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A large, stylized sunburst graphic in a lighter shade of purple, positioned on the left side of the cover. It consists of a central dark purple oval with radiating lines that form a fan-like shape.

# EXTREME FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN EUROPE

Femi(ni)cide in Germany

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Aleida Luján Pinelo





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*In memory of my ancestors*

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Faculty of Law

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ALEIDA LUJAN PINELO: Extreme Forms of Violence against Women in Europe. Femi(ni)cide in Germany

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## ABSTRACT

In the modern world, human rights enjoy greater legitimacy, and the discourse of equality between sexes has acquired enough plausibility to be introduced in the form of institutionalized political practices. Even so, old and new forms of gender-based violence are occurring and even increasing worldwide. Gender-based violence occurs in all societies, but many of its forms are still not explicitly addressed by European law and policy; this is the case with femi(ni)cide (femicide/feminicide). Following the feminist argument that naming femi(ni)cide is necessary in order to make it visible and generate interventions against these crimes, in this dissertation I propose that the concept of femi(ni)cide is important for feminist theory, activism, and legal and political analysis in the European arena.

The main research question in this dissertation is: *What is the performance of the concept of femi(ni)cide in political and legal spheres in the context of Europe?* The dissertation comprises four articles written with the context of Western Europe in mind—the birthplace of modernity, where the legal, political, and academic discussion on femi(ni)cide is still limited. One article analyzes the concept of femi(ni)cide from a philosophical perspective to determine what it means and whether or not it essentializes women. Another looks at how the concept of femi(ni)cide has traveled, evolved, and ramified as it has moved between global South and global North. Working with the case study of Germany, another article analyzes how the discussion on femi(ni)cide is being framed by different political actors in that country considering the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In another article, I put into conversation the two main theoretical approaches that inform this dissertation: new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South, including decolonial theory.

Some of the findings of this dissertation point to colonial structures that continue to permeate femi(ni)cide research in Europe, and to the danger of watering down the complexity of the concept of femi(ni)cide, thus draining it of its political power. Working with both epistemologies of the South and new feminist materialism provides tools to help avoid reproducing colonial and patriarchal hierarchies and to work from a place of complexity. With this dissertation I aim to help fill the academic gap on femi(ni)cide in Western Europe, to encourage further research on this matter, and to provide useful information for organizations dedicated to combating violence against women / gender-based violence.

**KEYWORDS:** Epistemologies of the South; new feminist materialism; femicide; feminicide; feminism; gender-based violence; new materialism; patriarchy; sex; woman; Istanbul Convention; decoloniality; Germany; criminal law; feminist law; human rights; international law; epistemology; eurocentrism; tropical materialism

## TURUN YLIOPISTO

Oikeustieteellinen tiedekunta

Oikeuden ja sukupuolen tutkimus

ALEIDA LUJAN PINELO: Naisiin kohdistuvan väkivallan äärimmäiset muodot Euroopassa. Nais erityiset murhat Saksassa

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### TIIVISTELMÄ

Nyky maailmassa sukupuolten välinen tasa-arvo on arvokas osa institutionaalista poliittista käytäntöä ja ihmisoikeudet ovat yhä tärkeämpi osa lainsäädäntöämme. Sukupuolittunut väkivalta on silti maailmanlaajuisesti yhä yleisempää, ja sitä on havaittavissa niin vanhoissa kuin uusissakin muodoissa. Eurooppalainen lainsäädäntö ja politiikka eivät ota kantaa sukupuolittuneen väkivallan moniin muotoihin, vaikka niitä voidaan havaita kaikissa yhteiskunnissa. Lait ja politiikka Euroopassa eivät huomioi tässä tutkimuksessa käsiteltyjä naisiin kohdistuvia henkirikoksia (femicides/fimi(ni)cides), joista tässä tiivistelmässä käytän termiä naisnais erityiset murhat (naismurha/tappo). Feministisen ajattelun mukaan nais erityisten murhien esille tuominen ja nimeäminen on välttämätöntä, jotta niihin voisi puuttua. Tässä tutkimuksessa esitän, että naismurhan käsite on oleellinen niin feministisen teorian ja aktivismin, kuin eurooppalaisen poliittisen ja lainopillisen analyysin kannalta.

Tämän tutkimuksen pääkysymys on: Miten nais erityiset murhat käsitteellistetään eurooppalaisilla poliittisilla ja oikeudellisilla areenoilla? Tutkimus koostuu neljästä artikkelista. Ne on kirjoitettu suhteessa Länsi-Eurooppaan, modernin maailman syntysijaan. Länsi-Euroopassa sekä oikeudellinen, poliittinen että filosofinen keskustelu naismurhasta on edelleen vähäistä. Naismurhan käsitettä filosofisesta perspektiivistä käsittelevän artikkelin tarkoituksena on selvittää käsitteen merkitystä ja sitä, onko käsitteen suhde naisiin essentialisoiva. Toinen artikkeli selvittää, miten naismurhan käsite on globaalin etelän ja globaalin pohjoisen välillä liikkunut, muuttunut ja kehittynyt. Tapaustutkimus Istanbulin sopimuksen täytäntöönpanosta Saksassa tarkastelee, miten erilaiset poliittiset toimijat käsittelevät naismurhia suhteessa Istanbulin sopimukseen. Yhdessä artikkelissa keskustelutan kahta tutkimuksen tärkeintä teoriasuuntausta, uusmaterialistinen feminismi ja etelän epistemologiset teoriat kuten dekolonisoiva teoria.

Osa tämän tutkimuksen tuloksista kohdistaa katseen kolonialismin rakenteisiin, jotka vaikuttavat edelleen naismurhien tutkimukseen Euroopassa. Tutkimuksen päätelmät kehottavat huomioimaan, että naismurha-käsitteen yksinkertaistaminen vähentää käsitteen poliittista painoarvoa. Uusmaterialistinen feminismi ja etelän epistemologiat tarjoavat työkaluja, joiden avulla voi välttää kolonialististen ja patriarkaalisten hierarkioiden uusintamista. Näiden työkalujen avulla myös työskentely naismurhien kompleksisuuden kanssa on ollut mahdollista. Tutkimus täyttää naismurhien akateemisessa tutkimuksessa ollutta aukkoa. Samalla sen tavoitteena on rohkaista tulevaa tutkimusta ja tarjota tietopohjaa naisiin ja sukupuoleen kohdistuvaa väkivaltaa vastaan kamppaileville järjestöille.

ASIASANAT: Etelän epistemologiat; feministinen uusmaterialismi; naismurha; nais erityinen murha; feminismi; sukupuoleen perustuva väkivalta; uusmaterialismi; patriarkaatti; sukupuoli; nainen; Istanbulin yleissopimus; dekoloniaalisuus; Saksa; rikosoikeus; oikeuden ja sukupuolen tutkimus; ihmisoikeudet; kansainvälinen oikeus; epistemologia; Eurooppa-keskeisyys; trooppinen materialismi

UNIVERSIDAD DE TURKU

Facultad de derecho

Género y derecho

ALEIDA LUJAN PINELO: Formas extremas de violencia contra las mujeres en Europa. Femi(ni)cidio en Alemania

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## RESUMEN

En el mundo moderno, los derechos humanos gozan de mayor legitimidad y el discurso de la igualdad entre los sexos ha adquirido suficiente plausibilidad como para ser introducido en forma de prácticas políticas institucionalizadas. Aun así, viejas y nuevas formas de violencia de género están ocurriendo e incluso aumentando en todo el mundo. La violencia de género ocurre en todas las sociedades, pero muchas de sus formas aún no se abordan explícitamente en la legislación y las políticas europeas; este es el caso del femi(ni)cidio (femicidio/feminicidio). Siguiendo el argumento feminista de que es necesario nombrar el femi(ni)cidio para visibilizarlo y así generar intervenciones frente a estos delitos, en esta tesis propongo que el concepto de femi(ni)cidio es importante para la teoría, el activismo y el derecho feminista, y para el análisis político en el ámbito europeo.

La principal pregunta de investigación de esta tesis es: ¿Cuál es el papel del concepto de femi(ni)cidio en los ámbitos político y jurídico en el contexto europeo? La tesis consta de cuatro artículos, escritos teniendo en cuenta el contexto de Europa Occidental —el lugar de nacimiento de la modernidad, donde la discusión legal, política y académica sobre el femi(ni)cidio aún es limitada. Un artículo analiza el concepto de femi(ni)cidio desde una perspectiva filosófica para determinar qué significa y si esencializa o no a las mujeres. Otro analiza cómo el concepto de femi(ni)cidio ha viajado, evolucionado y ramificado a medida que se ha movido entre el Sur y el Norte globales. Trabajando con el estudio de caso de Alemania, otro artículo analiza cómo la discusión sobre femi(ni)cidio está siendo enmarcada por diferentes actores políticos en ese país considerando la implementación de la Convención de Estambul. Otro artículo pone en conversación los dos enfoques teóricos principales que informan esta disertación: el nuevo materialismo feminista y las epistemologías del Sur, incluida la teoría decolonial.

Algunos de los hallazgos de esta tesis señalan estructuras coloniales que continúan permeando la investigación sobre femi(ni)cidio en Europa y el peligro de diluir la complejidad del concepto de femi(ni)cidio, drenándolo así de su poder político. Trabajar tanto con epistemologías del Sur como con el nuevo materialismo feminista proporciona herramientas para ayudar a evitar la reproducción de jerarquías coloniales y patriarcales y para trabajar desde la complejidad. Con esta tesis pretendo contribuir a llenar el vacío académico sobre el femi(ni)cidio en Europa occidental, fomentar más investigaciones sobre este tema y proporcionar información útil para las organizaciones dedicadas a combatir la violencia contra las mujeres/violencia de género.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Epistemologías del Sur; nuevo materialismo feminista; femicidio; feminicidio; feminismo; violencia de género; nuevo materialismo; patriarcado, sexo, mujer, Convención de Estambul; decolonialidad; Alemania; derecho penal; derecho feminista; derechos humanos; derecho internacional; epistemología; eurocentrismo; materialismo tropical



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Thought emerges and is nourished through different relationships (including broken ones) in different areas of our lives. Therefore, even when I write under the label of an “I,” this “I” is not a solipsistic entity, an agent built in isolation and from academic experiences only. My research is the result not only of personal meditations but also of “intra-actions” with different people and spaces. Along these lines, I want to thank some of the people who have (un)consciously contributed to the development of this doctoral dissertation.

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April 2023  
*Aleida Luján Pinelo*

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# List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by roman numerals:

- I Luján-Pinelo, Aleida. “Mangrovian Encounters between Epistemologies of the South and New Feminist Materialism.” *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 21, no. 2 (2022): 21–42.
- II Luján Pinelo, Aleida. “A Theoretical Approach to the Concept of Femi(ni)cide.” *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2, no. 1 (2018): 40–63.
- III Luján-Pinelo, Aleida. “Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (forthcoming).
- IV Luján-Pinelo, Aleida. “On Extreme Forms of Violence against Women in Europe – Does Femi(ni)cide Exist in Germany?” In *Gender Competent Public Law and Policies, Gender Perspectives in Law 2*, edited by Marko Davinić and Svetislav Kostić, 109-129. Cham: Springer, 2022. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14706-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14706-7_6)

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# Related Publications

Additional publications based on this dissertation:

- I Mobayed Vega, Saide, Sonia M. Frías, Fabiola de Lachica Huerta, and Aleida Luján-Pinelo. “Femicide in Mexico.” In *The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Femicide*, edited by Myrna Dawson and Saide Mobayed. New York: Routledge, forthcoming.
- II Collectif Féminicides Par Compagnons ou Ex, Feminizidmap, Kathomi Gatwiri, Savia Hasanova, Anna Kapushenko, Lyubava Malysheva, Saide Mobayed Vega, Audrey Mugeni, Rosalind Page, Ivonne Ramírez, Helena Suárez Val, Dawn Wilcox, and Aimee Zambrano Ortiz. “Femicide Data Activism.” In *The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Femicide*, edited by Myrna Dawson and Saide Mobayed. New York: Routledge, forthcoming.\*
- III Luján Pinelo, Aleida. “Research and Documentation of Femi(ni)cide in Germany.” *WomenBeing Magazine* 2 (2022): 10–13.  
[https://issuu.com/womenbeingmag/docs/wb\\_magazine\\_issue\\_2?fbclid=IwAR1FojBzdbgbtV8vwhhvXN6-PCKG\\_bDdHwtXa-Os1Ulf6i1DP2eMNs8BGc](https://issuu.com/womenbeingmag/docs/wb_magazine_issue_2?fbclid=IwAR1FojBzdbgbtV8vwhhvXN6-PCKG_bDdHwtXa-Os1Ulf6i1DP2eMNs8BGc).
- IV Luján Pinelo, Aleida, and Hannah Beeck. “Feminizidmap – ein Datenbankprojekt.” In *#keinmehr – Femizid in Deutschland*, edited by Merle Dyroff, Marlene Pardeller, and Alex Wischnewski, 23–24. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2020.
- V Luján Pinelo, Aleida, and Hannah Beeck. “Femi(ni)zide in Deutschland.” *LOTTA–Antifaschistische Zeitung* 7 (Summer 2020): 4–7.

\* I participated as an author in this article, but since several members of *Feminizidmap* also co-authored in the chapter, we decided to publish under our collective name.

# 1 Introduction

In the last few years, European governments have more intensely developed strategies to fight violence against women and girls in their own territories, evidenced by the implementation in 2011 of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). This legally binding instrument obligates governments of contracting countries to adopt concrete and comprehensive plans to combat, protect women (including girls) against, and ultimately eliminate all forms of gender-based violence. The plans are meant to include: necessary modifications to law codes; development of data collection and comprehensive policies; the establishment of strategies of prevention through education, awareness, and training programs; development of protection and support tools; and international cooperation and monitoring mechanisms.<sup>1</sup> This convention, however, does not explicitly acknowledge femi(ni)cide<sup>2</sup> as part of its definition of violence against women.<sup>3</sup> Femi(ni)cide is a feminist concept that applies to certain killings of women and girls or feminized subjects—those which occur within the patriarchal apparatus or power hierarchies of sex/gender.<sup>4</sup> Femi(ni)cide includes a variety of non-discrete types such as serial, rape, lesbophobic, prostituted woman, intimate, child, and racist.<sup>5</sup>

Despite national strategies and European measures such as the Istanbul Convention, women's organizations and international bodies have pointed out the

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Istanbul (CETS No. 210, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> I use “femi(ni)cide” as an abbreviation of “femicide/femicide” unless otherwise specified. I address the rationale for this use below.

<sup>3</sup> See further María del Mar Daza Bonachela, “Femicide in the Context of the Istanbul Convention,” in *Femicides and Other Murders of Women in Spain: Annual Report 2015*, ed. Graciela Atencio (Vienna: Special UN Edition–ACUNS, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The definition offered here will be developed at length later in the text.

<sup>5</sup> For femi(ni)cide types, see, for example, Diana Russell, “Defining Femicide and Related Concepts,” in *Femicide in Global Perspective*, ed. Diana Russell and Roberta Harmes (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Graciela Atencio and Elena Laporta, “Types of Femicide or Variants of Extreme Patriarcal Violence,” *Feminicidio.net*, 15 October 2012, <https://feminicidio.net/types-of-femicide-or-variants-of-extreme-patriarcal-violence/>.



limited change in statistics related to violence against women and girls in Europe; along with this, the numbers of femi(ni)cides have not significantly decreased.<sup>6</sup> Although Europe keeps no official statistics on femi(ni)cides,<sup>7</sup> their potential incidence becomes clear if we look at the number of deaths in the context of violence within relationships, which some states have started to report since the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.<sup>8</sup> What in femi(ni)cide research is called intimate femi(ni)cide or intimate partner femi(ni)cide refers to cases in which the victim and the perpetrator had an intimate relationship history, such as being boyfriend and girlfriend, a married couple, or ex-partners.<sup>9</sup> This type of femi(ni)cide tends to represent just over half of the total number of femi(ni)cides.<sup>10</sup> The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has started to report numbers of intimate femi(ni)cides, but it relies on the numbers that national states report to it, which has been problematic due to the varying means of data gathering in each country. Therefore, in 2021 EIGE presented guidelines for data collection on intimate partner violence, including “femicide” (see footnote 7). If it is true that numbers are not declining, this might suggest that the measures that governments have been implementing in this field are not appropriate and need to be reevaluated.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), *Statistical Framework for Measuring the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls (Also Referred to as “Femicide/Feminicide”)* (2022); UNODC, *Killings of Women and Girls by Their Intimate Partner or Other Family Members: Global Estimates 2020* (2021); European Commission, *Violence against Women and the Role of Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Strategies* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> This situation is starting to change. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published in 2021 some indicators and recommendations for data collection; however, this institute focuses on “intimate femicide” alone. EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), *EIGE’s Indicators on Intimate Partner Violence, Rape and Femicide: EU State of Play* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021); EIGE, *EIGE’s Indicators on Intimate Partner Violence, Rape and Femicide: Recommendations to Improve Data Quality, Availability and Comparability* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> All states collect data on homicides, but the use of femi(ni)cide as a framework to disaggregate data is not common. Such work is mostly done by civil society organizations such as *Feminicidio.net* in Spain, *Counting Dead Women* in the United Kingdom (UK), *FemminicidioItalia.info* in Italy, and the collective *Féminicides par compagnons ou ex* (FPCE) in France. Since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, more countries have started to report violence against women and girls, including killings in the context of intimate relationships.

<sup>9</sup> See Russell, “Defining Femicide,” 18.

<sup>10</sup> See Graciela Atencio, “Lo que no se nombra no existe,” in *Feminicidio: De la categoría político-jurídica a la justicia universal*, ed. Graciela Atencio (Madrid: Catarata, 2015), 32; and Diana Russell and Jane Caputi, “Femicide: Speaking the Unspeakable,” *Ms Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1990): 34–37.

Unlike in Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>11</sup> where femi(ni)cide has been addressed since the late '90s, with vast knowledge produced in academic, legal, and activist spheres,<sup>12</sup> it is only relatively recently that femi(ni)cide in the context of Europe has gained ground in feminist scholarship and domestic political agendas.<sup>13</sup> While there has been research on violence against women and girls and female homicide in the context of Europe, the problem of femi(ni)cide was generally framed as such only outside of Europe, and treated as a development cooperation issue. For example, the German Heinrich-Böll Foundation has co-organized annual conferences on femi(ni)cide since at least 2009, but is not very active with regard to femi(ni)cide in Europe and Germany;<sup>14</sup> the European Union–Latin America and Caribbean Foundation (EU-LAC Foundation) has held several events in relation to fighting femi(ni)cide in Latin America and the Caribbean;<sup>15</sup> the “Spotlight Initiative” has founded several activities to fight violence against women and girls, including femi(ni)cide, in the global South,<sup>16</sup> and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has provided diverse recommendations to European countries to aid in fighting against femi(ni)cides in countries outside Europe, such as Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In this text, I use the term “Latin America and the Caribbean,” but I am aware of the discussions about the problem of using Latin America (including the Caribbean) to cover a variety of territories that do not all share languages rooted in Latin. As an alternative to this reductive and colonial name, some activists and researchers have been using the Kuna name for Latin America: Abya Yala. For critiques of the use of the term “Latin America,” see, for example, Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); and Francesca Gargallo, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala: Ideas y proposiciones de las mujeres de los 607 pueblos en nuestra América* (Mexico City: Editorial Corte y Confección, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See further Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds., *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Elena Laporta, “Evolución del concepto: Un anglicismo que se desarrolló en América Latina,” in *Feminicidio: De la categoría político-jurídica a la justicia universal*, ed. Graciela Atencio (Madrid: Catarata, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Shalva Weil, “Research and Prevention of Femicide across Europe,” in *Femicide across Europe*, eds. Shalva Weil, Marceline Naudi, and Consuelo Corradi (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> It is hard to track when the first conference took place; some documents refer to a 2006 event. There is information from the second conference, in 2009, onwards; the eleventh conference, scheduled for 2020, was postponed due to COVID-19.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://eulacfoundation.org/en>.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://spotlightinitiative.org/>. I use “global South” to refer broadly to those countries that historically have experienced “the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as [...] the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering.” Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Epistemologies of the South and the Future,” *From the European South* 1 (2016): 18.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Disappearance and Murder of a Great Number of Women and Girls in Mexico*, Resolution 1454 (21 June

Given this limited research on femi(ni)cide in Europe, I am interested in studying the phenomenon in this region. I argue that colonial thought and structures are partly responsible for the assumption, held for many years, that femi(ni)cide did not occur in Europe. I argue too that these same structures of thought and power threaten to permeate the current debates on the subject in Europe—it is not a matter of ignorance, as some people tend to claim. The doctoral research presented here is guided by the general question: *What is the performance of the concept of femi(ni)cide in political and legal spheres in the context of Europe?* Or, in other words, *What kind of work does the concept of femi(ni)cide do, and what kind of work might it do, in political and legal spheres in Europe?*

To carry out this project, I work with a case study: femi(ni)cide in Germany. I will expand on the reasons behind this selection in the forthcoming sections; for now it is enough to mention that I am interested in addressing Germany because it is one of the countries in Western Europe that has high numbers of intentional homicides of women,<sup>18</sup> and because its government has taken a strong position against recognizing the occurrence of femi(ni)cide in its territory.<sup>19</sup> It also represents a country of the global North where the discourse of human rights enjoys greater legitimacy, and where the discourse of equality between the sexes has acquired enough plausibility to be introduced in the form of institutionalized political practices. My hope is that, by showing the shortcomings and consequences of not acknowledging and naming the murder of women and girls in one such country, I can shed light on possible alternatives.

