to the daylight. (2004, 53, *my translation*).

The Afro-Mestizo is central to the jarocho culture, but Mexico's African descendants "stand phantasmatically behind the making of Mexican tradition and culture" (Arce 2016, 244).

In a different conversation, Mare tells me:

There is discrimination within the population against a *pueblo* that in México is not considered to exist. The third root legitimizes the African background in the law but there are no secondary laws that support this recognition thus the law does not apply as it should.

There is an active practice of exclusion of this third root in public policy. The Mexican state has not yet accepted the U.N. recommendation issued in 2001 following the Durban World Conference Against Racism (CMCR), that stipulates states with Afro-descendant populations must recognize them in the constitutional field. This is despite international recommendations for constitutional recognition, and the actions it has been acknowledged would be necessary to fulfil the objectives of the International Decade for Persons of African Descent in the Americas 2015-2024, proclaimed by the U.N. As Mare indicates, there are some local constitutional reforms, such as in the state of Oaxaca in 2013, in Guerrero in 2014, and in Mexico City in 2017, which led to the recognition of the Afro-Mexican people. However, secondary laws that would allow the design of specific public policies for Afro-Mexicans have not yet been implemented.

According to information published the 27th of March of 2017 by INEGI, CNDH and Conapred, there are 1, 381, 853 Afro-descendant people in México, that is, one in every 100 inhabitants of the country. Guerrero is the entity with the largest number of afrodescendent

population, with 6.5%; followed by Oaxaca with 4.9 % and Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, with 3.3 %. According to the results of the 2015 Intercensal Survey, in México 1.2 % of the population total of the country is Afro-descendant.¹⁰⁶

Today is the 24th of November 2016, the first day of Primer Congreso de Etnomusicología de la UNAM (First Congress of Ethnomusicology in the Faculty of Music of UNAM), and the last day I will meet Mare during my fieldwork. She had attended, very early in the morning, the second presentation of the congress titled “Resignificación de géneros musicales: Son jarocho” (Resignification of musical genres: Son jarocho). Mare’s friends and music colleagues María González de Castilla and Omar Muñoz Raigosa had presented their works titled, respectively: “Son jarocho y juventudes: Contextos y prácticas musicales contemporáneas, problematización para su abordaje” (Son jarocho and youth: contexts and contemporary musical practices, problematization for its approach) and “Los espacios del son jarocho en Guadalajara” (Spaces for son jarocho in Guadalajara). Both of them are jarana players from Guadalajara and invited Mare to their academic presentations. Therefore I can see before my eyes the large scope of Mare Advertencia Lirika’s project, her continuous exchange of learning with people that practice other musical genres, as well as the patterns of reciprocity among them. Currently she is learning to play the *mosquito*, a small jarana also known as requinto, which plays high-pitched notes, and she is also interested in the preservation of the historical memory of Afro-Mexicans, and therefore son jarocho.

¹⁰⁶ Perfil Sociodemográfico de la Población Afrodescendiente en México (Sociodemographic Profile of the Afro-Descendant Population in Mexico). Information published the 27th of March of 2017 by INEGI, CNDH and Conapred. http://www.inegi.org.mx/saladeprensa/boletines/2017/especiales/especiales2017_03_04.pdf (Accessed 18 September, 2017).

The rescue and preservation of historical memory, as an individual and collective narrative, occupies a fundamental place in Mare's discourse and political practice. Her participation within hip-hop culture, son jarocho, feminist movements, indigenous struggles, the afroestizo demands, and fandango are all extensions of *comunalidad* in a feminist key. For Mare, hip-hop functions to denounce the arbitrariness of the Mexican State especially towards women and as a historical documentation tool connected to the sharing of knowledge in an interweaving of reciprocity, solidarity and sorority networks. This networking has amplified to the whole of México, some geographies in the United States with large Chicano population, (a chosen identity for some Mexican-Americans in the United States experimenting racial, social and political oppression), Central America, South America, and more recently Europe with Mare's concerts in France and Luxembourg in July 2017.

On this music tour in Europe, Mare wrote the song "Mentiras" (Lies), a music collaboration with Hechi Mc (a female Chilean rapper living in France) and Dinamita (a female French-Costa Rican rapper). Launched on the 16th of September 2017, the music video was recorded in Paris, and had the Eiffel Tower, *the Gardens of Versailles* and government-subsidized housing as background to their denunciations of colonization, the "First World", and the claimed multiplicity of identities within Europe:

"Vinimos a hablar de las mentiras" (Dinamita)

"México y Chile desde el primer mundo... Sudacas..." (Hechi Mc)

"Llegaron con sus rezo, nos quitaron nuestro suelo,
esclavizaron, aniquilación sin piedad a nuestros ancestros
en nombre del progreso siguen cometiendo abusos

y ahora estamos aquí los buscavidas, no intrusos" (Hechi Mc)

"Que el primer mundo solo es blanco" (Mare Advertencia Lirika)

“Eso es mentira” (Todas)

“ Que el sexismo ya no existe” (Dinamita)”

“Eso es mentira” (Todas)

“Que aquí solo hay riqueza” (Hechi Mc)

“Eso es mentira” (Todas)

“Que es un estado de derecho” (Mare Advertencia Lirika)

“Eso es mentira” (Todas)

“Que el extranjero es el ladrón” (Dinamita)

“Eso es mentira” (Todas)

‘Que se abolió la esclavitud’ ” (Hechi Mc)

“Eso es mentira” (Todas).¹⁰⁷

“I have found myself looking to the South” Mare tells me during an interview, emphasising the coincidence that our interview took place on the 11th of September, the same day as the anniversary of the military coup in 1973 in Chile. The September 11 2001 Twin Tower attacks in New York City did not appear in the conversation. I assume the military coup in Chile came to her mind firstly because she has travelled there and made professional and friendship connections with the indigenous Mapuche groups from Chile, and because her main interest is in the South.

¹⁰⁷ “We came to talk about the lies (Dinamita)” / “Mexico and Chile from the first world Sudacas ...” (Hechi Mc) “They arrived with their prayer, they took our soil, enslaved us, annihilation of our ancestors without pity. In the name of progress they continue to commit abuses and now we are here the life seekers, not intruders” (Hechi Mc) “That the first world is only white” (Mare Advertencia Lirika) “That’s a lie” (All) ““hat sexism no longer exists” (Dinamita) “That is a lie” (All) “That there is only wealth here” (Hechi Mc) “That is a lie” “That Law exists”(Mare Advertencia Lirika) “That is a lie” (All) “That the foreigner is the thief” (Dynamita) “That is a lie” (All) “That slavery was abolished” (Hechi M) “That is a lie” (All)(*my translation*). Sudaca is a pejorative term used in Spain to name people from South America. Lately the term has been appropriated by the South Americans.

When Mare says the South, she is not only talking about the Latin-American geographical South, throughout which has travelled several times in different music tours, but that “global” South which is addressed by Boaventura Sousa de Santos:

The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimizing such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the geographic North (Europe and North America), in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalized populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, racism and islamophobia (De Sousa 2016, 17).

These ideas of the South are reflected in the lyrics of “Mentiras” and “Bienvenidx” from the *Siempre Viva* album, in her workshops and in all her projects addressed to the preservation of a collectivized historical memory. Maurice Halbwachs, in his posthumously published book *La Memoire Collective* (1968), emphasized social interaction as foundational to the construction of a collective memory, arguing that “While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individual as group members who remember” (1968, 78).

The construction of solidarity and sorority networks throughout the Latin American region within hip-hop culture has had a profound impact on Mare, especially in her relations with our sister country Chile. From Chile, the struggles of the indigenous Mapuche people, the defence of public education, land rights, the longtime history of political hip-hop, their experience of femicide, and the preservation of the memory of the dictatorship, all echo in Mare’s struggles

and her demands to the Mexican State.¹⁰⁸ This social interaction and collectivization of individual memory reminds us that our personal and local experiences are shared in other geographies. Mare Advertencia Lirika's political artistic project continues to spread its connections within indigenous, feminists, afro-descendant, Southern, and frontier narratives and struggles, because as Mare says, "if *Estados-Nación* (Nation-State) globalize their public policies, we [female] should globalize our resistance actions".