The hypothesis I follow is that the lack of a political and legal category that names a specific kind of violence towards women—in this case, femi(ni)cide—limits any attempt to fight this kind of crime, because without recognizing the phenomenon one cannot develop concrete policies and legislation to solve it. With this study I aim to fill the academic gap with regard to femi(ni)cide in Western Europe, to encourage further research on this matter, to provide useful information for organizations dedicated to combating violence against women and girls, and ultimately to show

2005); Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Femicicides*, Report Doc. 11781 (19 December 2008).

<sup>18</sup> See Graciela Atencio and Nerea Novo, “Femicide Statistics by Country in the European Union,” in *Femicides and Other Murders of Women in Spain: Annual Report 2015*, ed. Graciela Atencio (Vienna: Special UN Edition–ACUNS, 2017), 40.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the following statement: “Femicide (understood as the killing of women simply because of their gender and to which there is little or no state reaction) is not a phenomenon which can be found in Germany.” UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), *Statement by Germany on the Investigation and Prosecution of Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls* (2014), last accessed 22 July 2022, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/IEGM\\_GRK\\_BKK/Germany\\_Annex.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/IEGM_GRK_BKK/Germany_Annex.pdf).

that femi(ni)cide occurs in all European countries, thus questioning the old idea that this phenomenon only occurs in “third world countries.”<sup>20</sup>

## 1.1 The Structure

This manuscript is arranged as follows: After this section, where I describe the organization of this dissertation, I move to situate the emergence of my research (sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5), following feminist epistemologies that argue that research is informed by historical, cultural, and personal experiences of the “knowing subject.” After this, I continue by introducing the theoretical framework and methodological decisions that inform my research; these choices also apply to the articles that compose this manuscript (2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4). I then move on to discuss the state of the field of femi(ni)cide, particularly in Germany (3, 3.1, 3.2); I do not offer a genealogy or cartography of the concept and category of femi(ni)cide in this introduction, since this is the subject of my article “Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography.” Given the article-based format of this dissertation, I then move on to introduce each of the articles constituting this manuscript (4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4); in those sections I address specific decisions and challenges in the writing of each article.

This dissertation is a compilation of four articles addressing theoretical and conceptual aspects, the state of the field, and policy analysis:

- “Mangrovia Encounters between Epistemologies of the South and New Feminist Materialism” (theoretical framework). This article puts in conversation the two main theoretical frameworks informing this dissertation: epistemologies of the South and new (feminist) materialism. Some of the questions addressed in this article are: What does new (feminist) materialism stand for? What do epistemologies of the South refer to? Do these theories need to be decolonized? If so, to what extent and in what way might they need to be decolonized?
- “A theoretical approach to the concept of femi(ni)cide” (conceptual framework). This article establishes key conceptual decisions related to the concept of femi(ni)cide. It addresses the concept of femi(ni)cide from a new

<sup>20</sup> I started developing my doctoral research plan in 2016, when this “old idea” was still prevalent. During the first years of my research, 2018–2019, this idea was still widely expressed by various of my interlocutors in Northern Europe. However, in the last four years I have witnessed a huge change in this perception; I believe that the implementation of the Istanbul Convention has been a relevant driver for this change, as I will address later.

feminist materialist perspective, answering the questions: What should one understand “femi(ni)cide” to mean? What does this concept refer to? Does the concept of femi(ni)cide essentialize women?

- “Femi(ni)cide: A cartography” (state of the field). This article explores the current panorama of the subject of femi(ni)cide, mapping the emergence and transformations of the concept of femi(ni)cide. In doing so, it clarifies the distinction between femi(ni)cide as a concept and as a category. Some of the questions addressed in this article are: Are femicide and feminicide the same? What does “femi(ni)cide” stand for? Is “femi(ni)cide” a term created in the global South? Does femi(ni)cide refer to intimate relationships alone?
- “On extreme forms of violence against women in Europe – Does femi(ni)cide exist in Germany?” (policy). This article focuses on policy and legal analysis. This article works with the case study of Germany to explore the following questions: What does the incidence of femi(ni)cide reveal about the functioning of current policies against violence against women and girls? How is femi(ni)cide framed in European policy and domestic policy?

In what follows, I will introduce the *raison d’être* of this research, using my lived, autoethnographic, and situated experience as a starting point.

## 1.2 Situatedness

Whether we explicitly say so or not, most research is informed by personal experience, and experience is key in the formation of theory.<sup>21</sup> Bell hooks, for example, argues that feminist theory “emerges from the concrete, from [...] efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences.”<sup>22</sup> In this understanding, theory is bound to the materiality of existence and not the product of an abstract reality, as some readers of Plato have claimed. Hooks continues, affirming that feminist theory “emerges from efforts to intervene critically in [our] life and the lives of others.”<sup>23</sup> This is another relevant aspect of theory and a statement that I agree with: theory does not only imply an intervention or transformation in the “outside” world the researcher inhabits, it also enables and requires a transformation of the researcher’s own world.

<sup>21</sup> On epistemological agents-subjects, see, for example, Lynn Hankinson Nelson, “Epistemological Communities,” in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 70.

<sup>23</sup> hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 70.

It is along these same lines that I engage with feminist theories that question the “neutrality” and “objectivity” assumed by positivism, instead putting the self and its reflexivity into play in the knowing process.<sup>24</sup> Jone Miren Hernández García developed a methodology that I find a useful contribution to the analysis and discussion of the relationship between the researcher’s own experience and their research, which consists of three phases: auto/biographic, auto/ethnographic, and self/portrait.<sup>25</sup> These elements are present in the emergence of this research project, as I will describe in the next three sections. Because of this understanding, the use of the first person in this text is relevant and necessary.

### 1.3 The Spark

During 2011 and 2012, while I was living in Berlin, two stories drew my attention: the case of Julissa J., from Colombia, killed by her German ex-partner in Berlin in 2011;<sup>26</sup> and that of Semanur S., from Turkey, killed by her Turkish partner in Berlin in 2012. I saw dissimilarities in the media coverage of each case, as well as in the respective discourses about violence. The perpetrator’s nationality made a difference: the case of Semanur S., whose killer was Turkish, received far more media coverage, and the perpetrator’s motives were explained in relation to his “cultural background.”<sup>27</sup> In Mexico, the subject of femi(ni)cide has been well known

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988); Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Molly Talcott, “Interconnections and Configurations: Toward a Global Feminist Ethnography,” in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (California: SAGE Publications, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Jone Miren Hernández García, “Auto/biografía. Auto/etnografía. Auto/retrato,” *Ankulegi*, no. extra 0 (1999): 53–62.

<sup>26</sup> The film *Naomi’s Reise* was based on this case and highlights the racist and sexist views and stereotyping of the German defendant and the judges. See, for example, the interviews with Frieder Schlaich and Claudia Schaefer in *Naomi’s Reise – Spielfilm von Frieder Schlaich*, pressbook (Stuttgart/Berlin: EZEF-Filmgalerie 451, 2017), [https://www.ezef.de/sites/default/files/downloads/publikationen/presseheft\\_naomis\\_reise.pdf](https://www.ezef.de/sites/default/files/downloads/publikationen/presseheft_naomis_reise.pdf). Sabine Maier addressed this case too in her text “¿La mató sólo por el hecho de ser mujer?” In that article, Maier studies cases of “bi-national femi(ni)cides” in Germany, in which the victims are Latin American women and the perpetrators are German nationals. The author exposes the vulnerability of migrant women in bi-national marriages in which their spouses are German nationals. Sabine Patricia Maier, “¿La mató sólo por el hecho de ser mujer? Hacia una apropiación interseccional del concepto de feminicidio en el contexto de matrimonios bi-nacionales en Alemania,” *desiguALdades.net Working Paper Series* 81 (2015): 60–90.

<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of how femi(ni)cide is framed in the German media, see Hannah Beeck, “Mediales Framing von Femi(ni)ziden und Tötungsdelikten an Frauen in Deutschland” (MA thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 2021).

since the beginning of the millennium; to my understanding, due to my Mexican experience, these cases in Germany were femi(ni)cides. I did some brief research into femi(ni)cide in the German context, and to my surprise I found no information—that is, no research using the explicit conceptual framework of femi(ni)cide. (Later I will mention some of the works that have studied killings of women in Germany without using that framework.) It caught my attention, though, that several students in German universities were doing research on femi(ni)cide in Latin America and the Caribbean. The situation reminded me of the earliest anthropological studies, in which exotic and remote “others” were the ones studied by the “civilized West.” Why didn’t German authorities and media call these crimes femi(ni)cides? Why was there no research on this subject in the context of Germany? Why was there no available data on these crimes? Some years after these initial questions, a second turning point was Germany’s 2014 statement to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) denying the existence of femi(ni)cides in its territory: “Femicide (understood as the killing of women simply because of their gender and to which there is little or no state reaction) is not a phenomenon which can be found in Germany.”<sup>28</sup>

My research was conceived as a response to a *corazonada* which was the product of this lived experience.<sup>29</sup> However, several times during the course of this project, I have been asked why I am doing research related to Germany—a question that implies, for example, why I am not researching Mexico or other global South countries where the numbers of femi(ni)cides are higher. For me, Berlin—the community, not the city itself—felt like a second home for many years; therefore, the subject affected me directly. In a German context, I am Julissa, I am “the other,” in the sense that I can potentially be killed and have the act be blamed on my “Mexicanness”; I can be subjected to racist and xenophobic discourses to explain my killing.

As has become evident, while I was designing my research project, there was almost no research or political discussion related to femi(ni)cide occurring in German territory. This situation made me perceive time, and create the schedule for my research plan, in a relaxed way. There was not much literature on the specific subject that would imply a large amount of literature review work, and the collection of data seemed likely to go smoothly, depending only on my own timing. During the first year of my research, however, this situation started to change, though I was still

<sup>28</sup> UNODC, *Statement by Germany*.

<sup>29</sup> This Spanish word can be translated as “feeling-thinking” or “sensingthinking.” For an elaborated analysis of this concept, see the chapter “Bodies, Knowledges, and Corazonar” in Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

able to follow many of the political debates, news, and events related to femi(ni)cide (and, given my several visits to the country, I was able to participate in many of them). But my naïve idea of keeping track of all the debates on femi(ni)cide in Germany started to change completely in mid-2019. Germany ratified the Istanbul Convention in October 2017, and it entered into force in February 2018; from my point of view, this situation contributed to boosting interest in the subject in public discourse. By 2020, the number of articles, events, projects, and political debates had diversified so rapidly that it became difficult, if not impossible, to keep track of all of them. The fact that I was based outside Germany was also a factor that affected my capacity to stay up to date. Added to this was the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travel, diverted a great deal of attention to the health emergency, and increased the number of online events in general. Although at first I attended and participated in online events in general, and on femi(ni)cide specifically, after a while attending and participating in such events contributed to my feeling of exhaustion, so I stopped taking part.

These situations affected my original research plan and schedule, and demanded a change. The article “Femi(ni)cide: A cartography” was not originally conceived as part of this project, but it emerged due to the recurrent request to explain the concepts of feminicide and femicide, their similarities, differences, origins, and definitions, the differentiation between concept and category, etc. In the evolving debates occurring in Germany (and at a European level), I was able to recognize a sort of power dynamics going on in the narrative about the genealogy of femi(ni)cide. Therefore, I decided that my cartography would put the knowledge production of the global South at its center. This was not necessarily a novel move, since Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano had already pointed out the North-South power dynamics in “feminicide” research in their book *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*.<sup>30</sup> However, my contribution was, and still is, situated in emerging research on the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide in Europe, where these conversations are just starting to occur.

The original article on policy analysis (“On extreme forms of violence against women in Europe – Does femi(ni)cide exist in Germany?”) also underwent a drastic change. When I designed my research, there were no policy documents that addressed the subject of femi(ni)cide, so my original plan was to focus on the absences/silences in the official policies and action plans related to gender-based violence or violence against women and girls. But by 2020, some interesting documents had appeared on the horizon: minor interpellations and motions (I will explain the function of these documents later). These were presented by different

<sup>30</sup> Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, “Introduction: A Cartography of Feminicide in the Americas,” in Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*, 1–42.



political parties to different governments on the federal and state levels with respect to the subject of femi(ni)cide, so I decided to focus my analysis on them. As for the article discussing possibilities and challenges related to femi(ni)cide in criminal law in Germany, it had to be postponed primarily due to time limitations, but also because some articles discussing the issue have already appeared (I am critical of these approaches, some of which I will address later), and because just now there are real proposals being made to reform the criminal law. However, these proposals are not expected to be decided during the time frame of this research.

## 1.4 The Buzzing

I had the fortune of studying at a public arts high school in my hometown Oaxaca. There, professors encouraged us to think creatively and explore ways to combine sciences and arts. The overall principle was that the arts are another form of knowledge production relevant for the constitution of a human being. I specialized in theater, a discipline in which the living body (not the body as object) is key. Therefore, during my bachelor's studies in philosophy, my interest focused on the role aesthetics and the living body had in the production of knowledge. That is how I ended up writing my bachelor's thesis on the concept of the body in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work *Phenomenology of Perception*. Already in that thesis, I addressed the potential that embodied language, perception, and experience had for the law; for example, nonverbal language in testimonies of victims of rape, following Linda Alcoff's contributions. Even if I was attracted by so-called postmodern philosophy, I was mostly interested in the embodied aspect of the human experience; therefore, when I first read Rosi Braidotti's work on nomadic theory and new materialism, during my master's studies at Utrecht University in 2014, I immediately felt a sense of identification with these ideas and began to study them in greater depth.

While I studied these philosophies, interest in them was also increasing. However, a constant critique, like those posed to theory and philosophy in general, kept buzzing in my ear: this critique said that new materialism does make sense in theoretical, performative, and explorative terms, but not in terms of political action—for example, in policy making and activism. I was provoked by this idea, so I decided I wanted to explore to what extent this second *corazonada* was true.

## 1.5 Coupling

My research aims to work with the two interests I have mentioned: on the one hand, my personal curiosity about how theory comes to matter, and my desire to explore the potential of new materialism in and for “practical” and “political” research; and

on the other hand, my concern with studying femi(ni)cide in Germany and questioning the prevailing colonial structures in the discussions on the subject. The ultimate outcome I hope to achieve is to give an account of the usefulness of new materialism for political action, by using the example of femi(ni)cide; and to give an account of femi(ni)cide in Germany, doing justice to its complex condition, for which new materialism is an excellent theory.

## 2 Ethico-onto-epistemological Considerations

I start from the idea that all research is informed by certain metaphysics/ontologies. It is not the aim or the task of this dissertation to discuss in detail what metaphysics and ontology exactly mean—tons of paper, ink, and saliva have already been spent in trying to describe and differentiate them.<sup>31</sup> What is relevant to me is to highlight that these metaphysics-ontologies represent the fundamental assumptions that we usually take for granted about the world-reality, assumptions that will ultimately inform our decisions in research.<sup>32</sup> It is not by mere coincidence that one chooses to use one methodology or another, and neither is it by chance that one decides to dialogue with some theorists and not with others.<sup>33</sup> In what follows, I present my metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological presuppositions and decisions. To make it clear to readers, I define methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research does and should proceed,”<sup>34</sup> and research method as “a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering [data].”<sup>35</sup>

What are my assumptions about the world, reality, and nature? And with such an understanding, how can “I” get to know the world, nature, or reality? Above all, who

<sup>31</sup> See for example, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012); John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> For example, authors such as Michael Crotty and Carol Bacchi have argued that one decides which sources are most relevant in one’s research according to certain preconceptions, or that these preconceptions influence us in the way we formulate certain questions rather than others. Michael Crotty, “Introduction: The Research Process,” in *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London: SAGE, 1998); Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What’s the Problem Represented to Be?* (Frenchs Forest: Pearson, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> For a critique of the politics of citations, see, for example, Xin Liu, “The Use/Less Citations in Feminist Research,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 36, no. 108 (2021).

<sup>34</sup> Sandra Harding, “Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?,” in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Harding, “Introduction,” 2.

is this “I”? Martin Heidegger stated that one is already in the world, meaning that we are part of the very world-thing-reality we are questioning.<sup>36</sup> If one is already embedded in the world, the method of abstracting oneself from one’s own world in order to analyze that world (*epoché*, phenomenological reduction)<sup>37</sup> is not my chosen approach; I do not agree that such abstraction is possible or even desirable, although I have to admit that I have found the suggestion appealing. What other possibilities do I have, then? Reality, the world, and nature have many dimensions, and as humans we are finite, not omnipresent in the whole experience of existence; still, we have designed different ways to address our relationships in/with the world. Existence exceeds single human understanding. Each person’s own existence is a whole world; yet at the same time, I cannot exceed my own limitations and cannot encompass all existence. I have “access” only to partial existence; therefore, my knowledge will always be partial. I do not mean that there is only one section of existence I can “gain access to”—that would imply that there is a certain order, a pre-existing system of arrangement, and I do not share that premise. Alternatively, could there be a certain order that is not metaphysical?

One possibility is this: humans order the world-reality according to their interpretations or representations. This is the assumption of so-called social constructivism. Is ontology that anthropocentric order? According to Heidegger, one does not “access” the world to get to know it, as I already said, because we are already embedded in it; still, how can I talk about the world without subsuming the world into my human-centric representations? Some thinkers have argued that we can only interpret the world and produce meaning about it—this approach demands the supposition that there is existence beyond the human horizon, but that one cannot access it in any way except through language or human representation.<sup>38</sup> But then, where does the body and its materiality fit into this equation? This “I” is not only an

<sup>36</sup> See Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>37</sup> *Epoché* is a Greek concept that was used by different philosophers according to different understandings in ancient philosophy. Edmund Husserl popularized the term, which in simple and general terms means the suspension of the everyday attitude. This was developed as a method and became relevant for phenomenologists and the schools inspired by them. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, however, argued that this reduction is always incomplete. There are several sources for this discussion: for example, Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, transl. Dorian Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999); and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

<sup>38</sup> This was, for example, the claim made by Immanuel Kant, who argued, “What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves and without reference to the receptivity of our sensibility is quite unknown to us. We know nothing more than our mode of perceiving them.” Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. J. M. D. Meikejohn (Auckland: The Floating Press, 1969), 100.

incorporeal mind: at the end of the day this “I” is also the body tapping the keyboard, with dry eyes, feeling cold, feeling hungry, with back pain...

I was struggling with these questions when I first encountered new materialism through my readings of Braidotti’s work. I share with this approach some of the same concerns about the nature of the world and its relationship with humans. I disagree with hegemonic metaphysical narratives that have served to justify positivist and modernist discourses; and, although I understand the ontological turn that places the human at the center of any ontological consideration, as proposed by so-called postmodernism, new times demand readdressing/rereading established narratives. I am not completely sure that this approach, new materialism, offers the answers to all of the abovementioned dilemmas, but at least it helps me try to imagine different answers, to problematize from the vantage point of other paradigms and wordings. Stating that I use new materialism as a point of departure does not mean that my understanding of reality is normative, but rather that my queries, my ways of approaching reality, and the instruments I use for the purpose of research are informed by these starting points. It does not mean, either, that new materialism is a fixed theory that only needs to be applied as a mold to the world. The fact that one starts from certain preconceptions does not mean that one’s “experience-experiment” will not end up causing one to question and change those “points of departure” at a given moment.

When designing my research, I started out using an intersectional approach, understood not as an accumulative set of categories that are the basis of diverse discriminations, but more as an entanglement of attributes that configure discriminations. However, I found this approach limited in helping me grasp the complexities I was witnessing and experiencing in my research. In fact, I was identifying and criticizing a hierarchical power dynamic that in decolonial theory is called “coloniality.” Therefore, the theoretical framework of my research changed from one focused on intersectionality to one that led me to study and include epistemologies of the South; this does not mean that the basic arguments of intersectionality concerning multiple oppressions are ignored, but they are approached from different entry points. The fact that my initial approach was through new feminist materialism, and not other epistemologies, may be because the education I received in Mexico has been predominantly Western, coupled with the colonial assumptions I imbibed when younger, which made me believe that the most important philosophy is that produced in Europe, the US, or Canada—thus reproducing the image of a hierarchical tree of knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Anita Lundberg, Hannah Regis, and John Agbonifo, “Tropical Landscapes and Nature-Culture Entanglements: Reading Tropicality via Avatar,” *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 21, no. 1 (2022): 13.

Therefore, in this doctoral research, I am working with two main theoretical approaches: new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South. I use both frameworks to try to contest entrenched attitudes towards the discussion of femi(ni)cide in Europe, attitudes that I identify as modern, Western, patriarchal, and colonial. In what follows, I introduce each of the currents separately. After this, I select some concepts that are common to both tendencies of thought and are frequent throughout my work; I focus on describing the ways each tendency of thought treats these concepts. I have selected authors, both from new materialism and from epistemologies of the South, who take a critical and mostly feminist stance. To illustrate the epistemologies of the South, I further hone the focus, emphasizing authors who are based in the Americas. The conclusion addresses what the encounters between new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South have to do with decolonization and femi(ni)cide research. (The next three sections, “New (Feminist) Materialism,” “Epistemologies of the South,” and “Meeting Points,” are part of my article “Mangrovia Encounters between Epistemologies of the South and New (Feminist) Materialism.”)

## 2.1 New (Feminist) Materialism

Amidst the increased popularity of new materialism in diverse areas of research, many questions remain—for example, how is new materialism different from other labels such as “new materialisms,” “post-humanisms,” “speculative materialism,” “new empiricisms,” and “feminist new materialism”? It is important to clarify that new materialism is not a conscious, planned collective project, just as other “-isms” such as modernism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, and feminism are not. Often these labels are established at a later stage as a way to capture tendencies in thought that have similar patterns. Broadly speaking, the term has been used to name the work of certain theorists who explore a different metaphysics/ontology/epistemology, which involves performing rereadings of matter and materiality. However, they may not necessarily call themselves “new materialists,” and it is always risky to group heterogeneous worldviews under a single umbrella term.