Mare's globalized sorority resistance is exemplified by various collaborations with different female rappers from Latin America and its diaspora in Europe, as well as by her commitment to creating networks among indigenous rappers that sing in their native languages. Recently she has been organizing rap events with female and male artists from pueblos originarios in an effort to tackle the governmental double discourse of gender and indigenous inclusive quota.

Mare's commitment to collective resistance goes beyond her rhythmic protest poetry, goes beyond her autonomy workshops, and goes beyond her creation of inclusive events for women, indigenous and afro groups. It is manifest in constant implementation of the principles of *comunalidad* in a feminist and indigenous key, in her continual work to consolidate her belonging to the resistances of her hometown, of her family, and particularly of women, and in her creation of an extended sorority network that transcends frontiers with conscious political hip-hop. As Mare would say: ¡Los pueblos originarios Existimos, por que Resistimos! (First Nations exist, because We Resist!).

¹⁰⁸ Among the most important Chilean political hip-hop artists are Makiza (comprising Anita Tijoux, Seo2, Squat and Cenzi), the French-Chilean MC Ana Tijoux, Guerrilerokulto, SubVerso, and Portavoz.

CONCLUSIONS

An unexpected feeling of dizziness ran through my body. I know disbelief appeared on my face. Was the floor moving under my feet? “*Está temblando*” (The earth is shaking) cried out the woman behind me in the immigration queue. The big screens welcoming travellers to the country were rocking while the creaky noise of the large windows filled the airport terminal.

This was the evening of the 16th of February, 2018, a couple of minutes after I had landed in Mexico City. No seismic alert system had been activated nor any other warning procedure. People in the long and now broken, queue were anxious; caught by surprise. Mexicans were still nervous after a deadly earthquake five months ago that left hundreds dead after buildings crumbled, including schools in the states of Puebla, Morelos, and the Greater Mexico City area.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, September 19, 2017, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake had hit México City, with the south of Puebla at its epicentre. The quake coincidentally occurred on the 32nd anniversary of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, which left an estimated 10,000 people dead. At the moment of the 2017 quake – 1:15 pm Mexico time – I had been sleeping in Sydney, 12,976,14 km away. Now I was living the quake *in situ*, and despite the fact that the epicentre was found to be far along the Pacific coast, near Santiago Ixtayutla, in Oaxaca, it was still a powerful tectonic movement at a magnitude of 7.2.

Returning home to finish the last stage of writing my thesis not only confronted me with a strong earthquake but also with a further deteriorated scenario for Mexican women’s lives. Reading the headlines describing a growth in feminicides on the newspaper stand, listening to

my girlfriends' advice for self-defence, and experiencing the rise of catcalling in downtown Mexico City, all made me realise that violence towards women had dramatically escalated.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), in their latest report on gendered violence, 36% of the women killed in 2016 were strangled, hanged, drowned, burned, disfigured, beaten with an object, or stabbed: "The data show that women are killed with greater violence and brutality, they [the perpetrators] use means that produce more pain, they prolong their suffering before they die" (*my translation*). The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) reveals that of the total deaths due to homicide of women that occurred in 2016, 42.4% of them were women under 30 years of age. The rate of feminicides and the cruelty with which the murders are being committed have both increased, and the main targets are girls and young women.¹⁰⁹

On March 8, 2018, during the second annual *Paro Internacional de Mujeres* (International Women's Strike), which has evolved into an International Women's Day event, women mostly under the age of 30 took the streets of downtown Mexico City to denounce feminicides, forced disappearances, and all forms of sexist violence. *Exigimos el pleno derecho sobre nuestro cuerpo* (We demand full rights over our body), *Ni un feminicidio más* (Not another feminicide), *Quiero vivir sin miedo a pensar que mi hija no va a regresar* (I want to live without fear of thinking that my daughter won't return), read some of the demands on raised protest signs. Thousands of Mexican women denounced the wage gap and demanded to be free of violence in a country where even using public transport is a risky mission. According to the last U.N. Women's report, in México more than seven women a day die as victims of sexist violence. In

¹⁰⁹ "Estadísticas a propósito del Día Internacional de la Eliminación de la Violencia contra la Mujer (25 de Noviembre)" http://www.inegi.org.mx/saladeprensa/aproposito/2017/violencia2017_Nal.pdf (Accessed 10 March, 2018).