Speaking broadly, new materialism in the context of this research refers to a specific metaphysics/ontology or onto-epistemology that aims to traverse (but not necessarily “overcome”) modernist and postmodernist worldviews. Let’s take a simple example: the occurrence of an earthquake. A modernist approach would assume there is a “natural” event that can be explained in an “objective” and “universal” way; the experience of the subject is secondary and determined by the “natural” event itself. On the other hand, in a postmodernist reading, the event “might” be an event, but one cannot give an account of it except through one’s own

experience/perception; one is not negating this reality, but the reality cannot be accessed without human influence, and therefore the event itself is secondary. These two ways of dealing with the same subject-object dichotomy illustrate the context in which new materialism emerges and gains its *raison d'être*: to new materialism, there is both a material event and a human experience/perception that participate in the phenomenon known as “an earthquake”; neither of these is more important than the other, and it is possible to give an account of both.<sup>40</sup>

The main commonality that all new materialists share is the abovementioned understanding of reality and their interest in the possibility of embracing the materiality that was cut off by the linguisticism of post-structuralism.<sup>41</sup> As Braidotti sums up: “‘Neo-materialism’ emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, new materialism is a perspective that allows us to question the reduction of nature according to an anthropocentric representation and at the same time recognize its agency.<sup>43</sup> In current academic research, one can find diverse authors whose works ascribe to so-called material “turns.” Although not all of these authors exclusively understand new materialism as having been generated in feminist settings and some might fail to deeply engage with new feminist materialism,<sup>44</sup> some of new materialists’ and new feminist materialists’ queries are related and are reciprocally helpful.

I came to new materialism through feminism, and more particularly through the work of Braidotti, who notes that new materialism built itself on the contributions of late-’90s feminism. In her own words: “Feminist philosophers

<sup>40</sup> See Sara Ahmed, “Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism,’” *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 23–39.

<sup>41</sup> Sara Ahmed has made the criticism that this statement tends to be made without giving examples of exactly “how feminism or poststructuralism have not dealt with the body as a real, living, physical, biological entity or have reduced ‘everything’ to language, signification and culture.” Ahmed, “Open Forum,” 25.

<sup>42</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Cornelia Möser follows Pia Garske’s distinction between “agency” (*Handlungsfähigkeit*) and “efficiency” (*Wirkmächtigkeit*), the former referring to the “capacity to act” and the latter referring to “whether someone or something has an impact.” She implies in her critique that new materialists are focusing solely on “efficiency” when they speak of agency. It is not my aim here to develop this idea further, but I do not think that agency in new materialism is necessarily focused solely on efficiency. See Cornelia Möser, “Materialism, Matter, Matrix, and Mater: Contesting Notions in Feminist and Gender Studies,” in *Materialism and Politics*, ed. Bernardo Bianchi et al. (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2021), 211–212.

<sup>44</sup> Sometimes referred to as feminist new materialism.

have invented a new brand of materialism, of the embodied and embedded kind.”<sup>45</sup> An introduction to this formulation is outlined in the book *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012). Even though feminist theorists have played an important role in developing new materialism, we are currently witnessing a well-established practice in which feminist contributions are relegated to a marginal place within the mainstream of this materialist scholarship.<sup>46</sup> The term “new feminist materialism” might potentially be read by some people as meaning a specialized branch or offshoot of new materialism (i.e., new materialism with a feminist spin), but thinkers like Braidotti argue that feminism is part of the root, the genealogy, the genesis of it. Because of this, I do not see any new materialist project that is not attached to a feminist genealogy, and this is the reason why I choose to use the term “new feminist materialism.” Nevertheless, to resist falling into the trap of essentialisms and purisms, which would risk breaking up conversations, I often use both terms together, speaking of new (feminist) materialism.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, as one decides which authors to engage with based on personal, disciplinary, political, and cultural experiences, a certain limited set of authors and texts are referred to here out of the vast literature being produced about new (feminist) materialism. It is important to keep in mind that new (feminist) materialism is not a theory finished once and for all, but one that is still in the process of becoming.

According to Dolphijn and van der Tuin, new materialism has been influencing research in the humanities and science and technology studies since the late 1990s. However, according to Cornelia Möser, it peaked in 2010 and then started to decline.<sup>48</sup> I see a different reality than Möser, one in which academic research is showing increased interest in new materialism in all disciplinary areas.<sup>49</sup> As happens with many movements (which usually are not uniform, but receive their labels later on), this movement’s contours are blurry. “New materialisms,” “new materialism,”

<sup>45</sup> Rosi Braidotti, “A Critical Cartography of Feminist Post-postmodernism,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 47 (2005): 169–180.

<sup>46</sup> I am referring to areas of research in new materialism that occur outside Gender Studies departments, such as in Law, Philosophy, and Geography departments. Braidotti has pointed out a similar pattern in relation to posthuman scholarship. See Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), 2.

<sup>47</sup> This formulation is also used by other authors, such as in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*.

<sup>48</sup> Möser, “Materialism, Matter, Matrix,” 203.

<sup>49</sup> The examples are vast. To name a few: the emergence of journals such as *Matter*; the ongoing Utrecht summer school on post-humanities; and the European program “Cost Action IS1307 on *European New Materialist Network*,” which ran until 2018 (several projects derived from it remain active).



“new feminist materialism,”<sup>50</sup> and other related terms might not necessarily refer to the same problematizations, yet they may somehow be intertwined.

As Möser accurately highlights, new materialism might be confusing or misleading to many people because of the charged meaning of the words “new” and “materialism.”<sup>51</sup> For many, “materialism” refers to Marxist-derived theories, such as social feminism. New materialism, however, is not a branch of historical materialism, though it is informed by it to a certain extent.<sup>52</sup> Manuel DeLanda, for example, is critical of Marx’s theory of economics, but he takes from Marx his interest in the oppressed;<sup>53</sup> DeLanda values materiality, although of a different type. The materiality in new materialism refers primarily to “matter” in its various and complex versions. Meanwhile, “new” (Braidotti also uses the prefix “neo-”) does not mean “a better or improved version of ‘old.’”<sup>54</sup> Rather, it refers to re-readings of “minor traditions”; it is in this sense that Diana Coole and Samantha Frost call it “renewed materialism.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as Dolphijn and van der Tuin clarify: “New materialism says ‘yes, *and*’ to all of these intellectual traditions [such as materialism, pragmatism, and monism], traversing them all, creating strings of thought that, in turn, create a remarkably powerful and fresh ‘rhythm’ in academia today.”<sup>56</sup>

There is a certain anger, discomfort, and frustration projected towards new (feminist) materialism, particularly by other feminisms, that should be taken seriously; see, for example, Sara Ahmed’s “Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism’” (2008). Even if I engage with new feminist materialist scholarship, I think that we should avoid treating it with an attitude akin to hyper-consumerism, where scholars engage in the latest trend for fear of being behind the times. Pursuing such an ideal creates risks: for example, the principle of diversity/multiplicity, a key feature of new feminist materialism, can be lost as the theory enters into the mainstream. Chasing after a trend can result in the penalizing of those who do not do so: for

<sup>50</sup> Not to mention the wide variety of related approaches that focus on matter/materiality; for example, actor-network theory, legal materiality, and posthuman approaches.

<sup>51</sup> Möser is critical of new (feminist) materialism because in her opinion it overlooks “earlier feminist engagements with materialism, such as socialist, materialist, or Marxist feminism,” a situation that also applies to its use of “new.” Möser, “Materialism, Matter, Matrix,” 207.

<sup>52</sup> See Elizabeth Wingrove, “Materialisms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> He states, for example, that it is the role of “Leftists to cut the umbilical cord chaining us to Marx and reinvent political economy.” Cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*, 108.

<sup>56</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 89.

example, witch hunts against those not engaging with new materialism, or the refusal to fund or publish those who do not take a new (feminist) materialist approach, as has happened with other terms and trends in the humanities and social sciences such as “critical thinking,” “intersectionality,” and “interdisciplinarity.”

It is important to highlight that new feminist materialism as such is a project that has emerged in the context of temperate European landscapes and is informed by Western philosophies; however, its influence and inspirations have not remained within these limits.

## 2.2 Epistemologies of the South

Not surprisingly, the North-centric feminist epistemologies put pressure on the epistemologies of the North to the latter’s limits, but they themselves remained within such limits.... They were, however, of crucial importance to open up the space for the emergence of South-centric feminist epistemologies, which broke said limits and performed external critiques of the epistemologies of the North.<sup>57</sup>

If I were to consider the major “intellectual turns” in my lived history, not following a hierarchical order but a chronological one, I would name the mind-body turn, the feminist turn, and the decolonial turn. During my studies in Utrecht and Granada I became acquainted with postcolonial, Chicana, Black, and subaltern theories, but decolonial theory critiques from the Americas came to me much later, during this doctoral research.<sup>58</sup> The more I become familiar with postcolonial, anticolonial, and decolonial scholarship, the more its similarities with new (feminist) materialism resonate with me. It is evident that most of new (feminist) materialism’s theoretical basis and critiques are oriented towards major Western traditions of thought—namely, modernism and postmodernism. But it is not the only epistemology that questions modernism; epistemologies of the South share similar criticisms and put forward similar ideas, such as multiplicity/plurality, nonlinear time, non-exhaustive dichotomies, critique/creativity, and the material/flesh. These horizontal, rhizomatic conversations at the core of both new (feminist) materialisms and epistemologies of the South invite “mangrovia” ways of thinking.<sup>59</sup>

But what does the term “epistemologies of the South” refer to? I borrow the term from Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Santos understands these epistemologies as being those knowledges that are “anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those

<sup>57</sup> Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> I am particularly thankful to Anaïs Duong-Pedica for her engaging conversations and for her reading recommendations on decoloniality.

<sup>59</sup> Lundberg, Regis, and Agbonifo, “Tropical Landscapes,” 13.

social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, *and* patriarchy” (emphasis mine).<sup>60</sup> In my use, the term covers epistemologies such as postcoloniality, which is said to have been grounded in the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group and has a strong focus on British and French colonialism; anticoloniality, which has its beginnings in Black movements such as the civil rights movement in the US and African anticolonialism; decoloniality, which emerged in the study group Modernity/Coloniality in Latin America and the Caribbean; Indigenous epistemologies; and other epistemologies that might not be academic tendencies, such as communitarian epistemologies. It is important to note that the heterogeneity within these labels is huge, and their relationship is neither homogeneous nor always harmonious.<sup>61</sup>

In what follows, my analysis draws on the formulations of the decolonial theory of the Modernity/Coloniality group. However, it needs to be highlighted that the term “decoloniality” is used widely by scholars in ways that do not necessarily share the same genealogy, definitions, or assumptions. For decolonial theory scholars, there is a major conceptual difference between two terms, *colonialism* and *coloniality*. *Colonialism* refers to a moment in history/time in which some societies were under the political control of other societies, a condition that can change and often has changed, usually after an independence movement calling for an end to that occupation/domination; in a sense, this change of regime is what gives meaning to the term “postcoloniality.” *Coloniality*, a concept developed by Aníbal Quijano, refers to more complex socio-cultural processes derived from colonialism. According to the Modernity/Coloniality scholars, the colonization of the Americas in the fifteenth century configured a new and different global order in which colonialism, global capitalism, and Eurocentric modernity are entangled. Quijano states that “[d]uring the same period when European colonial domination was consolidating itself, the cultural complex known as European rationality/modernity was being constituted, which was established as a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, modernity cannot be understood without coloniality.

<sup>60</sup> Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*, 1.

<sup>61</sup> To follow some of the debates held among postcolonial and decolonial scholars, see, for example, Gianmaria Colpani, Jamila M. H. Mascot, and Katrine Smiet, “Postcolonial Responses to Decolonial Intervention,” *Postcolonial Studies* 25, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>62</sup> Original: “[d]urante el mismo período en que se consolidaba la dominación colonial europea, se fue constituyendo el complejo cultural conocido como la racionalidad/modernidad europea, el cual fue establecido como un paradigma universal de conocimiento y de relación entre la humanidad y el resto del Mundo.” Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad,” *Perú Indígena* 13, no. 29 (1992): 14. All translations into English are my own unless otherwise specified.

Coloniality is a process that embeds colonial structures into the collective imaginary and into institutions of power; the process of changing this condition is decoloniality. Quijano used the concept of *coloniality of power* to refer to the global pattern of power “that was based on the idea of ‘race’ and on the ‘racial’ social classification of world population”;<sup>63</sup> this classification laid the ground for the organization and control of working people, as Francesca Gargallo identifies.<sup>64</sup> Thus understood, *coloniality* affects a variety of other fields such as *knowledge*, in the sense that only certain knowledge is considered valid;<sup>65</sup> *gender*, in the sense that not only race but also gender contributed to the institution of such hierarchies;<sup>66</sup> and *being*, in the sense of its effects on the language and lived experience of people who were not considered fully human.<sup>67</sup>

Decolonial feminism is heterogeneous and has criticized some of the arguments made by male decolonial theorists due to their lack of a gender perspective,<sup>68</sup> as well as the locations these theories have emerged from: global North universities. Nevertheless, as Breny Mendoza points out, decolonial feminists have also appropriated some of the arguments and critiques of decolonial theory and have activated conversations with other feminist theories such as intersectionality, Black feminism, and postcolonial theory.<sup>69</sup> Decolonial feminists are interested in creating epistemological options that are horizontal and rhizomatic, and that account for the entanglement of nature and culture, to face the diverse struggles generated by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. However, similar to new feminist

<sup>63</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 218.

<sup>64</sup> Gargallo, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala*, 24. For a further discussion of the concept of *coloniality of power*, see Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad.”

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad”; Edgardo Lander, ed., *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales; Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007).

<sup>68</sup> I am using binary language to identify these scholars. However, I am aware of the complexity and difficulties that this use entails.

<sup>69</sup> Breny Mendoza, “Coloniality of Gender and Power: From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 115–119. See also Ochy Curiel, “Constructing Feminist Methodologies from the Perspective of Decolonial Feminism,” in *Decolonial Feminism in Abya Yala: Caribbean, Meso, and South American Contributions and Challenges*, ed. María Lugones, Yuderlys Espinosa-Miñoso, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021).

materialism, they are facing a risk of being neglected and marginalized in mainstream discussions on decolonial theory.

## 2.3 Meeting points

To illustrate the fertile lands where new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South potentially meet, I want to offer some fragmentary flashes showing their similarities and potential divergences. Certain selected concepts, relevant to this dissertation, are explored in what follows, but the list of possibilities is vast. Also, there are not always clear and distinct dividing lines between these concepts; they maintain an intrinsic relationship, so sometimes the narrative “cuts” in between them might be unsettling. The work of feminist authors is centered here; keep in mind, however, that this selection of authors is not exhaustive, and a range of authors and ideas exist far beyond what can be addressed here.

### 2.3.1 Dualism

One of the main critiques put forward by both new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South relates to dualism, which manifests in various ways. The discussions of the concepts that follow will address diverse versions of this dualism and show some of the alternatives to the Western binary system offered by new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South. For new materialists, dualisms are to be understood as two sides of the same coin: “An idea opposed to another idea is always the same idea, albeit affected by the negative sign. The more you oppose one another, the more you remain in the same framework of thought.”<sup>70</sup> Some examples of these false dualisms are: social constructivism / essentialism, culture/nature, idealism/materialism, man/woman, science/humanities, old/new, active/passive, and civilized/primitive.

One might think that speaking of the “global North and global South” contradicts one’s claim to criticize dichotomies, but I agree in this respect with Santos, who argues that “[i]n spite of resorting to the North-South dichotomy, the epistemologies of the South are not the symmetrical opposite of the epistemologies of the North, in the sense of opposing one single valid knowledge against another one.”<sup>71</sup> The global South is a historically and materially determined term and does not represent a single location, ideology, or theory. In consequence, epistemologies of the South are varied: some precede Western modernity in time while others grew up in resistance to it or

<sup>70</sup> Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 98.

<sup>71</sup> Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*, x.

in its shadow. These epistemologies are grouped together only by virtue of being treated in a certain way by a certain (violent and dualistic) historical process. The aim of these epistemologies is not to replace the epistemologies of the North in a dichotomic way of thinking, but to break (work through, traverse) those dualisms and their hierarchies, allowing instead for multiplicity. In new materialist terms, the epistemologies of the South are not reflecting or refracting but *diffracting*.<sup>72</sup>

Decolonial scholar María Lugones understands “the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity.”<sup>73</sup> This dichotomy serves as the bedrock for organizing social life, thus also informing how we think about race and gender. What Lugones is highlighting is a core critique specific to decolonial theory: some epistemologies of the South may not perceive dichotomic thinking per se as the main problem. For other global South thinkers, the trouble lies in a particular aspect of dichotomous thinking: the relationship between power (*potestas*), hierarchy, and domination.

New feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South question the dualisms developed by global North philosophy. The outcomes of this way of thinking have been, and continue to be, harmful and lethal. The endeavor of these epistemologies is to expose these dualisms and work through them.

In this dissertation, these dualisms are questioned in various ways. For example, when discussing the concept of femi(ni)cide, I offer an alternative to the dichotomy of social constructivism versus essentialism by using sexual difference theory (as read through new feminist materialist lenses). I also propose an alternative cartography of femicide and feminicide that questions the North-South hierarchy in the production of knowledge. As one example, I propose the use of the term “femi(ni)cide” to overcome unidirectional and progress-centered readings of the emergence of theories on the killing of women. In the case study of Germany, I problematize the dualism “I” versus the “other,” which is present in the construction of subjects defined as “women” and in Eurocentric culturalized readings of femi(ni)cide.

### 2.3.2 Difference

New feminist materialism has also been described as a “philosophy of difference,”<sup>74</sup> whose definition of *difference* is informed by Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy. Braidotti

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Donna J. Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *The Haraway Reader*, 63–124 (New York: Routledge, 2004); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>73</sup> Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 743.

<sup>74</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 126.

explains that “difference” throughout Western philosophical thought has been crystallized in a negative sense as the origin of inferiority; it is conceptualized as the state of being “different from” and thus potentially “less worthy than”—creating a dialectical relation between the self and the other.<sup>75</sup> New feminist materialism pushes instead “towards a difference that no longer focuses on a ‘differing from’, but shows ‘difference differing’ or ‘difference in itself.’”<sup>76</sup> In this latter logic, difference is not understood as a reason for domination (as if there could be any justification for this). This argument, however, does not deny the negative impact that such a dialectical understanding of difference has had on human life and its relationship to the non-human.

For Quijano, the Western or European identity consolidated during the encounter with other cultures in the fifteenth century (the so-called New World). The relationship with these new others was marked by differences that were established as “natural” and which therefore were used to justify hierarchical subordination.<sup>77</sup> As Quijano explains, according to this mindset, “only European culture is rational and can contain ‘subjects.’ The rest are not rational. They cannot be, or harbour, ‘subjects.’ Consequently, other cultures are different in the sense of being unequal, indeed inferior, by nature. They can only be ‘objects’ of knowledge and/or of practices of domination.”<sup>78</sup> Although times have changed, the colonial structure of this rational knowledge remains alive; for example, theorists in the global South have exposed the extractivist practices of which they are victims. In the words of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: “The legitimate word belongs to those above, those below provide the materials. The same as in every system of knowledge, we provide raw material, and they give an elaborated product back to us.”<sup>79</sup> Cusicanqui is referring to the well-known practice in which the North takes the knowledge and experiences of the South to produce validated theories. On the other hand, when the global South produces theories, it is common for these theories to remain in the margins. This

<sup>75</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> Kathrin Thiele, “Pushing Dualisms and Differences: From ‘Equality versus Difference’ to ‘Nonmimetic Sharing’ and ‘Staying with the Trouble,’” *Women: A Cultural Review* 25, no. 1 (2014): 11.

<sup>77</sup> See also Lundberg, Regis, and Agbonifo, “Tropical Landscapes.”

<sup>78</sup> Original: “sólo la cultura europea es racional, puede contener ‘sujetos’. Las demás, no son racionales. No pueden ser o cobijar ‘sujetos’. En consecuencia, las otras culturas son diferentes en el sentido de ser desiguales, de hecho inferiores, por naturaleza. Sólo pueden ser ‘objetos’ de conocimiento y/o de prácticas de dominación.” Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad,” 16.

<sup>79</sup> Original: “La palabra legítima le pertenece a los de arriba, los de abajo dan insumos. Lo mismo que en todo sistema de conocimiento, nosotros producimos materia prima y nos devuelven producto elaborado.” Cited in Ramón Grosfoguel, “Del ‘extractivismo económico’ al ‘extractivismo epistémico’ y ‘extractivismo ontológico,’” *Tabula Rasa* 24 (2016): 134.

knowledge extraction follows the patterns seen in, for example, the material extraction of tropical environments in benefit of the global North's profit and well-being.<sup>80</sup>

It is not the aim of epistemologies of the South and new feminist materialism to deny the existence of the hierarchies and structures of domination built upon the idea of difference. Without depoliticizing the struggles against these structures, both new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South commit themselves to working through them, and thus they embrace the power (*potentia*) of difference in itself. However, they do this without the naïve belief that difference itself is devoid of conflict and contradiction.

Aware of these critiques, in this dissertation I work with both understandings of difference. I cannot help but recognize the pejorative perspective that has constructed “women” and “others” (such as peoples from the South, or other sexual identities, religions, and ethnicities) as “different from” the centrally positioned hegemonic powers (such as people from the North, men, heterosexuals, Christians, or whites), and therefore “less worthy than.” But I also study “difference differing” and explore alternatives aimed at working through current structures based on the negative understanding of difference. In line with the idea of analysis based on autoethnographic, lived experience, I believe that the negative idea of difference has played a role in the relations I have established throughout this research. My condition as an epistemological agent from the global South, as I have described earlier, has marked certain conversations; this situation, however, has functioned as an impetus to do research and write against these narratives that continue to perpetuate difference in a pejorative sense.

### 2.3.3 Pluriversality/Relationality

New feminist materialism differentiates itself from universalist ontologies. Braidotti, for example, states that “universalism” has acquired a bad reputation in some areas of feminism thanks to works that have revealed the overgeneralizations regarding diversity that are hidden under that term.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, universalism has traditionally been disembodied, while concealing an abstract masculinity, whiteness, and Occidentalism, a false “subject position that allegedly transcends spatio-temporal and geo-political specificities.”<sup>82</sup> But Braidotti does not dismiss the term; rather, she proposes a reconceptualization of it. Thus, “false universalism” is

<sup>80</sup> Lundberg, Regis, and Agbonifo, “Tropical Landscapes,” 2.

<sup>81</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 85.

<sup>82</sup> Braidotti, cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 22.



understood as in fact being a political stance that universalizes some differences over others. Braidotti then reconceptualizes universality in a distinctive and enabling way, arguing that universality is “a qualitative leap, from individual experience to collective practice.”<sup>83</sup> Here “individual experience” is to be understood as being embodied and embedded in the materiality of existence, implying that universality is situated and therefore not gender-neutral or disembodied. Her proposal is informed by the feminist politics of location and situated knowledges.<sup>84</sup>

In a similar vein of questioning this abstract and false universalism, decolonial theory works with the concept of *pluriversality*.<sup>85</sup> Arturo Escobar highlights that pluriversality, common in some epistemologies of the South, responds to an ontological relationality, or radical interdependence, not only among humans but also with nonhumans and the earth. It is in this sense that one can say that universality, in new feminist materialist terms, and pluriversality refer to relationalities that are rooted. This concept is illustrated by the Zapatista movement’s well-known call for “a world in which many worlds fit.”<sup>86</sup> When one acknowledges the different metaphysics/ontologies of various communities, it becomes more evident that a single truth, worldview, and reality, as proposed by modern/colonial universalism, is not possible. The words of the communitarian feminist Lorena Cabnal illustrate this idea nicely: “There are no two equal stones, no two equal rivers, no two equal mountains. Although a tree gives us fruits, they are not identical. In this way, our bodies are not the same, the forms of communitarian coexistence are not the same.”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 115.

<sup>84</sup> The term “politics of location” was coined by Adrienne Rich, and “situated knowledge” by Donna Haraway.

<sup>85</sup> For the theorization of this concept, see, for example, Mignolo, “Delinking”; Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>86</sup> The original full sentence reads: “El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos” (The world we want is one in which many worlds fit). EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), *Cuarta declaración de la selva Lacandona*, 1996, [https://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1996/1996\\_01\\_01\\_a.htm](https://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1996/1996_01_01_a.htm), section 3. This sentence has been analyzed in relation to universality by, for example, Hinkelammert, who interprets this claim as a universal project based in “fragmentation/pluralization.” Franz J. Hinkelammert, *El mapa del emperador* (San José: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1996), 238.

<sup>87</sup> Original: “No existen dos piedras iguales, dos ríos iguales, dos montañas iguales. Aunque un árbol nos dé frutos, no son idénticos. De esa manera los cuerpos no son iguales, las formas de convivencia comunitaria no son iguales.” Interview with Cabnal in Claudia Korol, “Guatemala: Feminismo comunitario y recuperación de saberes ancestrales,” *Noticias de América Latina y el Caribe*, 17 January 2020, <https://www.nodal.am/2020/01/guatemala-feminismo-comunitario-y-recuperacion-de-saberes-ancestrales/>.

Pluriversality, thus understood, not only describes the diversity of realities but also questions the reduction of these to a single perspective. This relates to the idea behind the reformulated concept of universality used by Braidotti, in which the experiences of communities and subjects are what inform the concept of universality: a sort of bottom-up conceptualization. These understandings of universality inform my research here. For example, I heed the insistence that femi(ni)cide is a global issue that presents itself in different forms, thus implying that femi(ni)cide is a situated universality.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, most feminist work on femi(ni)cide itself questions the false universalism, neutrality, and objectivity presupposed in the law. Although critical and feminist legal scholars have long since exposed and challenged these fundamental false universalist presuppositions of modern-liberal law,<sup>89</sup> the discussions around femi(ni)cide show how rooted these ideas still are in the legal sphere, thus making evident the great challenges societies must work through.

### 2.3.4 *Cuerpo-territorio*

Like other new materialists, Karen Barad advocates for the possibility of speaking and giving an account of the real, matter, and nature after poststructuralism.<sup>90</sup> Barad gives the name “agential realism” to her theory that reconfigures not only matter but also time and space. For her these are not ontologically prior substances with determined properties or identities that come into interaction, thus generating intersections that constitute a phenomenon; instead, they are generative forces that co-emerge through *intra-action*.

For Barad, matter is not an isolated substance, nor is it passive or static; rather, it is an active agent of phenomena. This is an important point for new feminist materialism, since matter, throughout the history of Western philosophy, has occupied a minor position in relation to that of the mind, and in postmodern

<sup>88</sup> This has been implied, for example, in Jill Radford, “Introduction,” in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, ed. Jill Radford and Diana Russell (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 7–9.

<sup>89</sup> Some of these presuppositions have been shown to be Western-centric and colonialist, constructed according to the perspective of a white, middle-class, male gaze. For some critiques, see, for example, Frances Olsen, “The Sex of Law,” in *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, ed. David Kairys (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); Catharine MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 3 (1982); Carol Smart, *Feminism and the Power of Law* (London: Routledge, 1989); Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*.

<sup>90</sup> Karen Barad, “Re(con)figuring Space, Time and Matter,” in *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, ed. Marianne Dekoven (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 76–77.

approaches has been relegated to a product of discursive practices. For Barad, “matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity”; she goes on to say that matter “refers to phenomena in their ongoing materialization” (emphasis in the original).<sup>91</sup> For her:

Phenomena are ontologically primitive relations – relations without preexisting relata. That is, relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing “relata”, but rather the mutual ontological dependence of “relata” – the relation – is the ontological primitive. Relata only exist *within* phenomena as a result of specific intra-actions (i.e., there are no independent relata, only relata-within-relations).<sup>92</sup>

Barad does not deny the role of discourse, nor does she fall into a new “essentialism”; instead, she advocates for privileging *neither* nature *nor* culture. She proposes that “phenomena” are what she names “material-discursive intra-actions.”<sup>93</sup> As she puts it: “Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime-mattering, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of ‘quantum entanglements’, which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components.’”<sup>94</sup> Among these “components,” the author considers nonhuman elements such as environmental conditions. Along these lines, a phenomenon is not solely a discursive or a “natural” event; a phenomenon here is a complex arrangement of discourse and material “spacetime-mattering” conditions.

In a different formulation but a similar endeavour, *xinka* communitarian feminists from Guatemala have also developed a concept that puts emphasis on the fundamental relationality at the heart of bodily and material reality. The concept of *territorio cuerpo-tierra* (body-land territory) emerged from their fight against sexual violence and mining exploitation.<sup>95</sup> According to Cabnal, this concept is

a way of approaching and feeling the body as a living and historical territory, but it does not refer at all to the Western geographical conception of bodily geography or a map: it alludes to a cosmogonic and political interpretation of the

<sup>91</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 151.

<sup>92</sup> Karen Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 1–2 (2012): 49.

<sup>93</sup> Her understanding of this term comes from the physicist Niels Bohr and quantum physics. See Barad, “Re(con)figuring Space, Time and Matter.”

<sup>94</sup> Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 32.

<sup>95</sup> For an overview of communitarian feminism, see the chapter “Los feminismos comunitarios” in Gargallo, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala*.

way bodies have a *relationship* of being in the web of life. At the same time, it leads us to examine the way in which multiple forms of oppression — the structural historical effects of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and neoliberal capitalism — have been built on bodies, causing them to be expropriated through different pacts and mandates. (Emphasis mine)<sup>96</sup>

Communitarian feminism argues that Indigenous peoples'<sup>97</sup> ontological *relationship* between body and land has been disrupted by colonialism and, in the case of women, also by patriarchy.<sup>98</sup> One of their challenges, then, is to nurture that relationship in which the agential subject is not an isolated self but a communal

<sup>96</sup> Original: “una manera de plantear y sentir el cuerpo como territorio vivo e histórico, pero para nada se refiere a la concepción occidental geográfica, de geografía corporal o de mapa: alude a una interpretación cosmogónica y política acerca de cómo los cuerpos tienen una relación de ser y estar en la red de la vida. A la vez, nos lleva a revisar cómo han sido construidas sobre los cuerpos las múltiples opresiones, los efectos históricos estructurales del patriarcado, el colonialismo, el racismo y el capitalismo neoliberal, que los ha llevado a la expropiación a través de diferentes pactos y mandatos.” Lorena Cabnal, “De las opresiones a las emancipaciones: Mujeres indígenas en defensa del territorio cuerpo-tierra,” *Biodiversidadla*, 13 July 2016, [https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/De\\_las\\_opresiones\\_a\\_las\\_emancipaciones\\_Mujeres\\_indigenas\\_en\\_defensa\\_del\\_territorio\\_cuerpo-tierra](https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/De_las_opresiones_a_las_emancipaciones_Mujeres_indigenas_en_defensa_del_territorio_cuerpo-tierra).

<sup>97</sup> I use the label “Indigenous” to name the population prior to the invasion of the American continent. However, I am aware of the debates around naming and the lack of consensus. For example, for some, “original peoples” refers to a primordial past that blurs the contemporaneity of such peoples. “Indigenous” for some is a colonial name, so the people might prefer to call themselves by their chosen names, such as the Mapuches. Others take the label of “Indigenous” because they claim that if they were conquered as such, as such they will liberate themselves. See Gargallo, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> These communitarian feminists are more aligned with the argument that there existed an indigenous patriarchy which merged with colonial and African patriarchy. Julieta Paredes, for example, named this the “entronque patriarcal” (patriarchal juncture). See Julieta Paredes, *Hilando fino: Desde el feminismo comunitario* (Lima: Lesbianas Independientes Feministas Socialistas, 2008), 6. This notion is not shared by all decolonial feminists, which should not be considered a problem: rather than being an either/or situation, in a diffractive reading it is obvious that Indigenous communities were already so diverse before colonialism that one cannot expect the same practices in each one. It is more likely that some communities might have experienced what Segato calls patriarchies of low intensity (Rita Laura Segato, “Género y colonialidad: En busca de claves de lectura y de un vocabulario estratégico descolonial,” unpublished manuscript, 2010), while in other groups the sex/gender relations might have been more equal, and in still others these relations might have been more oppressive. More research might help to address these issues in different locations.

subject.<sup>99</sup> This nurturing of the relationship is not proposed in a romanticized sense of going back to “primordial” times, but rather in a way that is done from their body-land territory, which is immersed in a complex historical milieu. Thus, Barad and these communitarian feminists do not find it possible to define bodies, land, time, etc., in any way that extracts them from the web of relations.<sup>100</sup>

The role of the embodied subjects “women” in femi(ni)cide is key in my dissertation. Although I focus mostly on the new feminist materialist reading of the body, it is relevant to consider the implications of the killing of women within a given ecosystem. For example, when looking into the context of emergence of feminicide discourse, the materiality of the border territory of Ciudad Juárez is important for understanding the alarm that activated the mobilization of mothers and family members of victims in the first place, and later activists, researchers, and politicians.<sup>101</sup> In this sense the concept of *territorio cuerpo-tierra* is useful to analyze how violence against bodies affects territory, and vice versa, due to their ontological entanglement.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, I cannot deny the role that my own corporeality, as a subject identified as “woman,” has played throughout this research. My phenotypic characteristics and place of origin mattered differently depending on the locations where I performed this research.

### 2.3.5 Time

New feminist materialism assumes a nonlinear conception of time and questions the idea of time as progress. To continue with agential realism, Barad uses quantum physics and the “quantum leap” and diverges from the Euclidian conception of time and space and the Newtonian notions of causality, as well as the idea of matter as passive. Time, for her, is historicized: it “is not given, it is not universally given, but

<sup>99</sup> The literature on how Indigenous peoples have engaged with matter is vast, and concepts such as *pachamama* have been incorporated into environmental studies. On the concept of *pachamama*, see, for example, Asambleas del Feminismo Comunitario, “Pronunciamiento del feminismo comunitario latinoamericano en la Conferencia de los Pueblos sobre Cambio Climático,” *Biodiversidadla*, 6 May 2010, [https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/Pronunciamiento\\_del\\_Feminismo\\_Comunitario\\_latinoamericano\\_en\\_la\\_Conferencia\\_de\\_los\\_pueblos\\_sobre\\_Cambio\\_Climatico](https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/Pronunciamiento_del_Feminismo_Comunitario_latinoamericano_en_la_Conferencia_de_los_pueblos_sobre_Cambio_Climatico).

<sup>100</sup> On *cuerpo-territorio* as a concept and method, see further, for example, Sofia Zaragocin and Martina Angela Caretta, “*Cuerpo-Territorio: A Decolonial Feminist Geographical Method for the Study of Embodiment*,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 5 (2021).

<sup>101</sup> This materiality can be grasped, for example, in Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Body Counts on the Mexico-U.S. Border: Feminicidio, Reification, and the Theft of Mexicana Subjectivity,” *Chicana/Latina Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>102</sup> Zaragocin and Caretta, “*Cuerpo-Territorio*,” 1508.

rather [...] is articulated and re-synchronized through various material practices [...] *time itself* only makes sense in the context of particular phenomena” (emphasis in the original).<sup>103</sup> My aim here is not to develop Barad’s full argument, but rather, in the context of this discussion, to note how she suggests that time is not a stable or eternal property that is prior to an event or phenomenon; rather, time is constituted in intra-actions with space and matter.<sup>104</sup>

Time’s radical relationship with matter and space calls into question the idea of linear or progressive time. This has implications in, for example, how feminist waves have been traditionally conceived. According to new feminist materialists, feminist waves have been understood in a dialectical way, meaning that a new wave implies the negation or overcoming of the preceding waves or generations of feminist inquiry. Instead, new feminist materialism aims to work in a generative way, performing what Braidotti calls “transpositions” or doing what van der Tuin labels “jumping generations,” a term “for the bridging of ‘classes’ that were previously considered to be incommensurable, while being, in fact, part of a non-exhaustive dichotomy.”<sup>105</sup>

New feminist materialism traverses and dialogues with the previous waves or generations, thus avoiding Master narratives, phallic Mothers, or Oedipal structures. According to van der Tuin, Master narratives, in which the dialectic of the Hegelian Master-slave is reproduced, are common in the second wave of feminism; these narratives mean the confirmation by negation or subsumption of the philosophical Masters. Phallic Mothers refers to this same dialecticism, which seeks to embrace the competition of theories in order to have the right or power (*phallus*) of knowledge, or, in the Master-slave structure, to become the Master. Oedipal structures are also a dialecticism and are inspired by the Oedipal complex, which is impelled by competition and the sense of rivalry.<sup>106</sup>

The Quechua and Aymara languages in Bolivia share the word *pacha*, which expresses what could be translated as “time-space,” as in Barad’s agential realism.<sup>107</sup> However, the Quechua-Aymara formulation does not necessarily follow the same ontology and structure as Barad; the translation of *pacha* needs to be situated within Andean metaphysics to understand its *raison d’être*. Rivera Cusicanqui, for example, describes how present, past, and future are experienced by the Aymaran. Imagine a

<sup>103</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 66.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, the section “The Atom’s Queer Performativity” in Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 39–41.

<sup>105</sup> Iris van der Tuin, “‘Jumping Generations’: On Second- and Third-Wave Feminist Epistemology,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 59 (2009): 24.

<sup>106</sup> Van der Tuin, “Jumping Generations,” 20–22.

<sup>107</sup> See also Karl Swinehart, “Decolonial Time in Bolivia’s Pachakuti,” *Signs and Society* 7, no. 1 (2019).

person walking: her here and now, her “present,” is her body engaged in the act of walking-living; she has her past in front of her, as it is what she can see and what she is using to guide herself; and she is carrying the future on her back.<sup>108</sup> This notion of time, as Rivera Cusicanqui explains, is very different from the Western notion, which visualizes time as a line in which the past is situated behind us and the future in front of us—a linear notion that Barad is also calling into question.

There are different ways in which this nonlinear understanding of time plays a role in my dissertation. For example, the use of cartographies aims to provide non-exhaustive mappings of the emergence of concepts and debates, always with the awareness that these cartographies are partial and can be told otherwise. I also work on enabling conversations among different strands of feminism, generations of feminists, and diverse regions and languages (limited to my own skills), avoiding the perpetuation of Oedipal structures. Following the image described by Rivera Cusicanqui, my “past” experiences are my guiding lights in this journey. In some cases, I call them “contentious referents,” meaning “[t]he statement/s against which, consciously or not, one writes, and the identification of which is fruitful in the research process.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the time frame of the research itself has never been linear and progressive, as I describe in several parts of this text, and the further development of this time frame will remain dependent on the reader’s own interactions with it.

### 2.3.6 Subject-Object

The Cartesian dualism *res cogitans* / *res extensa*, which translates into the dualism of mind/body or of subject/object, has informed Western epistemology for centuries, not without being subject to diverse criticism by currents of thought such as postmodernism and feminism. Using the example of the earthquake that I described in section 2.1, the modernist/realist mode of knowledge makes the following correlation: there is an earthquake, an event that is clear and distinct, and the subject can come to know that event in an objective way. This way of knowing has

<sup>108</sup> Ana Cacopardo, “Historias debidas VIII: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui,” *Canal Encuentro*, video, 2017, <http://encuentro.gob.ar/programas/serie/8062/9467/#>, at 56:43. For an interesting analysis of the ways in which new materialism and decolonial theory concur on the idea of space-time, see Julia D. Eggleston, “Encountering Agency with Decolonial Thought, New Materialism, and *The Vegetarian*” (MA thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2019).

<sup>109</sup> In the original: “el/los planteamiento/s contra el/los que consciente o inconscientemente escribimos y cuya identificación es muy fructífera en un proceso de investigación/escritura.” Mari Luz Esteban, *Crítica del pensamiento amoroso* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2011), 16.

considered “things” that fall under the category of “object” to be passive and, to a certain degree, at the disposal of the “subject.” A postmodernist/social-constructivist approach, on the other hand, would question this perspective: the object is not at all passive and at the human’s disposal; however, the object (the earthquake, in this case) can only be accessed through the subjective human *representation*. Human subjectivity becomes a barrier or limitation to knowing the object in itself; in other words, the object, though it is understood as not passive, is subsumed to the effects of human practices such as the linguistic. New (feminist) materialism aims to traverse these two sides of the same coin, positivist objectivism and representationalism. Its starting point is the understanding of the various forms of “matter” (objects and bodies) as active agents that are not determined solely by human representationalism; it is in this way that new (feminist) materialism works to decenter the anthropocentrism in both ways of knowing.

Decolonial theorists (I am following the analysis of Maldonado-Torres, who refers to Enrique Dussel) describe the modern subject-object formulation as *ego conqueror / ego conquered*,<sup>110</sup> implying that this formulation laid the ground for diverse colonial dichotomies such as human/nonhuman, culture/nature, and mind/body. The conquered peoples were positioned in the role of the object, understood as incomplete humans, passive bodies, and subjects of exploitation.<sup>111</sup> In this modern idea, and I would say also in postmodernism to a certain extent, the conquering subject is a distinct individual and is self-reflexive, while the object is a clear and distinct entity which is external to the subject.

Quijano, for example, argues that the subject really exists, but it does not exist in isolation. Rather, it exists “as a differentiated, but not separated, part of an intersubjectivity,” and he goes on to argue that knowledge according to this perspective “is an *intersubjective relationship* concerning something, not a relationship between an isolated subjectivity, constituted in itself and before itself, and that something” (emphasis mine).<sup>112</sup> Black–Asian American feminist Margo Okazawa-Rey, when discussing the reenvisioning of the feminist self and how to work with others, follows a critique similar to Quijano’s: “there is no ‘I’ without ‘you’; [...] I am ‘I’ and you are ‘you,’ but the definition and the construction happen

<sup>110</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 244–245.

<sup>111</sup> As natural resources are. See also David Arnold, “‘Illusory Riches’: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840–1950,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>112</sup> Original: “Existe como parte diferenciada, mas no separada, de una intersubjetividad” / “El conocimiento, en esta perspectiva, es una relación intersubjetiva a propósito de algo, no una relación entre una subjetividad aislada, constituida en sí y ante sí, y ese algo.” Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad,” 15.



together.”<sup>113</sup> She then continues by making an interesting remark about how this relationship has been constructed in the global North: “It’s really interesting that in Western psychology, pathology is co-dependence, and in Eastern thought, pathology is when you become too separate from others, the collective.”<sup>114</sup> In her view, this relationality or connectiveness, as she calls it, is not to be confused with extractivism, “extracting ideas and resources from human beings or from the environment.” What she calls “true connectivity” allows us to “generate ideas, ways of doing, ways of being in the wider world.”<sup>115</sup>

I approach the object-subject dualism in different ways in my dissertation; for example, the line between my academic research and my activism has never been clear, as I describe later. Femi(ni)cide is not only my research subject but also the object of my political engagement, and because of this, my research is radically intertwined with my experiences among the academic and the activist communities. I read this relationality between academia and activism as a sort of intra-action in which the knowing researcher also becomes the subject of study by communities, and one does not have full control in these relationalities. The cases of femi(ni)cide that I have been studying throughout these years have shaped my everyday experience as well, from causing difficulty falling asleep to affecting my relationships with subjects identified as men; I see these experiences as becomings of both the knowing-known subject and the knowing subject-community.