2016, 2,746 feminicides were registered and more than 23,800 in the last decade. The U.N report ‘Feminicidal Violence in Mexico 1985-2016’ stated that murdering a woman in Mexico is almost free: only 10% of cases receive a conviction.¹¹⁰

The wave of women struggling to express such demands has reached all different Mexican geographies, including in the south-eastern mountains. On December 29, 2017, Zapatista women invited all “rebellious women around the world” to The First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle:

If you are a woman in struggle who is against what is being done to us as women; if you are not scared (or you are, but you control your fear), then we invite you to gather with us, to speak to us and listen to us as the women we are¹¹¹

This event was planned for March 8-10, 2018, in the *Caracol* of Morelia, Tzotz Choj zone of Chiapas. Women were invited to participate as individuals or as collectives with diverse artistic and cultural activities. Thousands of women from all over México and the world responded to the call and fulfilled, for a couple of days, Silvia Federici’s claim that: “Zapatismo has achieved something that not even the U.N. has achieved with other resources: they have opened the doors of their communities to thousands of people around the world”.¹¹² On this occasion, they opened their doors only to “women in the struggle against the patriarchal and chauvinist capitalist system”, in a celebration of women’s life and justice. Batallones Femeninos and Mare

¹¹⁰ See the U.N. Women report *La violencia feminicida en México, aproximaciones y tendencias 1985-2016* (Feminicidal violence in Mexico, approximations and trends) <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20mexico/documentos/publicaciones/2017/10/violenciafemicidamx%2007dic%20web.pdf?la=es&vs=5302> (Accessed 25 February, 2018).

¹¹¹ Convocation to the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2018/01/03/convocation-to-the-first-international-gathering-of-politics-art-sport-and-culture-for-women-in-struggle/> (Accessed 7 January, 2018).

¹¹² See <http://somoselmedio.org/article/el-zapatismo-ha-conseguido-algo-que-ni-la-onu-ha-lograron-silvia-federici> (Accessed 10 March, 2018).

Advertencia Lirika also attended and brought their feminist hip-hop to the Zapatista Women in Struggle Summit.

Now back in México, I can follow their participation via their official social media accounts and I learned that Obeja and Mare shared the stage on the last day of the encounter. When I saw them performing together there, in a Facebook video, I was transported back to the period of my fieldwork. I felt both nostalgic and happy that I had the opportunity to get to know them; to share time, space, food, travels, and reflections with the whole crew of Batallones, Mare, and their extended sorority network. I had immersed myself in their worlds, which are currently also my worlds, and mutually we got to know each other through different experiences and geographical locations.

The theoretical concepts I have used in this thesis, such as *sororidad*, *comunalidad*, *autogestión*, and autonomy, materialised in mapping trajectories through the Mexican territory with them; from the various feminist positionings of our specific class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds; from our construction of historical memory; from learning and sharing life skills and the constant critical questioning of our different privileges and the authoritarian role of the Mexican State.

At the time that I write these lines, the members of Batallones Femeninos have a hip-hop event titled *Cultura Urbana: De lo cotidiano al Arte* (Urban Culture: From day-to-day to Art) scheduled for March 23 at Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México. Mare will participate on April 12 in a hip-hop festival in downtown Mexico City as well as facilitating a workshop for *Arte de la Desobediencia de Musas a Creadoras* which is integrated into the sixth generation of the *Escuela para la Libertad de las Mujeres* that will take place from the 13 of

April to the 14 of July in Oaxaca City. Thus, Batallones Femeninos and Mare's feminist activism continues, as do their conscious lyrics and the workshops which unite women from different geographies and social backgrounds. Also, they continue in their active construction of an historical memory which enables women to persist in the struggle for better living conditions. This historical memory materialises in every song, workshop, encounter, travel, reflection, or communal and autonomous work.