Furthermore, I question the common practice of positioning global South epistemologies as “objects of study” (*res extensa / ego conquered*); rather, I adopt them to study the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide in Europe. In this research I have avoided reproducing the colonial focus on subjects that traditionally have been positioned as objects of research (the “others,” the “different from”). In my research, I try to think of options that go beyond the culturalization of violence and instead account for the diversity of forms of femi(ni)cide.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Margo Okazawa-Rey, “No Freedom without Connection,” in *Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Linda E. Carty (Chicago: Haymarket Publications, 2018), 28.

<sup>114</sup> Okazawa-Rey, “No Freedom without Connection,” 28.

<sup>115</sup> Okazawa-Rey, “No Freedom without Connection,” 29.

<sup>116</sup> “Culturalization of violence” is a practice engaged in by Western countries in which non-Western cultural aspects are overstated to explain violence. See Celeste Montoya and Lise Rolandsen Agustín, “The Othering of Domestic Violence: The EU and Cultural Framings of Violence against Women,” *Social Politics* 20, no. 4 (2013): 539.

### 2.3.7 Power/Creativity

Max Horkheimer—member of the Frankfurt school—introduced the term “critical theory” to differentiate his work from what he labeled “traditional theory,” meaning, in this instance, positivism. His critical theory sprang up as the negation of a prior theory, and as a critique rather than a form of idealism.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps that is why thinkers such as Braidotti argue that, for the Frankfurt school theorists, critique has a negative value: a dialecticism that new feminist materialism avoids.<sup>118</sup> In the case of Braidotti, she prefers to use the Deleuze-Guattarian affirmative and creative understanding of critique: “To criticize is only to establish that a concept vanishes when it is thrust into a new milieu, losing some of its components, or acquiring others that transform it.”<sup>119</sup> That is, critique is not a simple negation or dismissal of a concept; concepts are subject to critique, and this does not discredit their transformative and political potential.

But Horkheimer also understands critique as bound up with material conditions: social conditions are historical and contingent configurations of power. Critique, in this line, is more interested in identifying and describing the relational social conditions of societies. For example, Braidotti “combines critique with creativity, in a ‘double edged vision’ (Kelly 1979) that does not stop at critical deconstruction but moves on to the active production of alternatives.”<sup>120</sup> Manuel DeLanda describes this in a different way, saying that critique “is never enough. Marxism [as an example] is not going to go away simply by making a critique of it, we need to offer a viable alternative.”<sup>121</sup>

I connect this with Okazawa-Rey’s quest to engage in *wonderful thinking*, meaning that “it can’t just be struggle around issues; it also has to be a generative struggle around vision.”<sup>122</sup> Most epistemologies of the South share this double-edged movement of critique: these epistemologies not only focus on unveiling power structures in current societies, such as the colonial and patriarchal, but also propose alternatives (generative aspect) that spark movements in multiple directions.

<sup>117</sup> Rodrigo Jokisch, “La escuela de Frankfurt y la ‘teoría crítica’: Apuntes metodológicos,” *Acta Sociológica* 33 (2001): 3.

<sup>118</sup> Rosi Braidotti, “Thinking as Nomadic Subject,” *Institute for Cultural Inquiry*, video, 7 October 2011, <https://www.ici-berlin.org/event/620/>, at 47:40.

<sup>119</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 28.

<sup>120</sup> Cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 46.

<sup>122</sup> Okazawa-Rey, “No Freedom without Connection,” 29. Moreover, for Okazawa-Rey, “[e]ngaging in ‘wonderful thinking’ requires us first to create popular-education gatherings—intergenerational, multi-identities, cross-issue, across-sector—wherever we are located and, wherever possible, across geographies.” Okazawa-Rey, 32.

In this research, I follow this double movement of critique. I not only identify flaws but also participate actively in mobilizing alternatives, such as the creation of the femi(ni)cide database *Feminizidmap* (I will expand on this later). This understanding of critique also, in my understanding, touches the epistemological agent, the researcher. The transformation, as already mentioned, is not limited to the outside world if one assumes that the relationship between the self, the community, and material reality is ontologically entangled. I link this with Braidotti's Foucauldian reading of power, in which it is not enough to study and identify the restrictive and disciplinary force of power (*potestas*), but it is also necessary to consider its affirmative, productive, and empowering aspect (*potentia*).<sup>123</sup>

### 2.3.8 Transdisciplinarity

New (feminist) materialism moves “away from disciplines towards the meta-disciplinary.”<sup>124</sup> It questions approaches such as interdisciplinarity and similar tendencies that work in the field of “interactions” and thus assume preexisting bodies of study. Such an assumption implies that independent and well-defined disciplines come together and have conversations with each other, without their boundaries being affected. New (feminist) materialism “is not an epistemic class that has a clear referent”; rather, it is “something to be *put to work*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>125</sup> It works in intra-actions and by traversing disciplines; therefore, new (feminist) materialism is critically engaged in transforming the current discipline-driven structure of academia, and it “takes scholarship into absolute deterritorialization.”<sup>126</sup>

In an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach, one tends to bring together various disciplines to address a given subject; the participants interacting usually speak from the perspective of their own discipline and therefore expect to make their contribution from that place. In this approach, despite the rich and probably challenging conversations, the disciplinary frameworks of the researchers remain the same. Working with new (feminist) materialism implies, among other things, that ways of addressing a problem emerge from intra-actions rather than interactions, and, for the researcher, this implies moments of defamiliarization and transformation in relation to their given discipline. We all have habits, since most of us have been trained in particular disciplines, but these habits do not always need to remain the same.

<sup>123</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 105.

<sup>125</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 103.

<sup>126</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 103.

Decolonial feminist scholars are also trained in particular academic disciplines. However, they are not necessarily constrained by the methods of their disciplines; they practice radical self-reflexivity, and more importantly, their political activism and struggles are their driving force. Academic work makes sense insofar as it contributes to social transformation; however, decolonial feminists recognize the site of privilege and power (*potestas*) that universities constitute and are well aware of the role that researchers have in these spaces of knowledge production.<sup>127</sup>

In my study of femi(ni)cide, I started by formulating the research questions and then I identified possible ways to address them. I did not design the research based on disciplinary methodologies or methods; instead, I made decisions based on theories, methodologies, and practices that I considered useful to try to answer my queries (of course, my education and lived experience informed these decisions, but the clear and distinct structure of a discipline did not). This research may be situated on the thresholds of disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, law, and political sciences; but these thresholds are neither definite nor clear and distinct. Not fully belonging to any discipline has had several impacts on me: for example, when I submitted articles to journals, for some the texts were not theoretical enough, while for others they were too theoretical or lacked empirical material. The same as with the sex/gender dichotomy, disciplines exist and we navigate our academic careers based on them, but some of us aim to work through them, to traverse them, to bridge diverse knowledges, with the desire to transform the becoming of future academia. In the process, we are also invited to transform ourselves.

## 2.4 Decolonizing New (Feminist) Materialism and Epistemologies of the South

Although both new (feminist) materialism and epistemologies of the South have similarities, there are two points in relation to their similarities that I want to focus on. The first has to do with the greater popularity of new (feminist) materialism compared to epistemologies of the South. The second picks up on a phenomenon that Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt have identified: a limited dialogue between these two movements.<sup>128</sup> Why is new (feminist) materialism

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*; Cacopardo, “Historias debidas”; Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*; and Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia U. Rutazibwa, eds., *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>128</sup> Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt, “The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-colonial Engagement,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 3–4 (2019): 332.

gaining more interest than epistemologies of the South? Note that I am not implying that it should be the other way around, in a dialectical way; rather, this is a rhetorical question that allows me to make visible an aspect that I think we, as researchers working with these theories, need to explore. One aspect relevant to the popularity of new (feminist) materialism is its location of emergence: academia in the temperate global North. Places of enunciation matter, generating positions and relations of power (*potestas*). Whether we like it or not, coloniality continues to inform our decisions regarding whom we establish conversations with, or not, and where we look for our theories.

This influences the second point: that the limited conversations might be informed by the persistent assumption in academia “that Indigenous studies scholarship is primitive, less rigorous, less theoretically refined, simplistically concerned with identity politics, and so on.”<sup>129</sup> This assumption can also “frame people’s encounters with the literature before they read it or even pre-empt such reading.”<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Indigenous studies done by Indigenous researchers, or work based on epistemologies genuinely rooted in the South, tend to be done by people who have a harder time accessing academia and its resources, often having to fight to gain a foothold in the system. For this reason, it is necessary that scholars working with new (feminist) materialism or epistemologies of the South identify and avoid practices of erasure and extractivism—that is, that they not become “agents of displacement.”<sup>131</sup> It is necessary to engage in conversations with the diversity of epistemologies of the South, generate practices of companionship, and enable radical imagination.<sup>132</sup>

However, mainstreaming new materialism can not only lead to the eclipsing of other theories, such as Indigenous knowledges, that offer important insights into materiality but also lead to the omission of theories that are an essential part of it, such as the feminist theories that make up new feminist materialism. New feminist materialism is at the root of new materialism, yet even so, it is ignored by the latter; on many occasions, new feminist materialism is pushed to the margins, thus limiting engaged conversations.

So, it is important to address these epistemologies, new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South, with responsibility and avoid contributing to their depoliticization as they become more mainstream. This is especially important for

<sup>129</sup> Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, “New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories,” 333. See also Arnold, “Illusory Riches,” 13.

<sup>130</sup> Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, “New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories,” 333.

<sup>131</sup> Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, 334.

<sup>132</sup> See also Sophie Chao and Dion Enari, “Decolonising Climate Change: A Call for Beyond-Human Imaginaries and Knowledge Generation,” *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 20, no. 2 (2021): 44–46.

those of us who work in academic environments and participate in the production and circulation of knowledge, simply because academia continues to be a space of power and validation of knowledge. In particular, epistemologies of the South have emerged in the context of specific struggles that demand from us an ethical and political accountability; their *raison d'être* should not be erased or distorted.

We should hear, for example, the calls by Black theorists to be aware of how white scholars have appropriated and benefited from their work on race. In the chapter “Holding My Sister’s Hand” in her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks describes how white women have benefited from the experiences and theorizing of Black women and women of color to gain space in the academy, but without genuinely engaging in critical analysis of whiteness and its complicity in unequal structures of power.<sup>133</sup> Although hooks was making these claims decades ago, this scenario has not changed significantly. Rivera Cusicanqui makes a similar claim when she questions the ways in which some decolonial theorists appropriate the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous thinkers to produce “their” theories and thus advance their own academic careers. Some terms have emerged to name these practices, such as methodological extractivism,<sup>134</sup> cognitive extractivism,<sup>135</sup> and epistemic extractivism.<sup>136</sup> All of this should be kept in mind as we study how femi(ni)cide has been theorized, dealt with, and fought against (or not) in Europe.

<sup>133</sup> See “Holding My Sister’s Hand,” in hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

<sup>134</sup> Santos, *End of the Cognitive Empire*.

<sup>135</sup> Leanne Simpson in Naomi Klein, “Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More’s Leanne Simpson,” *Yes!*, 6 March 2013, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2013/03/06/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson>.

<sup>136</sup> Grosfoguel, “Del ‘extractivismo económico’ al ‘extractivismo epistémico.’”

### 3 State of the Field

Only in recent decades has violence against women and girls been made visible on an international scale and considered to be a violation of women's human rights,<sup>137</sup> and only recently has masculine violence not been seen either as something natural or as the product of individual anomalies (the act of insane people and psychopaths). It is not always true that if something does not have a name it does not exist. It has been said, for instance, that femi(ni)cide is a new word for an old barbarism.<sup>138</sup> But the fact that women and girls throughout history have been killed by men because they are women does not imply that those killings were always considered a form of brutality. In this sense, labeling these crimes as femi(ni)cide is important to make them visible and to try to comprehend the problem, while conceptualizing them as femi(ni)cide is a political activity that enables the creation of possible futures without those crimes.<sup>139</sup> Working in this line, Diana Russell, who originally theorized "femicide," records some earlier historic uses of the word "femicide" before her theorizations.<sup>140</sup> In the 1801 literary piece *A Satirical View of London*, "femicide" was used to describe "the killing of a woman."<sup>141</sup> In the early nineteenth-century nonfictional text *The Confessions of an Unexecuted Femicide*, the perpetrator William MacNish narrates his murder of Mary Elliston, an orphan who was pregnant with his child.<sup>142</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, *Wharton's Law Lexicon* included "femicide" as "the killing of a woman."<sup>143</sup> This last example is of special

<sup>137</sup> Throughout this dissertation, when I use the term "women," it should be understood as including girls as well.

<sup>138</sup> See Radford's introduction to part 1, "Femicide Is as Old as Patriarchy," in Jill Radford and Diana Russell, eds., *Feminicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 25.

<sup>139</sup> For concepts as political, see, for example, Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*; Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2011).

<sup>140</sup> Russell, "Defining Femicide," 13.

<sup>141</sup> John Corry, *A Satirical View of London at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century* (London/Edinburgh, 1801), 60.

<sup>142</sup> William MacNish, *The Confessions of an Unexecuted Femicide*, 4th ed. (Glasgow, 1827).

<sup>143</sup> J. J. Smith Wharton, *The Law Lexicon or Dictionary of Jurisprudence* (London, 1848), 251.

interest because Wharton, on the first page of his dictionary, states that he is “explaining all the technical words and phrases employed in the several departments of English law”;<sup>144</sup> no wonder Russell suspects it might have been a punishable offense. If so, this might be the first documented use of femicide as a legal category.<sup>145</sup>

However, Russell recalls that she first heard the word “femicide” in 1974 from an English friend, who told her that the American writer Carol Orlock was planning to title an anthology with that word. The anthology never came out, and Russell never knew in what sense this word would have been used. Nevertheless, she introduced the word in the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women (Brussels, 1976) without defining it, though it was understood to refer to a hate killing perpetrated by men against females.<sup>146</sup> It was only in 1990 that she, together with Jane Caputi, defined femicide as “the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women.”<sup>147</sup> Russell had worked for many years on violence against women, particularly rape in the US and South Africa. Meanwhile, Jill Radford, based in England, also worked for many years on male violence. In 1980 she joined the Winchester Women’s Liberation Group, which was engaged in fighting against male violence, especially in the UK. One year later, a member of the group, her friend Mary Bristow, was murdered by her ex-partner; his “motive” was Mary’s refusal to return to a relationship with him. This situation convinced Radford that the killing of her friend and those of other women in similar situations were not common homicides but the result of a system of male violence. She moved to London to work with Women against Violence against Women, where she met Russell, and the two started working together on the first anthology on femicide, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*.

In this landmark anthology, Russell questioned the opinion that rape was the ultimate form of sexual violence; for her, the most extreme form of gender violence was femicide.<sup>148</sup> And Radford framed femicide as a form of sexual violence and defined it as “the misogynist killing of women by men.”<sup>149</sup> Russell and Radford formulated the concept of femicide to give a name to a gendered phenomenon of killing, thus avoiding the gender neutrality of the term “homicide.” This concept is not meant to simply differentiate killings by the sex of the victims, but to name a crime based in a gender power structure. Russell, in subsequent years, would develop

<sup>144</sup> Wharton, *Law Lexicon*, i.

<sup>145</sup> Russell, “Defining Femicide,” 13.

<sup>146</sup> Diana Russell and Nicole Van de Ven, eds., *Crimes Against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal* (Berkeley: Russell Publications, 1990), 161.

<sup>147</sup> Russell and Caputi, “Femicide,” 34.

<sup>148</sup> Jill Radford and Diana Russell, “Preface,” in Radford and Russell, *Femicide*, xiv.

<sup>149</sup> Radford, “Introduction,” 3.



different definitions of “femicide”; nowadays we cannot say that there is a single agreed-upon definition of this crime, although calls to settle on a single definition have been made by many feminists and researchers in the field of violence against women and girls.

For many years the concept of femicide had less impact in the countries where it emerged than it did in Latin America and the Caribbean. Marcela Lagarde introduced this concept to Mexican academia—and into the Latin American and Caribbean panorama—in 1994, transforming it into Spanish as *feminicidio* (feminicide). Her formulation highlights the *femininus*<sup>150</sup> element that is crucial to understanding why all feminicides are killings of women but not all killings of women are feminicides: that is to say, not all killings of women and girls are motivated by the construction of sex and gender relationships. Lagarde also introduced in her definition of femicide the *responsibility of states*—which has been very much questioned by authors such as Russell, as I will address later—and the *tolerance of society*.<sup>151</sup>

Given that Lagarde’s definition includes the State’s responsibility, some people in Spanish-speaking areas prefer to use Russell’s term “femicide” (*femicidio*), while those who agree with Lagarde’s contributions are more likely to use “feminicide” (*feminicidio*). Not all theorists and activists working on femi(ni)cide, however, are embedded in these debates, so they might use these terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, the choice of terms has generated a heated debate among some theorists and activists in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>152</sup> This has occasionally led to a breakdown of networks; for example, Russell recounts that in 2008 she attended a conference in El Salvador on femicide, later realizing that users of the term *femicidio* had not been invited.<sup>153</sup> The choice of terms remains contested not only in the Spanish-language arena. Therefore, I have proposed using the form “femi(ni)cide,” partly because it has more “economy of language” or “practicality” than the more unwieldy “femicide/feminicide.” Above all, I find it important to unite the two terms because, following new feminist materialism, I support the cause of

<sup>150</sup> For the discussion of the *femininus*, see Aleida Luján Pinelo, “A Theoretical Approach to the Concept of Femi(ni)cide,” *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>151</sup> Marcela Lagarde, “Antropología, feminismo y política: Violencia feminicida y derechos humanos de las mujeres,” in *Retos teóricos y nuevas prácticas*, ed. Margaret Bullen and Carmen Diez Mintegui (Donostia: Ankulegi Antropologia Elkarte, 2008).

<sup>152</sup> Patsilí Toledo Vásquez, *Feminicidio* (Mexico City: Oficina en México del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, 2009), 28.

<sup>153</sup> See Diana Russell, “The Origin & Importance of the Term Femicide,” *Diana E. H. Russell*, *Ph.D.* (website), December 2011, [https://www.dianarussell.com/origin\\_of\\_femicide.html](https://www.dianarussell.com/origin_of_femicide.html). This example illustrates the dialecticism that new feminist materialism criticizes, because it generates competition and leaves out other perspectives. See van der Tuin, “Jumping Generations,” 20–22.

enabling conversations among different authors, and avoiding conceptual hierarchies or the appearance of supporting one side in a power war, which could block communication, as Russell's anecdote illustrates.<sup>154</sup> My formulation of "femi(ni)cide" should be understood as the merging of femicide, as developed by Russell, and feminicide, as reconceptualized by Lagarde and others. The framing of "femi(ni)cide" is used in this sense throughout this manuscript and in related articles, unless otherwise specified.<sup>155</sup>

The article "Femi(ni)cide: A cartography" offers a mapping of the situation of this concept and category in the global context and then focuses on Europe, so I will not expand more on that here. However, the situation in Germany is not developed at length in that article, so I will unpack the situation in Germany in the following section, with the remark that I am focusing on explicit uses of the concept of femi(ni)cide as such. Much of the information I use is the result of autoethnographic work—firsthand information originating from my own encounters and participation in events—and of written texts of diverse nature: the literature on the shaping of movements and politicization of femi(ni)cide in Germany is still developing.

Before jumping into the state of the field in Germany, want to raise one more point. In "Femi(ni)cide: A cartography," I argue that the emergence of the concept of femi(ni)cide in Latin America and the Caribbean illustrates the ontological entanglement (intra-actions) among several realms such as activism, law, academia, and politics; the same, I argue, can be observed in Europe. Therefore, even if I do not delve more deeply into the analysis of these intra-actions, they need to be considered while reading and trying to make sense of the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide—in, for example, the configuration of the debates, the responses to femi(ni)cide by the State and society, and the narratives that are emerging from these intra-actions.

<sup>154</sup> Russell, for example, has pointed out that she became "distressed when the term feminicide is used rather than femicide." Russell, "Origin & Importance."

<sup>155</sup> I started using the widespread form "femicide/feminicide" in my writings in 2014. Soon after, I started to explore the option "femi-ni-cide," but after some discussions with my editor, I ended up with the formulation "femi(ni)cide." Similar proposals have been made, for example, by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, which introduced "fem[in]icide" in their 2019 report on data. CFOJA (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability), *#CallItFemicide: Understanding Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls in Canada 2019* (2019), 15.

### 3.1 State of the Field—Femi(ni)cide in Germany

In Autumn 2017, the collective *#keinmehr* (not one less)—this motto derives directly from the *ni una menos* movement in Argentina<sup>156</sup>—was established by Alex Wischnewski and Marlene Pardeller. Based in Berlin, the initiative had the goal of introducing the subject of femi(ni)cide into the social domain, bringing awareness of the problem to Germany, stimulating networks, and ultimately spurring social and political action.<sup>157</sup> That same year, in cooperation with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation,<sup>158</sup> the group organized a conference on “femicide” in Germany (probably the first one of its kind). In June 2019 they organized a second event that aimed to build networks and knowledge: “Expert day: Let’s Talk about Femicides! Sharing and Networking Knowledge.”<sup>159</sup> Later on, in 2020, organizers of these events published the booklet “Femicide in Germany,” possibly the first publication on femi(ni)cide specifically dealing with Germany.<sup>160</sup> A collective named *#keinmehr* also emerged in Leipzig in April 2020; among other things, they document cases of femi(ni)cide occurring in Leipzig. Although connected to the group of the same name in Berlin, they are an independent collective.<sup>161</sup> A year later, in 2021, *#keinmehr Halle (Saale)* was established to do research on “femicide” in the region of Saxony-Anhalt.<sup>162</sup> The work of these groups is strongly influenced by and in dialogue with the experiences and knowledge produced in Latin America and the Caribbean related to femi(ni)cide; although their focus is mostly political and activist, they are also contributing to the production of knowledge relevant in academic settings.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>156</sup> The original slogan is “Ni una menos, ni una muerta más” (Not one less, not one more woman dead). It belongs to the Mexican poet and activist Susana Chávez Castillo, who was active in the movement seeking to shed light on the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez, and whose body was found on December 6, 2001. See Minutouno, “#NiUnaMenos: ¿Quién fue la autora de la consigna que une a miles contra la violencia de género?,” *Minutouno*, 3 June 2015, <https://www.minutouno.com/sociedad/niunamenos/quien-fue-la-autora-la-consigna-que-une-miles-contra-la-violencia-genero-n365815>. This motto was frequently used among many activist groups in Mexico, and it became used worldwide, especially once the activist movement in Argentina adopted it in 2015.

<sup>157</sup> See Merle Dyroff, Marlene Pardeller, and Alex Wischnewski, *#keinmehr – Femizid in Deutschland* (Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2020); and the group’s most recent webpage: <https://keinmehr.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>158</sup> Affiliated with the political party Die Linke (The Left).

<sup>159</sup> In the original: “Fachtag: Let’s talk about femicides! Wissen teilen und vernetzen.”

<sup>160</sup> Dyroff, Pardeller, and Wischnewski, *#keinmehr*.

<sup>161</sup> See “Über uns” (About us) at <https://keinmehrleipzig.noblogs.org/>.

<sup>162</sup> See “Über uns” (About us) at <https://keinmehrhalle.blackblogs.org/uber-uns/>.

<sup>163</sup> To read about the emergence of the *#keinmehr* movement in Germany, see, for example, Elisabeth Winterer, “#keinmehr – Bewegungen gegen den Femi(ni)zid Zur

There is previous research in Germany on the killing of women by men within the context of intimate relationships, but without using the framework of femi(ni)cide.<sup>164</sup> One scarce example of research that does use the framework of femi(ni)cide is Luise Greuel's 2009 report "Escalation of Violence in Intimate Relationships."<sup>165</sup> That study is an analysis of characteristics of and factors influencing intimate partner conflicts that result in "homicides" in Germany. It works with criminal data and refers to "femicide," using US literature on the subject. In 2015 Sabine Maier published a study of two cases of "bi-national feminicides" (Germany–Latin America) using an intersectional framework.<sup>166</sup> Julia Habermann is doing doctoral research on male homicide offenders under adult criminal law in Germany for the years 2015–2017, using the framework of femicide (which in her usage refers to intimate femicide).<sup>167</sup> In 2021 Hannah Beeck delivered her master's thesis on media framing of femi(ni)cide in Germany, using data from 2019.<sup>168</sup> In 2022, the Institute of Criminology at the University of Tübingen started a research project called "Femicides in Germany – An empirical-criminological study on the killing of women."<sup>169</sup> In 2019, the German Women Lawyers Association (DJB)<sup>170</sup> published the paper "Femicides in Germany: Prosecution and Appropriate

transnationalen Dimension der Bewegungen #NiUnaMenos bis #keinemehr und Femi(ni)ziden in Deutschland" (BA thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 2020).

<sup>164</sup> For example: Dagmar Oberlies, "Der Versuch, das Ungleiche zu vergleichen: Tötungsdelikte zwischen Männern und Frauen und die rechtliche Reaktion," *Kritische Justiz* 23, no. 3 (1990); Dagmar Oberlies, *Tötungsdelikte zwischen Männern und Frauen: Eine Untersuchung geschlechtsspezifischer Unterschiede aus dem Blickwinkel gerichtlicher Rekonstruktionen* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995); Ulrike Lembke and Monika Frommel, "Das Recht des Stärkeren: Zur schwierigen dogmatischen Beziehung von Heimtückemord, Trennungstötung und Gewaltschutzgesetz," *Neue Kriminalpolitik* 21, no. 3 (2009); Lena Foljanty and Ulrike Lembke, "Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der 'Ehrenmord' – Rechtsprechung," *Kritische Justiz* 47, no. 3 (2014); Andrea Sieverding, "Tödlich endende Partnerschaftskonflikte Eine Analyse von Tötungsdelikten an Frauen durch ihre (ehemaligen) Partner," *Polizei & Wissenschaft* 3 (2008).

<sup>165</sup> This report was commissioned by the State Criminal Police Office of North Rhine–Westphalia. Luise Greuel, *Forschungsprojekt "Gewalteskalation in Paarbeziehungen"* (Bremen: Institut für Polizei und Sicherheitsforschung, 2009).

<sup>166</sup> Maier, "¿La mató sólo por el hecho de ser mujer?"

<sup>167</sup> See Julia Habermann, "Projektbeschreibung: Die Sanktionierung von Partnerinnentötungen im Vergleich zu anderen Tötungsdelikten" (Doctoral project description, Ruhr University Bochum, 2021), [https://www.kriminologie.rub.de/images/pdf/habermann\\_julia\\_projektbeschreibung.pdf](https://www.kriminologie.rub.de/images/pdf/habermann_julia_projektbeschreibung.pdf).

<sup>168</sup> Beeck, "Mediales Framing von Femi(ni)ziden."

<sup>169</sup> In the original: "Femizide in Deutschland – Eine empirisch-kriminologische Untersuchung zur Tötung an Frauen." See the project description at <https://kfn.de/forschungsprojekte/femizide-in-deutschland/>.

<sup>170</sup> Der Deutsche Juristinnenbund e. V.

Punishment of So-Called Separation Killings.”<sup>171</sup> They also organized roundtables such as the 2020 event “When Men Kill Women – On the Phenomenon of Femicide in Germany.”<sup>172</sup> In 2021 Inga Schuchman and Leonie Steinl published an article in which they speak about “femicides” in the form of separation-related killings and the criminological discussion in Germany.<sup>173</sup> Derived from the COST-Action IS1206 “Femicide across Europe” (2013–2017), the European Observatory on Femicide was established in 2017;<sup>174</sup> Prof. Dr. Monika Schröttle is in charge of setting up the database for Germany. A comparative report on research and data on “femicide” in Germany, Malta, Cyprus, Portugal, and Spain was published in 2021.<sup>175</sup> These are non-exhaustive examples, but they help me to illustrate the relatively recent increase in interest in femi(ni)cide defined as such occurring in Germany.

Several projects on femi(ni)cide informed by the debates held in Latin America and the Caribbean have emerged since 2018—for example, #KeineMehr Wiki, a project to document violence against women between 2016 and 2020, including cases that fall under the framework of femi(ni)cide.<sup>176</sup> AK Feministische Geographien Frankfurt<sup>177</sup> documented cases of femi(ni)cide occurring in the region of Hessen in 2018.<sup>178</sup> The Netzwerk gegen Feminizide<sup>179</sup> was established in 2020 in Berlin; they work on building a network against “feminicide” that is transnational, antiracist, and anticolonial. The database Feminizidmap documenting femi(ni)cides occurring in Germany since 2019 was established in 2018.<sup>180</sup> Other projects exist that are not necessarily informed by the experience and knowledge of Latin America and the Caribbean: for example, One Million Rising Deutschland, which started

<sup>171</sup> Deutsche Juristinnenbund, “Femiziden in Deutschland: Strafverfolgung und angemessene Bestrafung von sogenannten Trennungstötungen,” *Themenpapier* 19–24 (2019), <https://www.djb.de/presse/stellungnahmen/detail/st19-24>.

<sup>172</sup> In the original: “Wenn Männer Frauen töten – zum Phänomen des Femizids in Deutschland.” See the event information at <https://www.djb.de/termine/details/v200113>.

<sup>173</sup> Inga Schuchman and Leonie Steinl, “Femizide – Zur strafrechtlichen Bewertung von trennungsbedingten Tötungsdelikten an Intimpartnerinnen,” *Kritische Justiz* 54, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>174</sup> Shalva Weil, Marceline Naudi, and Consuelo Corradi, eds., *Femicide across Europe* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 168–169.

<sup>175</sup> Monika Schröttle et al., *Comparative Report on Femicide Research and Data in Five Countries (Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Spain)* (FEM-UnitED Project, 2021).

<sup>176</sup> The project ran from 2020 to 2021. Its website can still be accessed using the Wayback Machine: <https://keine-mehr.de/dokuwiki/>.

<sup>177</sup> The Feminist Geographies Working Group.

<sup>178</sup> See <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d5f0ca7d7436478a8883a00993b183e2>.

<sup>179</sup> Network against Feminicide. See

<https://wirwollenunslebend.wixsite.com/netzwerkgnfeminizid>.

<sup>180</sup> See <https://feminizidmap.org/>. I am co-founder of this project, a subject I will come to later.

registering “femicides” occurring in German territory since 2019.<sup>181</sup> In 2019, Kristina Wolff initiated the Change.org campaign “Stop killing women #saveXX”<sup>182</sup> to include “femicide” as a criminal category in German law, and according to her website, in the same year she started the Femicide Observation Center Germany to document “femicides” in German territory.<sup>183</sup>

The first newspaper article using the word “femicide” with respect to the problem in Germany was published in 2018, and since then more articles on the issue have been published in different media venues, including the mainstream newspapers the *Tageszeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Der Spiegel*, and non-mainstream newspapers such as *Stern*. The organization Gender Equality Media has been running the “Media Screening” project since October 2019, in which, among other things, they make visible the way in which German media downplays the reporting of “femicides.”<sup>184</sup> Radio channels and podcasts have also covered the subject, such as Radio Corax, Lila Podcast, and Deutschlandfunk. Documentary channels such as Deutsche Welle and Norddeutschen Rundfunks have also reported on the problem of “femicide” in Germany. Some books have also been published in the last two years on the subject, such as *Alle drei Tage: Warum Männer Frauen töten und was wir dagegen tun müssen* (Every three days: Why men kill women and what we must do about it);<sup>185</sup> *Femizide: Frauenmorde in Deutschland* (Femicides: The killing of women in Germany);<sup>186</sup> *Geschlechterspezifische Gewalt und Femizid* (Gender-based violence and femicide);<sup>187</sup> and *Tötungen von Frauen in Deutschland: Eine Analyse des Phänomens “Femizid” unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der*

<sup>181</sup> This group began by registering only intimate “femicides,” but now they seem to have broadened their scope to include other types. See <http://www.onebillionrising.de/>.

<sup>182</sup> In the original: “Stoppt das Töten von Frauen #saveXX.”

<sup>183</sup> See <https://kristina-wolff.de/>. While I was doing the literature review, I did not find this information available. I became aware of the existence of this project through the Change.org campaign to criminalize “femicide” in Germany in May 2020, when I signed the petition. Later, in August 2020, a colleague from *Feminizidmap* and I held a Zoom conversation with Wolff, and only then did we find out about her database project. Her web page was published later.

<sup>184</sup> See their “Media screening” project here: <https://genderequalitymedia.org/portfolio/gewalt-ist-keine-sprache-unser-medienscreening/>. One of their posts, from 2019, can be seen here: <https://genderequalitymedia.org/nachgezählt/>.

<sup>185</sup> Laura Backes and Margherita Bettoni, *Alle drei Tage: Warum Männer Frauen töten und was wir dagegen tun müssen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2021).

<sup>186</sup> Julia Cruschwitz and Carolin Haentjes, *Femizide: Frauenmorde in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel Verlag, 2021).

<sup>187</sup> Oliver Michaelis, *Geschlechterspezifische Gewalt und Femizid* (Düsseldorf: Grin, 2021).

*Opfermerkmale* (Killings of women in Germany: An analysis of the phenomenon of “femicide” with special consideration of the characteristics of the victims).<sup>188</sup>

Since August 2018, ten minor interpellations using the paradigm of femi(ni)cide have been posed to the German government at different levels and by different political parties, mostly from the left and center of the political spectrum. So far, three motions have been presented at regional levels in relation to femi(ni)cide, all by the parliamentary group of Die Linke. In 2020 Germany delivered the State Baseline Report (SBR) to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), and eight shadow reports were elaborated in response to the SBR, some of them explicitly addressing the issue of femi(ni)cide. I delve into these documents in my article “On extreme forms of violence against women in Europe – Does femi(ni)cide exist in Germany?” To conclude this section, I want to mention the 2022 draft law on femi(ni)cide which is being prepared and discussed; it will be interesting to see in what terms this law is elaborated. Not only will it be important to analyze the outcome of this proposal, but most significant, for me, will be the discussions that this draft law activates.

## 3.2 Mapping Femi(ni)cide in Germany

If 120 out of a total of 40 million women are killed by their husbands every year, one cannot say that this is a typical consequence of the social structure. That is downright absurd.<sup>189</sup>

Hans-Ludwig Kröber

As stated above, I was convinced from the start that femi(ni)cide occurs in Germany, although it was not recognized as such by the government. In my view, the failure to recognize it was a matter of naming, and, partially, of interpretation of definitions—but, if analyzed in a structural manner, colonial thinking was also playing a role. One of my aims, then, was to contest the German government’s argument before the UNODC about the nonexistence of femi(ni)cide in its territory by showing data, and at the same time by mapping the different types of femi(ni)cides occurring in German

<sup>188</sup> Sonja Delévièuse, *Tötungen von Frauen in Deutschland: Eine Analyse des Phänomens “Femizid” unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Opfermerkmale* (Essen: Vossenkühl Scriptorum Verlag, 2022).

<sup>189</sup> In the original: “Wenn 120 von insgesamt 40 Millionen Frauen im Jahr von ihren Männern getötet werden, kann man nicht sagen, dass das eine typische Folge der Sozialstruktur ist. Das ist geradezu absurd.” Katja Fühse, “Warum töten Männer ihre Frauen? ‘Mitleid mit dem Ex ist fatal,’” *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 November 2020, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/warum-toeten-maenner-ihre-frauen-mitleid-mit-dem-ex-ist-fatal/26621506.html>.

territory, thus potentially contributing to policy proposals, activist projects, and the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). To do so, I planned to document and analyze data on killings of women that could fall within the scope of femi(ni)cide during the years 2018–2020. The data sources I considered analyzing were statistics from the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) on homicides and murders of women; online police reports; legal cases; and case reports in newspapers.

To document the cases, I adapted *Feminicidio.net*'s Excel database.<sup>190</sup> In 2017 I presented my idea of working on this database in a hackspace for women in Berlin, "Heart of Code," where I met Lisa Passing, a developer who offered to help me develop an online version of the database that would facilitate my data documentation. Soon I learned a crucial lesson: my contact with the German police mentioned that the BKA information is confidential, which made me realize that my access to the BKA statistics would be limited and would represent a long-term endeavor. It is understandable that accessing sensitive data is not a straightforward step. One of the possibilities I weighed was doing an internship with the BKA: I thought this might be a good way to allow them to get to know me and me to get to know them. I directly contacted the BKA and mentioned the sort of questions I was interested in getting answers to, such as how the BKA database works and what their methodology is. The BKA informed me about the internships they offer, which are diverse but generally connected to programs that require a mandatory internship, and the minimum waiting time to receive an answer about being accepted is six months. So I ended up discarding the idea.

Another source of information I considered was the daily police reports. But these reports are not centralized, meaning that if I wanted to use them as sources, I would have to look at all regional police web pages to identify cases that might be related to femi(ni)cides. Furthermore, the reports give minimal information, since usually they deliver the initial information about a case when it is first communicated; it takes more time to confirm data or add more data to the case. I discarded this possibility as well. My third option for data sources was legal cases, but this too turned out to be more complex than I originally thought. The federal organization of Germany and the autonomy of each state has served as an argument for the lack of a federal database of legal cases—only the cases that arrive to the Supreme Court of Justice are accessible through a federal data bank. Most femi(ni)cide cases fall under the jurisdiction of state courts. It seems that this situation might change in the near future, but so far such a change has not materialized.

<sup>190</sup> I collaborated with *Feminicidio.net* from 2011 until 2021, and I had discussed this project with that project's founder, Graciela Atencio.



Julia Habermann, who has been doing research on male homicide offenders under adult criminal law in Germany for the years 2015–2017, shared with me her experience of case gathering and mentioned that the process of collecting information was time-consuming because she had to contact each state’s district court and public prosecutor’s offices. Sabine Maier, who in 2013 published an article based on two cases of “bi-national” femi(ni)cides, also shared with me that she experienced limitations accessing some cases due to not being a PhD candidate (at the time she was a master’s student). In this scenario, legal cases as main sources seemed to me—as an individual researcher who was not German, not based in Germany, not enrolled in a German university, and who had time limitations—not to be a feasible option. It is possible to access some cases through the private company Juris.de—at a price, of course—but, while it seems that the University of Turku once had a subscription to this service, it does not anymore. For all these reasons, I decided to narrow my sources to newspapers alone—several projects worldwide have worked with newspapers as their main source of information, and publications derived from this type of source have been published.<sup>191</sup>

But the access to data on femi(ni)cide is a problem not only for research but also for activism and policy making; it is a problem that has been pointed out by civil society and activists in other regions as well. As a response to the lack of data on femi(ni)cides, different projects worldwide have been emerging since the ’90s. For example, Julia Monárrez was the first researcher to develop a systematic geo-referential database on “femicide” intended to help identify areas of risk.<sup>192</sup> After that first endeavor, other projects have started to emerge in other regions, including Femicidio.net, which was launched in November 2010.<sup>193</sup> Femicidio.net is a project to document femi(ni)cides in Spain that was conceived and initiated by the

<sup>191</sup> See, for example, Collectif Féminicides Par Compagnons ou Ex et al., “Femicide Data Activism,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Femicide*, ed. Myrna Dawson and Saide Mobayed. New York: Routledge, forthcoming.

<sup>192</sup> Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, “Ciudad Juárez: Moderna necrópolis,” interview by Graciela Atencio, Femicidio.net, 21 December 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrv04d3pDOI>. Her database, “Femicide,” contains cases from 1993 to 2004, based on the list of cases provided by Esther Chávez Cano. Its primary source of information was newspaper articles, but it also included information from interviews. See also Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, *Trama de una injusticia: Femicidio sexual sistémico en Ciudad Juárez* (Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2009), 90–91.

<sup>193</sup> See their website here: <https://femicidio.net/>. The construction of the project and the database took around two years, according to a personal conversation with Graciela Atencio.

Argentinian journalist and activist Graciela Atencio.<sup>194</sup> Geofeminicidio is the name of the online application for quantitative and qualitative documentation of “feminicides.”<sup>195</sup> This database registers various types of feminicides, not limited to intimate femi(ni)cide, and other killings of women by men.<sup>196</sup>

In 2011 I started to collaborate with Feminicidio.net. Given my familiarity with this project, and as a result of several discussions with Atencio about the situation I was observing in Germany, she suggested that I start a similar project for Germany. This idea started to materialize when I began my doctoral research in 2018 and when Lisa (the developer) and I formally agreed to work together. For obvious reasons, this turn of events would become relevant to the development of my research, and it would turn femi(ni)cide in Germany into not only my research subject but also the topic of my activism, thus traversing both my work time and my free time.<sup>197</sup> Several times this situation put me at a critical juncture: Where to draw the lines between my research and my activist work? This condition helped me to personally experience one of the central claims of new feminist materialism, without having planned it: knowledge is political and emerges in a complex web of intra-actions, thus traversing diverse areas such as academia and activism. In the words of the Nasa people, “The word without action is empty. Action without word is blind.”<sup>198</sup>

In late 2018 Lisa, Sabine Maier, and I founded Feminizidmap, an independent research project to develop the documentation and database idea I described earlier. In the same year we put out a call for volunteers to help us with the part of the project devoted to documentation. This is how we found our first documentation team

<sup>194</sup> At the beginning the plan was to document “feminicides” in 21 Ibero-American countries. But due to economic and human resources reasons this was not possible. In 2014, I participated in the attempt to integrate Argentina into the documentation process.

<sup>195</sup> See the website: <https://geo.feminicidio.net/>.

<sup>196</sup> For the different types of femi(ni)cide they follow, see, for example, Atencio and Laporta, “Types of Feminicide.”

<sup>197</sup> Activism is understood differently by different people. As a person trained in philosophy and considering the scope of the Feminizidmap project, I see the work we do as involving both feminist theory and practice (although some members may perceive the work we do as very much intellectual).