My academic work has widened its horizons in the course of my research, and continues more committed to the feminist struggle of all women in the world. The ethnography process made me realise the extent and importance of the movement of young feminist art and cultural practices not only in the Mexican context but also in the whole Latin-American region. I came back to México interested in following the developments of these diverse artistic, feminist practices of young women from different backgrounds in the region, and interested in newly engaged kinds of research. During this research I also became very interested in these young women's travel trajectories; in a feminist mapping of their journeys and their right to the cities, to the country, to space. More particularly as women who live geographically and socially on the margins of the cities. Recently I discovered the documentary *Rush Hour* (2017) by Luciana Kaplan, which I want to see as soon as it arrives at the cinemas in my city.¹¹³

From the reviews and the trailer, I know that the film portrays the daily odyssey of three different commuters from Mexico City, Istanbul, and Los Angeles who spend several hours on public transport going from home to work and back. I have experienced this myself, like many others, and I am interested now in the risks faced women in those long journeys and in thinking how a communitarian feminist mapping of such routes, with specially dangerous areas

¹¹³ <https://vimeo.com/236959090> (Accessed 19 January, 2018).

signalled in red, might provide important warnings for women but also encourage them to explore their proximities and beyond.

The day of my arrival in Mexico City, Mare wrote on her Facebook account, “¿Cómo reconstruir... cuando no deja de temblar???” (How to reconstruct ... when it doesn’t stop quaking??...). Mare’s statement not only alludes the numerous quakes that the country and more specifically Oaxaca has recently suffered, but also in my opinion serves as a metaphor of the current convulsive time in México. In this sense, our Zapatista sister’s advice during the closing of the Women’s Summit in Chiapas is one to follow: “Sigan luchando, no se rindan, no se vendan, no renuncien a ser mujeres que luchan. Acordemos seguir vivas y seguir luchando, cada quién a su modo, su tiempo y su mundo. No te rindas, no te vendas, no claudiques” (Keep fighting, do not give up, don’t sell out, do not give up being women who struggle. Let’s agree to stay alive and keep fighting, each one according to her way, her time and her world. Don’t give up, don’t sell out, don’t give in” (*my translation*).

¡VIVAS NOS QUEREMOS!

APPENDICES

Figure 1 Batallones Femeninos in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences in UNAM, after their concert, during the U.N campaign HeforShe. Date: 26th August 2016.



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)

Figure 2 Mare Advertencia Lirika during her concert in the Narvarte neighbourhood denouncing the homicide of journalist Rubén Espinosa and the femicide of activist Nadia Vera, Yesenia Quiróz, Olivia Alejandra Negrete and Mile Virginia. Date: 31st July 2016.



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)

Figure 3 A young woman on her way to the #24A feminist rally in Mexico City holds a banner with the phrase: *En Neza y Chimalhuacán nuestras vidas también importan* (In Neza and Chimalhuacán our lives also matter). *Neza*, is an abbreviation for Nezahualcóyotl, the name of one municipality of State of Mexico, as well as Chimalhuacán. Both municipalities are part of the Mexico City periphery and where many feminicides have been committed without legal punishment. Date: 24th April 2016.



Photo: <http://nofm-radio.com/2016/05/radiacion-ultravioleta-3-decaricaturizar-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres/> (Accessed 8 May 2017).

Figure 4 Map of México with my travel ethnography route.



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal design)

Figure 5 Flyer of the SiempreViva Tour.



Photo: Facebook Mare Advertencia Lirika

<https://www.facebook.com/mare.advertencia.lirika.official/photos/a.441416079210774.103279.441400009212381/1203026676383040/?type=1&theater> (Accessed 14 May, 2017)

Figure 6 Batallones Femeninos album *Vivas Nos Queremos* (2016).



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)

Figure 7 Batallones Femeninos album *Información Nutrimental* (2014).