<sup>198</sup> The full statement in the original: “La palabra sin acción es vacía. La acción sin palabra es ciega. La palabra y la acción por fuera del espíritu de la comunidad son la muerte” (Word and action outside the spirit of the community are death). This saying is part of the wisdom of the Nasa people in Colombia, quoted by Pedro Chávez Sánchez in “Presentación,” in *El derecho en insurrección: Hacia una antropología jurídica militante desde la experiencia de Cherán, México*, by Orlando Aragón Andrade (Ciudad de México: Escuela Nacional de Estudios Superiores Unidad Morelia, 2019), 10.

members: Marthe, Nora, Rafa, and Hannah Beeck.<sup>199</sup> In 2020 the project started to advance more intensively. One of the factors contributing to this was the fact that interest in femi(ni)cide had grown in Germany in the preceding years (as I described in section 3.1 above), which showed a demand and need for data. Between 2021 and 2022 the number of members of Feminizidmap has grown—at the moment of writing, we are ten.<sup>200</sup>

Germany’s UNODC statement has already been debunked by several societal and political actors in Germany. During recent years some organizations have already offered numbers related to femi(ni)cide in the German context: for example, for the year 2019, there is the BKA report on violence in the context of intimate relationships (including killings);<sup>201</sup> the *#keinmehr* publication containing 2019 data;<sup>202</sup> the presentation “Evidence-Based Data on German Femicide Cases” by Kristina Wolff, which includes data from 2019;<sup>203</sup> and the *Comparative Report on Femicide Research and Data in Five Countries* by several authors (including the German researcher Monika Schröttle), which includes data from Germany from 2019.<sup>204</sup>

Since 2016, the BKA has delivered an annual report on violence in the context of intimate relationships (so called intimate partner violence, IPV); this report includes women and men as victims and perpetrators. It has been criticized because the total numbers for homicide/manslaughter include attempts, which can be misleading. Furthermore, the charts focusing on the nationality of victims and perpetrators only display non-German nationalities. By not displaying the full picture of nationalities (including German), such a report can lead to confusing readings of the data, although the body of the text does mention the percentages of

<sup>199</sup> For personal reasons, not every member wants their full name to be included; this often has to do with security, given the antifeminist movement in Germany.

<sup>200</sup> Lisa (2018–present), Sabine (July 2018–July 2020), Marthe (July 2019–July 2020), Rafa (July 2019–present), Nora (July 2019–present), Hannah (July 2019–October 2022), Alina (March 2020–November 2021), Dervla (September 2020–June 2022), Verena (September 2020–present), Vanessa (September 2020–present), Isabel (September 2020–present), Myri (December 2020–present), Leonie (January 2021–present), Elena (January 2021–present).

<sup>201</sup> BKA (Bundeskriminalamt), *Partnerschaftsgewalt, Kriminalstatistische Auswertung 2019* (Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt, 2020).

<sup>202</sup> See the chapter “Verkürzte Erhebung – verkürzte Analysen: die Datenlage zu Femiziden in Deutschland,” in Dyroff, Pardeller, and Wischnewski, *#keinmehr*, 17–22.

<sup>203</sup> Kristina Felicitas Wolff, “Evidence-Based Data on German Femicides,” presentation at the International Day of Human Rights, December 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Femicide/2020/CSOs/femicide-observation-center-germany.pdf>.

<sup>204</sup> Schröttle et al., *Comparative Report on Femicide Research*.

Germans who are perpetrators or victims. The 2019 data shows that 117 women were killed in the context of intimate relationships (homicide, manslaughter, or fatal bodily injury), representing 78.52% of the total victims of violence with deadly consequences within a relationship. Of these, 57.2% had a “spouse” relationship with the perpetrator, 23.07% were in an “unmarried partnership” with them, and 19.6% had a “former relationship.”<sup>205</sup> But from the report, there is little information that is useful for studying the context of these murders and determining, for example, if they were intimate femicides or not.

The report of *#keinmehr* addresses one of the criticisms that has been shared by various activists and academics who use the term “femi(ni)cide” broadly: it is most likely that the killings registered in the BKA’s annual reports on IPV correspond largely to “intimate femi(ni)cides.” However, if we assume that this type of femi(ni)cide tends to represent more than half of the total number of femi(ni)cides,<sup>206</sup> there is still a range of cases that do not fall within this category but that still might be considered femi(ni)cides. Along these lines, *#keinmehr* reports that in 2019 there were 158 killings of women outside the framework of an intimate relationship, representing 57.5% of the total number of killed women. It is not possible to extrapolate further conclusions from these percentages and affirm that all these cases are femi(ni)cides, but my argument remains the same: that other cases of femi(ni)cide can be found within those numbers. Furthermore, as is also highlighted in the *#keinmehr* report, these numbers do not include suicides; in some cases, the study of the causes and/or motivations that might have led a woman to commit suicide sheds light on potential femi(ni)cides.

In the *Comparative Report on Femicide Research*, the data on “femicide” varies a bit. Their definition of “femicide” refers to “the intentional killings of women because they are women. Femicide is analyzed against the background of gender-specific power and hierarchy relations, and patterns of control.”<sup>207</sup> However, the report analyzes only cases of intimate partner killings of women, which in femi(ni)cide research fall under the type of intimate femi(ni)cide. The total number of women killed in Germany is reported to be 177 (they register cases of women over 16 years old); 109 of these killings are labeled as IPV (61.5%), and 68 as others. Of the total IPV cases, 25% occurred during separation or in the context of a planned separation. The report registers cases perpetrated by other family members (14%), in the context of sexual violence or prostitution (3%), and other (21%).

In the presentation “Evidence-Based Data on German Femicides,” Kristina Wolff presented some numbers related to “femicide” in Germany, including

<sup>205</sup> See table 6.2 in BKA, *Partnerschaftsgewalt*.

<sup>206</sup> See chap. 1, n. 11, above.

<sup>207</sup> Schrötle et al., *Comparative Report on Femicide Research*, 7.

information from 2019. It is not clear what definition of femicide she follows, but she presents the following numbers: To begin with, she identifies 182 total cases of femicide (including cases committed by Germans abroad and cases in which cars were used as weapons). However, her analysis only focuses on 173 of these cases (she removes the cases involving cars and those committed abroad); following these numbers, 62.4% (108) of the cases were committed in the context of a former or existing intimate relationship.<sup>208</sup> Finally, for the same year, Feminizidmap registered the following types of femi(ni)cides: intimate, family, non-intimate, child, due to connection, and prostitution.<sup>209</sup> It also registered other killings: homicide/manslaughter and murder by theft.

Year	Registered killings of women (total)	Femi(ni)cides	Intimate femi(ni)cide
2019	176	164	106

**Figure 1.** Total cases for 2019 registered in Feminizidmap.

Although the UNODC statement has already been challenged by various political actors in Germany, there is still some hesitancy to acknowledge femi(ni)cide as a problem of social concern, which is exemplified by the words of the forensic psychiatrist Hans-Ludwig Kröber quoted at the outset of this section. It is true that femi(ni)cide is not driven by social factors alone: there are elements of individuality intertwined as well, and research on femi(ni)cide does not argue otherwise. But at the same time one cannot deny that individuals develop in social environments (here, the epistemologies addressed in chapter 2 are necessary). Femi(ni)cide continues to be a structural social problem, as it is linked to a continuum of violence against women and girls. Femi(ni)cide is the ultimate form of this violence and the most visible one, so it should not be studied as a “personal,” “individual,” “private” matter alone. In this regard, I see new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South as important theories to help us to work in complexity, which is demanded in the study of femi(ni)cide.

<sup>208</sup> Wolff, “Evidence-Based Data.”

<sup>209</sup> For a description of these femi(ni)cide types, see Atencio and Laporta, “Types of Femicide.”

## 4 Introductions to Original Publications

In this section I will introduce in more detail the published articles that constitute this dissertation. I will take the chance to further develop some aspects that were left out of the published articles, I will discuss some of my specific methodological decisions, and I will address some of the challenges I encountered at different phases of the articles' production. The order of presentation of the articles does not correspond chronologically to the dates of publication, but to a design that treats the four articles as a whole project.

### 4.1 Mangrovia Encounters between Epistemologies of the South and New (Feminist) Materialism

I had agreed with my supervisor that I would include only three articles in this dissertation instead of the four I had originally considered including (a common story in any article-based dissertation), but while I was writing the second chapter of this dissertation on new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South, I came across the call for papers for the special issue of the journal *eTropic*: "Tropical Materialisms: Poetics, possibilities, practices." I think I became aware of this call thanks to a scholar familiar with new materialism who shared it on Twitter. In any case, what caught my attention was the assumption expressed by the editors in the call: that both posthumanism and new materialism need to be decolonized. As has become evident in this dissertation, I work with new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South to try to contest modern Western attitudes showing the stamp of patriarchal and colonial thought that have become entrenched in the discussion of femi(ni)cide in Europe; the call was thus extremely intriguing to me.

As addressed above in chapter 2, I had been feeling some discomfort with the current popularity of new materialism, different *corazonadas* that I shared with colleagues working with either new feminist materialism or epistemologies that fall under the term I borrow from Santos, epistemologies of the South. So I took the

opportunity to explore this discomfort and these *corazonadas*. The article is structured the same as chapter 2 above: first I introduce new (feminist) materialism and epistemologies of the South separately, having in mind primarily an audience not necessarily familiar with either. After that, I put both currents of thought in conversation through a non-exhaustive set of concepts such as dualism, difference, pluriversality, *cuerpo-territorio*, time, and subject-object. I do not argue that these currents are the same; rather, I argue that they have strong points of affinity, but also fundamental divergences. By putting them in conversation, I aim to shed light on the potentialities of working with these epistemologies. I argue that deep and engaged conversations are needed, and, most importantly, that we need to be attentive and to avoid reproducing colonial and patriarchal habits.

During the elaboration of this section of the manuscript, I had already read some texts that were eye-opening; for example, I was amazed to find works that had already explored combining new materialism and epistemologies of the South, such as the MA thesis by Julia Eggleston, in which the author explores the concept of agency in both new materialism and decolonial theory through the South Korean short novel *The Vegetarian*.<sup>210</sup> The recently released book *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetorics* seems to address these convergences too, but I have not yet had the opportunity to read it, so I cannot comment further.<sup>211</sup>

But there were two articles that particularly resonated with my *corazonada* on colonial tendencies in new materialism. The first one is the article by Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt, “The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-human Agency,”<sup>212</sup> in which they examine three factors that contribute to the limited engagement with Indigenous ontologies whose understandings of agency and the nonhuman are similar to the understandings found in new materialisms. These factors are innocent ignorance, racism in academia, and a patriarchal attitude that downplays these ontologies by saying that “this has all been done before.”<sup>213</sup> The other article is “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism” by Zoe Todd.<sup>214</sup> In this article, Todd begins from a situated experience—a time when she attended a lecture given by one of the icons in some strands of new materialism and post-humanism, Bruno Latour—that made her reflect on Euro-Western-centered

<sup>210</sup> Eggleston, “Encountering Agency with Decolonial Thought.”

<sup>211</sup> Jennifer Clary-Lemon and David M. Grant, eds., *Decolonial Conversations in Posthuman and New Material Rhetorics* (Chicago: Ohio State University Press, 2022).

<sup>212</sup> Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, “New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories.”

<sup>213</sup> Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, 333.

<sup>214</sup> Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 4–22.

scholarship and its complicity with colonialism and patriarchy. Finally, in her latest book, *Posthuman Feminism*, Braidotti states that “mainstream posthuman scholarship has neglected feminist theory, while in fact feminist theory is one of the precursors of the posthuman turn.”<sup>215</sup> Maybe my *corazonada* about the watering down of feminism in some new materialist and posthuman scholarship was not totally wrong.

The first comments from the reviewer of my article were both challenging and illuminating. This first set of comments related to my lack of engagement with “tropicality”; it was true, I was ignorant of this emerging field. Becoming familiar with the literature on tropicality was not difficult; in fact it was complementary to the reading on coloniality that I had been doing for this research. But the most disturbing comments were in relation to my limited creativity in engaging with tropical materialist figurations:<sup>216</sup> my language was rigid and lacking imagination. This situation made me realize that my ability to be playful and creative with images and words in my writing had gone dormant. Why had I become more rigid in my imagination? How did this comment relate to the calls for “power to the imagination,” to “think creatively” and practice “wonderful thinking,” that I support? Partially, my creative constraints might be connected to some of the reviewers’ comments on my previous articles, in which even the use of the first person was questioned, and in which I was asked to make some playful titles and subtitles more precise and descriptive. Now that I was given the opportunity, my creativity was blocked, and this sensation was not pleasant. But above all, what is creativity in academic writing, particularly in more conservative disciplines and areas that want to be perceived as “scientific,” “objective,” and “neutral”?

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## 4.2 A Theoretical Approach to the Concept of Femi(ni)cide

This article was driven by the following “contentious referent”:<sup>217</sup> that the concept of femi(ni)cide essentializes, in a pejorative sense, women. In this article, I do not offer a genealogy of the terms “femicide” and “feminicide,” nor do I analyze the different definitions offered by various authors. Rather, I introduce the framing

<sup>215</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*, 2.

<sup>216</sup> See also the concept of “matterphors” in Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub, “Introduction: Matterphorical,” *Theory & Event* 24, no. 1 (2021). I am thankful to Amalia Verdu for this reading recommendation.

<sup>217</sup> Esteban, *Crítica del pensamiento amoroso*. See chap. 2.3.5, n. 110, above.



“femi(ni)cide” and analyze it as a philosophical concept; by studying some of its constitutive elements I respond to my contentious referent. In 2013, during my master’s studies, one classmate commented that femi(ni)cide did not speak to them: they identified as transfeminist and not as a woman,<sup>218</sup> and in their understanding, the concept of femi(ni)cide essentialized and solely addressed “women.” Their critique made me consider the possibility that maybe the concept of femi(ni)cide did essentialize women, so I kept thinking about the issue. In 2014, while reading *Nomadic Subjects* by Braidotti, I came upon a possible way to approach the apparent essentialism of women in the term “femi(ni)cide.”

I start this paper by situating the emergence of the concept of femi(ni)cide in sociological, anthropological, and political settings, thus showing not only how the concept has traveled from North to South, but also how it has been reformulated in the South. After this, I introduce Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s understanding of concepts, as sketched in their text *What Is Philosophy?* With this understanding of concepts, I continue by describing some of the constitutive elements at play in the concept of femi(ni)cide: “patriarchy,” “women,” and “gender violence.” Finally, I come to answer my contentious referent by applying Braidotti’s sexual difference theory as proposed in her text *Nomadic Subjects*. This paper is informed by new feminist materialism.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that concepts are composed of at least two other concepts; they argue that there is no concept founded upon just one element. This feature makes a concept a “whole” in the sense that it totalizes its components, but at the same time it remains a fragmentary whole.<sup>219</sup> When analyzing femi(ni)cide, I propose that some of its constitutive concepts are patriarchy, sex, gender, sex-gender system, woman, violence, and gender-based violence. This characterization of concepts allows me to argue that the definition and understanding of femi(ni)cide will be dependent on how the other constitutive concepts are also defined. So, to assess whether or not femi(ni)cide essentializes “women,” one needs to understand what “women” means in this scenario. I propose addressing this issue by using a new feminist materialist approach, which allows me to state that femi(ni)cide, the concept, does not itself essentialize women but rather helps us to identify the system that essentializes them: patriarchy or the sex/gender system. This article situates what I am referring to when I speak about “the concept of femi(ni)cide” throughout my research, an understanding that also informs my subsequent readings on this

<sup>218</sup> *Transfeminismo* started to be used by collectives in Spain as an umbrella term to make visible the diversity of feminist subjects in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality and their different oppressions. See Miriam Solá and Elena Urko, *Transfeminismos: Epistemes, fricciones y flujos* (Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2013), 19.

<sup>219</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 21.

subject: “the killings of women, or feminized subjects, as outlined by the ‘Same,’ the patriarchal system.”<sup>220</sup>

Due to space limitations, in this article I do not delve further into the various aspects that materiality has in theory formation and activism. But new feminist materialism allows me to show how the material bodies involved in the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide are agents in the configuration of social meanings. I am referring not only to the corpses per se but also to, for example, the materiality of sexes, and its implications in social settings. In this sense, femi(ni)cide is the product of situated and complex social and material intra-actions that also cut across issues of identity and subjectivity. This paper was novel in the sense that it studies femi(ni)cide from a philosophical perspective. It helps to shed light on debates about whether or not trans people fall within the scope of femi(ni)cide, and it activates new feminist materialism in an arena that had not been widely explored, that of violence against women and girls.

After the publication of this paper, two researchers, one based in Brazil and the other one in Colombia, contacted me because they were interested in reading this article in Spanish. They were working on trans people and femi(ni)cide, which nowadays is called transfemi(ni)cide, and they mentioned there was not much literature on the subject. This situation has also made me consider that we who can write in different languages have the responsibility to bridge conversations by also offering versions of our texts in the languages we master, otherwise we allow English, the current language ruling academia, to keep on dominating and dis/connecting different people around the world, whose primary language is different. Although I recognize that this is not an easy task—in my case, at least, I have found it difficult to translate my own texts, to allocate the time to do it, and to find the spaces in which to publish translations rather than original versions—I see this as another form of academic activism.

This paper was published in 2018 in the thematic issue “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” of *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*.<sup>221</sup> To my understanding, this was the first endeavor to address femi(ni)cide from a philosophical perspective, and it has served as an inspiration for further research. For example, Anna Quintelli (University of Turin) and Ana Miranda Mora (Dresden

<sup>220</sup> Luján Pinelo, “Theoretical Approach,” 61.

<sup>221</sup> I received various emails from scholars from Latin America asking if this article was available in Spanish, and soon afterward I received a proposal to include a version of this article in Spanish in an edited publication for a general audience. I adapted the article into Spanish for a general audience, but the publication did not happen. I have not yet been able to rework the first translation to adapt it again to an academic standard and submit it to an academic journal in Spanish. Perhaps this article in Spanish is no longer needed.

University of Technology) are working on similar endeavors at the moment. The formulation “femi(ni)cide” that I first proposed in this text has become widespread not only in academic settings; for example, UN “Femicide Watch” has changed their wording from “fem[in]icide” to “femi(ni)cide.”<sup>222</sup> It is not a matter of vanity when I say that I can also see the contributions that this paper has activated: for example, in some of the interpellations that I analyzed in the article “On extreme forms of violence against women in Europe – Does femi(ni)cide exist in Germany?” I am grateful that people find my ideas useful; however, in several cases my name has been misspelled, completely changed, or not referenced at all.

In the current debates about whether or not trans people are included in the feminist category of “woman,” a dichotomous form typical of modern thought, in which two extremes are opposed, is gaining ground. In this paper I was trying to traverse these two sides of the same coin, which both new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South also question. Last but not least, I do see some limitations in this first text, particularly because of my lack of engagement with epistemologies of the South at the moment of elaborating it. I believe that this limitation does not discredit my argument, but such engagement could have enriched my work if I had incorporated it from the beginning. I agree with the decolonial critique of femicide and feminicide that García del Moral elaborates in her 2018 text “The Murders of Indigenous Women in Canada as Feminicides: Toward a Decolonial Intersectional Reconceptualization of Femicide,”<sup>223</sup> where she states that the radical feminist roots of the concept of “femicide” need to be reformulated; and, therefore, I believe Braidotti’s sexual difference theory (which I read in new feminist materialist terms) is worthy. Still, I recognize that my analysis should have made capitalism and coloniality visible.

### 4.3 Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography

The idea for developing this article emerged as result of my ethnographic experience attending or participating in various events such as a research visit to the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies (Humboldt University Berlin, 2018), the Annual Conference of the European Network on Gender and Violence (Freiburg), the “Expert Day: Let’s Talk about Femicides! Sharing and Networking Knowledge” (Berlin),<sup>224</sup> the DaMigra Annual Conference “Stop Violence Against all Women”

<sup>222</sup> See <https://www.femicide-watch.org/>.

<sup>223</sup> Paulina García-Del Moral, “The Murders of Indigenous Women in Canada as Feminicides: Toward a Decolonial Intersectional Reconceptualization of Femicide,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 4 (2018).

<sup>224</sup> See chap. 3.1, n. 160.

(Erfurt), and the “Feminist Meetings Berlin.”<sup>225</sup> Recurrent questions at those events were: Are femicide and feminicide the same? What does “femi(ni)cide” stand for? Is “femi(ni)cide” a term created in the global South? Is femi(ni)cide a phenomenon that occurs only in the global South? Does femi(ni)cide refer to intimate relationships alone? What does it mean that femi(ni)cide is a legal concept? These questions were also frequent when I taught law students in the US and in Finland about femi(ni)cide (at the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law, Louisville, 2019, and the Faculty of Law of the University of Turku, 2020–2021). I realized that there was a need for an introductory article to address those questions, particularly for an English-speaking audience, and it was relevant to have it at that moment, when discussions on the subject were gaining interest in Europe, and particularly in Germany.

Just as the fact of being a woman does not make a person an expert in feminism, neither does being born and raised in the global South necessarily produce a decolonial consciousness. The original design of this paper did not consciously engage with, for example, anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial theories (which I now integrate under the wording “epistemologies of the South”).<sup>226</sup> I was using phrases such as “global North-South hierarchies of power,” “unidirectional flows of theories,” and “hierarchies in knowledge production,” but without the tools to name these dynamics as colonial structures. Thanks to the comments I received from colleagues on my first drafts, I realized I was afraid of naming “coloniality” as such, because it would sound too radical and might scare some readers. But there was no way around it: the situation needed to be named. My *corazonada* that these colonial dynamics were occurring in the European context was shared by other activists interested in the subject of femi(ni)cide.

For this article, I took as my contentious referent the following claim: “European scholars are now at the forefront of publications in the [study of femicide].”<sup>227</sup> This statement, together with my experiences while participating in several European conferences on femi(ni)cide and my lived experience as a racialized researcher in Europe,<sup>228</sup> made me realize the danger of continuing to perpetrate colonial thinking in feminist research in Europe—in this specific case, in relation to femi(ni)cide. I have shared the claim with some researchers in Latin America and the Caribbean,

<sup>225</sup> “Reuniones Feministas Berlin” was a weekly Spanish-speaking feminist meeting space in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin.

<sup>226</sup> See chap. 2.2.