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)

Figura 8 Mare Advertencia Lirika album *Siempre Viva* (2016).

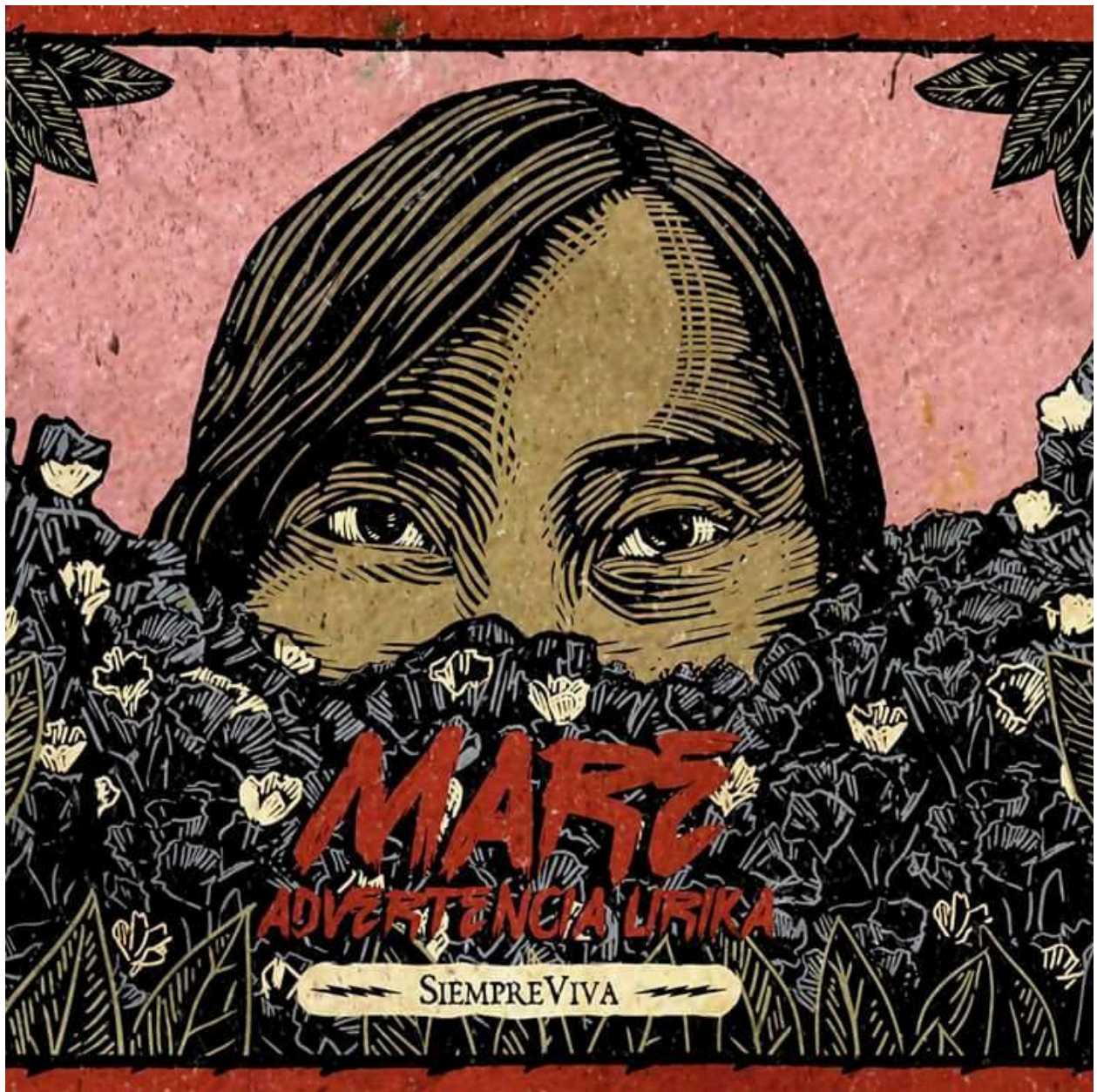


Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)



Photo: Daniela Villegas (personal photo archive)

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