<sup>227</sup> Weil, “Research and Prevention.” The fact that I disagree with this particular statement, however, does not mean that I completely disagree with Weil’s work; that would imply continuing to reproduce an Oedipal structure.

<sup>228</sup> Theorizing from lived experience and connecting with the things one is reading is a characteristic of feminist theory. See, for example, Okazawa-Rey, “No Freedom without Connection,” 16.

and they also disagree with it—we agree that the global South continues producing knowledge and theories in this area. First, and above all, it is not a matter of competition with regard to who publishes more than the rest; and second, the fact that there are more publications on femi(ni)cide on Europe only means that now the focus is changing.

Activists and researchers in the global South continue to produce relevant research on the subject, and the statement above only shows a Eurocentric perspective that needs to be questioned. Furthermore, many researchers in the global South have a harder time accessing academia and its resources, often having to fight to gain a foothold in the system, with relevant implications in the publication sphere. My endeavor with this article, then, is not only to offer an introduction to the concept and legal category of femi(ni)cide for a non-Spanish-speaking European audience, but also to highlight some colonial practices that are harmful in research about femi(ni)cide.

In September 2020 I submitted the article to a legal journal under the title “Femi(ni)cide: A cartography of the concept and legal category,” and in May 2021 I received the first set of comments by the reviewers, many of which focused heavily on the legal aspects addressed in the paper. Although the article is not a legal analysis per se, the comments helped me become more familiar with legal language and rules, and thus to improve the text to make legal statements clearer and more accurate.<sup>229</sup> It seemed that disciplinary traditions required me to clearly distinguish philosophical, sociological, and political concepts from legal concepts and categories; I was advised to change the title of the paper because it could mislead a legal audience with regard to its purposes. After the resubmission I received additional comments on the article, and after the second resubmission, the paper was rejected in October 2021. The argument was that the paper still needed substantial revisions. The comments I received on this second version, however, were cosmetic, many of them related to language and copyediting.

This situation, however, made me consider at least three things. The first one had to do with the entanglement of care work and editorial work during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were many discussions surrounding how this situation was delaying peer reviews and publications in feminist journals or journals

<sup>229</sup> I am thankful to Amalia Verdú Sanmartin for explaining to me how laws and decrees work and for reviewing the table that I included in this article (containing the information about Latin American and Caribbean countries that have criminalized femi[ni]cide).

where the editors and/or reviewers are women.<sup>230</sup> The second relates to the question of disciplinary frameworks and what it means when a journal promotes interdisciplinarity: although the journal to which I submitted the article accepts “interdisciplinary” papers and works with feminists’ perspectives, the main critiques I received were legal (even though my paper is not a “legal” paper, it addresses the law). The third aspect worth analyzing is the politics of language in publications. Several comments from the reviewers were in relation to my use of US English instead of UK English; this situation brings me back to discussions about the fact that publishing in English puts non-English-speaking researchers at a disadvantage, particularly in areas of research where the nuances of language are key, such as the humanities and social sciences.<sup>231</sup> English is by no means a language which I master, therefore I always rely on the work of my editor, who is an expert not only on the English language but also on my primary language, Spanish. The fact that this editor is familiar with Spanish language structures allows him to propose the English-language options closer to what I mean to say; it is not only small linguistic details but the overall meaning that is at stake when doing language editing. Not everyone in academia has the privilege to have a highly skilled editor, or the privilege of having funding for language editing; this situation continues to put certain researchers at a disadvantage.

So it is not only theories and concepts such as “femicide” and “feminicide” that travel and are translated, but also languages themselves—Spanish to English, in my case. In addition, the languages of academic disciplines travel and are translated as well, such as from philosophy to law. I have claimed that my research is “transdisciplinary,”<sup>232</sup> and while trying to find a journal for this article, I felt the humble need to stop and ask myself, What does it mean to say that research, a journal, or a discipline is transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary? Social problems are not exclusive to a particular discipline: problems demand to be addressed through

<sup>230</sup> For a metadata analysis, see Flaminio Squazzoni et al., “Gender Gap in Journal Submissions and Peer Review during the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study on 2329 Elsevier Journals,” *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 10 (2021): e0257919. And for a critical analysis of research in this respect, see Maria do Mar Pereira, “Researching Gender Inequalities in Academic Labor during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Avoiding Common Problems and Asking Different Questions,” *Gender, Work, and Organization* 28, no. S2 (2021).

<sup>231</sup> See, for example, Christian De Vito, “Knowledge and Power: The Languages of Academia,” *Worlds of Related Coercions in Work* (blog), 5 November 2021, <https://worck.eu/2021/11/05/knowledge-and-power-the-languages-of-academia/>.

<sup>232</sup> Even if I am critical of the terms “interdisciplinarity” and “multidisciplinarity,” as I have addressed in section 2.3.8, I have still used them; they are the terms mostly used in most universities’ strategy plans. See, for example, the University of Turku’s previous and current plans.

different perspectives, and this should emerge organically. Femi(ni)cide, for example, has been addressed by different societal actors such as activists, researchers, and politicians.

This paper is a cartography, in Braidotti's understanding: "a theoretically-based and politically-informed reading of the present."<sup>233</sup> Following a cartographic approach responds to "two main requirements, namely to account for one's locations in terms both of space (geopolitical or ecological dimension) and time (historical and genealogical dimension), and to provide alternative figurations or schemes of representation for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*)."<sup>234</sup> This paper maps not only the political-theoretical conditions in different geographical locations and temporalities with relation to the specific concept femi(ni)cide, but also colonial power relations activated in the configurations of this concept. The aim is to shed light on the creative and generative possibilities that this concept has in different geographical and temporal dimensions, and the paper stresses the ethical accountability researchers have to embody when studying the subject.

Finally, my experience with this article demonstrates the fact that research is a process: one starts with one idea, but inevitably the circumstances affect the original design of the plan, and one needs to constantly reformulate the project. But it is not only the research plan that changes: the epistemological agent "I," the researcher, also transforms in the process. That is to say, I did not remain untouched. The article was accepted for publication in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in September 2022.

#### 4.4 On Extreme Forms of Violence against Women in Europe – Does Femi(ni)cide Exist in Germany?

When I originally designed my research project, there were no policy documents that addressed the specific subject of femi(ni)cide in Germany, so my plan was to focus on the absences/silences in the Istanbul Convention, the German Protection Against Violence Act, and the two German Action Plans on Combating Domestic Violence. Although the word "femi(ni)cide" does not appear in these documents, this phenomenon could be addressed through what is not said, as has been studied in hermeneutics. I was planning to use Carol Bacchi's "What is the problem represented

<sup>233</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 2.

<sup>234</sup> Braidotti, 2.

to be” approach (WPR), but employing a new feminist materialist reading; I was exploring a way to apply the WPR approach without falling into representationalism.

But starting in 2018, things began to change in the public and political arena in Germany—I argue that this change can be partially explained by the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by Germany—so I shifted my attention to documents that used the term “femi(ni)cide.” To analyze these documents, I started exploring Donna Haraway’s methodology “diffractive reading”: this “is a critical practice for making a difference in the world. It is a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom. It is a critical practice of engagement, not a distance-learning practice of reflecting from afar.”<sup>235</sup> This, according to Barad, enables us to go beyond representationalism, which for her means, in general terms, “the idea that representations and the objects (subjects, events, or states of affairs) they purport to represent are independent of one another.”<sup>236</sup>

As required by article 68 of the Istanbul Convention, in September 2020 the German government delivered the State Baseline Report (SBR) to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO); this report was followed by nine shadow reports, some of them using the framework of femi(ni)cide.<sup>237</sup> At the moment when I was preparing the article for a call for papers, there were eight shadow reports, by the following groups: the RIGG Intervention Union RLP (September 2020); Solidarity with Women in Distress, SOLWODI (2020); Lebkom e. V., Lessan, Terre des Femmes, and End FGM European Network (joint report, 2020); DaMigra (December 2020); German Women Lawyers Association (February 2021); the German Istanbul Convention Alliance (February 2021); the Alliance Nordic Modell (July 2021); and Johanna Elle / Andrea Kothén (July 2021).<sup>238</sup> Later the number increased to nine, with the shadow report from BAG Homeless Aid (December 2021); this document was not included in the analysis in my article, but this does not represent a problem, since this report does not address femi(ni)cide.

Since August 2018, 10 minor interpellations using the framework of femi(ni)cide have been presented to the German government.<sup>239</sup> In Germany, minor interpellations are questions that any member of the parliament (in conjunction with

<sup>235</sup> Donna Haraway cited in Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 90.

<sup>236</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 28.

<sup>237</sup> Shadow reports are critical documents produced by civil society in response to official reports, whose aim is to point out shortcomings in the government’s strategies. UNWOMEN, *Alternative and Shadow Reporting as a Campaign Element* (3 January 2012), <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1302-alternative-and-shadow-reporting-as-a-campaign-element.html>.

<sup>238</sup> Information valid at least through August 18, 2021.

<sup>239</sup> Information valid at least until August 2021.



the parliamentary party) asks to the government (either at the state or federal parliament level), which in turn (through the ministries) has the duty to answer them in writing and in a timely manner.<sup>240</sup> Die Linke<sup>241</sup> is the party that has presented the greatest number of interpellations at the federal and state level (6 out of 10). Die Grünen<sup>242</sup> is the party that has presented the second-largest number of interpellations, at both the federal and the state levels (2 out of 10). This difference in the number of interpellations presented by this party seems interesting to me because in 2008 the Greens / European Free Alliance group of the European parliament and the Heinrich Böll Foundation started to organize annual conferences on the subject of femi(ni)cide. The first conferences were very much focused on the phenomenon in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, and only in recent years has the focus shifted to include Europe.<sup>243</sup> It is true that the Foundation is legally independent from the party and only aligns with it in its broader ideas. Still, given this background, it was reasonable to expect some political pressure to address the subject in the German context to come from this party.

In this paper, I took as my contentious referent the idea that there is no need to adopt the concept of femi(ni)cide because German criminal law already addresses the problem.<sup>244</sup> I analyze how femi(ni)cide is framed and defined in European policy and domestic policy, and to what extent the concept of femi(ni)cide could improve the functioning of policies on violence against women and girls in this region. My analysis is informed by new feminist materialism and epistemologies of the South. I argue that for the State, what is not named does not exist; in this regard, the act of naming matters, since it can affect the lives of real people. When the problem of femi(ni)cide is not named, it is not visible, and no political interventions are taken against these crimes.

There is also a tendency, in the State actors' discourse, towards a dualistic approach that ends up "othering" or "culturalizing" violence (a mechanism used by Western countries in which cultural elements from non-Western countries are magnified to explain violence).<sup>245</sup> In the case of femi(ni)cide, this includes the creation of dichotomies between "us" and the "others" (the nonviolent Christian

<sup>240</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of how the German government works, see, for example, <https://www.bpb.de/>.

<sup>241</sup> "The Left" (Left).

<sup>242</sup> "The Greens" (Centre-left).

<sup>243</sup> It is hard to track the first conference; some documents refer to a 2006 event. There is information about the second conference, in 2009, onwards; the eleventh conference, scheduled for 2020, was postponed due to COVID.

<sup>244</sup> Bundesregierung, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion Die Linke*, Doc. 19/4059 (2018), 3.

<sup>245</sup> See Montoya and Rolandsen Agustín, "Othering of Domestic Violence."

Germans versus the violent non-Christians and non-Germans, or the nonviolent Europeans versus the violent outsiders). Such dichotomies continue to be strongly present in the discourse about and practices to fight against violence against women and girls, and some feminists perpetuate these ideas as well.<sup>246</sup> Female genital mutilation (FGM) and honor killings (which are largely associated with non-European cultures) are well accepted in the law, whereas most political actors are still reluctant to recognize femi(ni)cide.<sup>247</sup> A decolonial critique does not claim that non-Western communities are not violent or that they do not have hierarchical sex/gender systems, but it questions the culturalizing, stigmatizing, and exceptionalist discourses of violence produced in the North. The study of violence against women and girls needs to be situated and needs to account for the complex entanglement of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.<sup>248</sup>

Femi(ni)cide, furthermore, is framed in some of these discourses in relation to modernist ontologies assuming the premise of the de facto “universality,” “neutrality,” and “equality” of law. It is against such an assumption that the concept of femi(ni)cide emerged in the first place. The political relevance of the concept of femi(ni)cide is that it unveils a structure that otherwise ends up concealed under the use of homicide: a hegemonic system in which the universal is thought of as neutral and totalizing but in fact obscures a hierarchical power structure in which the subjects “women” are placed on the side of the subordinated.<sup>249</sup> The concept of femi(ni)cide calls into question the alleged neutrality of law, showing that in fact law is sexed and follows an approach whose single axis is the male gaze.<sup>250</sup> Even when we want to pursue universal principles such as equality, we need to be attentive to the current material differences among people.

This article has been published in 2022 in the book *Gender Competent Public Law and Policies* in the Springer series “Gender Perspective in Law”; the volume is edited by Marko Davinić and Svetislav Kostić.

<sup>246</sup> See, for example, Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>247</sup> Lembke and Frommel analyze this phenomenon in the law, although they do not use the concept of femi(ni)cide. See Lembke and Frommel, “Das Recht des Stärkeren.”

<sup>248</sup> See, for example, the work of Floretta A. Boonzaier, “Spectacularising Narratives on Femicide in South Africa: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis,” *Current Sociology* 71, no. 1 (2023); García-Del Moral, “Murders of Indigenous Women”; Nadera Shalhoub-Kervorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, “Femicide and Colonization: Between the Politics of Exclusion and the Culture of Control,” *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>249</sup> See Luján Pinelo, “Theoretical Approach.”

<sup>250</sup> See chap. 2.3.3, n. 91.

## 5 Conclusions / For the Future!

During the last four years the role of the concept of femi(ni)cide in the political and legal spheres has changed drastically in the context of Europe, and particularly in Germany. In the latter country, it went from being a term applied only to other contexts to being one used actively in the context of Germany as well, within several societal areas such as media, politics, policy making, research, arts, and activism. As I mentioned in the introduction, my belief is that the failure to name specific kinds of violence towards women—in this case femi(ni)cide—limits any attempt to fight these types of crime. Not naming the problem in the legal arena, as illustrated in the case of Germany, has caused limitations in data collection, in research, and ultimately in prevention strategies.

However, the use of the concept of femi(ni)cide in the political arena has shown itself to be productive: it has, for example, activated changes in several societal areas such as activism, media, and discussions in the legal sphere. The pressure to address the problem is growing on different fronts, not only in Germany but in many European countries. However, there are still some risks—for example, as I mentioned in my article “On extreme forms of violence,” there is the danger of reducing the discussion to a fraction of the problem: intimate femi(ni)cide. Even if this form of femi(ni)cide represents the majority of cases, there is a spectrum of cases that are not covered by this focus and about which we have little information to help in analyzing them, as the statistics offered by *#keinemehr* and *Feminizidmap* showed for 2019. I welcome proposals to address intimate femi(ni)cide, because I do think it is relevant and urgent, but I question the reduction of the problem, and its corresponding strategies, to this type of femi(ni)cide; without data on all types of femi(ni)cide, the policies that might be developed will be limited. We need to remember that the concept of femi(ni)cide is complex and therefore it demands complex approaches and strategies.

This complexity continues to be difficult for many lawyers and legal scholars to address. It is also true that the needs and structures of the legal system are often ignored by other social scientists—in my article “Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography” I discuss this, using as an example a critique developed by Rita Laura Segato—and so interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and/or transdisciplinary dialogues are very much

needed. Another risk is that of reproducing colonial structures and narratives. Even when femi(ni)cide scholars are feminist or use feminist scholarship and aim to work with cutting-edge methodologies, we are not exempt from reinforcing these modes of thought that ultimately affect real bodies; pointing out, questioning, and exposing coloniality is an endeavor that, sadly, is still required.

New feminist materialism has provided me the tools to explore the intra-actions of political action and academic research, and to give an account of femi(ni)cide in its complexity; however, it seemed to fall short in helping me grasp aspects of coloniality. That I originally privileged new feminist materialism over epistemologies of the South is a sign of my Western-centric upbringing—something that the latter epistemologies helped me to acknowledge. However, reading and working with these two approaches did not mean that I had to choose one over the other; at this point we can agree that such a dualistic and Oedipal way of thinking is a pattern we need to start traversing. Maybe we, people engaged with new (feminist) materialism, need to start practicing complex thinking, forms of thought that embrace multiplicity and diversity. Maybe then meeting and generating dialogue with other epistemologies will be a smooth and “natural” move.

It is important to note that complex thinking does not imply paralysis when it comes to action; during this research, multiple times I was questioned about how we can work with complexity and at the same time build concrete actions. The law in particular seems to require clear and distinct concepts. But imagine an asteroid that disintegrates when entering the earth’s atmosphere, forming multiple meteorites on earth. Each meteorite, even though it is no more than a fragmented piece, holds the complex fingerprint of the universe’s history. This image, to me, serves as an analogy for the role of philosophical, sociological, anthropological, and political concepts that, when entering the legal sphere, are fragmented, yet still hold their complexity. This is what I tried to achieve in my paper “A Theoretical Approach”; working with complex thinking might require us to change our positivist mindset and work comfortably with paradoxes and never-ending questionings. Keep in mind that, in the analogy I just proposed, the fact that an asteroid “comes” or “arrives” from space should not be taken as implying a supreme force.

Originally, I considered exploring the intra-action between society and law in a final article about femi(ni)cide and criminal law—very much attuned with some socio-legal scholarship, but using my theoretical framework as sketched at the outset. For that paper, I considered analyzing specific articles of the criminal code in relation to homicides/manslaughter, interviewing criminal lawyers, and/or interviewing social actors such as members of nongovernmental organizations. For that purpose, in August 2018 I met with Prof. Dr. Katrin Höffler in Berlin to start working on this idea; during our meeting, she suggested that I investigate the discussion about the criminalization of hate crimes in Germany. She thought that femi(ni)cide could

follow a similar path, and that it could be incorporated in criminal law under hate crimes.<sup>251</sup> While collecting documentation on this subject, I also came across the statement of Sabine Kräuter-Stockton,<sup>252</sup> who already in 2012, in the framework of a panel on violence against women organized by the embassies of France and Germany in Costa Rica, had urged discussing the possible inclusion of “femicide” in German criminal law:

In view of the numbers in Germany, it would be good for us to take up the impulse from Central America and to have a discussion aimed at creating a separate criminal offense of femicide: in 2011, 154 women in Germany were killed by their husbands, partners, or ex-partners, which must compel us to react. The introduction of the new criminal offense would not only be expected to increase the chance of appropriate punishment for the perpetrators and thus have a general and special preventive effect. In addition, there is the effect, which should not be underestimated, that the discussion in the (professional) public sphere about the creation of a new law inevitably entails that the reality behind the draft law being discussed will be disclosed and clarified for society.<sup>253</sup>

It is evident that Kräuter-Stockton is acknowledging the legal and political improvements in countries such as Costa Rica and highlighting the benefits to countries such as Germany of following their lead. However, she is also pointing out that criminalization is not only important in terms of punishment regulation outcomes; equally relevant is the public discussion that such a proposal could enable (by making visible the structures, such as sex/gender, upon which these crimes’ occurrence rests). Furthermore, in her statement, Kräuter-Stockton clarifies that the

<sup>251</sup> This last point has been already developed by Leonie Steinl, as I addressed earlier, and I have made some critiques of that perspective in my paper “On extreme forms of violence.”

<sup>252</sup> Member of GREVIO since May 2018.

<sup>253</sup> In the original: “Angesichts der Zahlen in Deutschland würde es uns gut anstehen, den Impuls aus Mittelamerika aufzunehmen und eine Diskussion in Richtung der Schaffung eines eigenen Straftatbestands Femizid zu führen: Im Jahr 2011 wurden in Deutschland 154 Frauen von ihrem Mann, Lebensgefährten oder Ex-Partner umgebracht, was uns zu einer Reaktion drängen muss. Von der Einführung des neuen Straftatbestands wäre nicht nur zu erwarten, dass sie voraussichtlich die Chance einer angemessenen Bestrafung der Täter erhöhen und damit general- und spezialpräventiv wirken würde. Hinzu kommt der nicht zu unterschätzende Effekt, den die Diskussion in der (Fach-)Öffentlichkeit um die Schaffung eines neuen Gesetzes zwangsläufig mit sich bringt, indem die hinter dem diskutierten Gesetzentwurf stehende Realität für die Gesellschaft offengelegt und verdeutlicht wird.” Sabine Kräuter-Stockton, “Costaricanischer Impuls für Deutschland: der ‚Femizid‘ als eigener Straftatbestand,” *djbZ Zeitschrift des Deutschen Juristinnenbundes* 4 (2012): 165.

approach to addressing femi(ni)cide needs to be a comprehensive, or mainstreaming, law, focusing not only on creating the criminal category but also on the full range of concomitant aspects such as implementation and awareness raising among the judiciary. Kräuter-Stockton rightfully affirms that it is not enough to have a good law if it is not correctly applied.

Costa Rica, however, as I mention in my article “Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography,” passed a unidirectional law focused only on intimate femi(ni)cide; it is good to take this country’s experience as a referent, then, but it is also necessary to analyze a limited law of the type passed there in terms of its shortcomings and its relation to other types of laws and understandings of femi(ni)cide in other Latin American or Caribbean countries that have also criminalized femi(ni)cide. No doubt these countries have long-standing experience with the subject, and the knowledge they have produced is valuable for current research and discussions in Europe; however, engaged conversations are key. Femi(ni)cide research not only needs to question sex/gender structures but also needs to be attentive to other structures such as colonialism, classism, and racism. At the moment I write this conclusion, the German Minister of Justice, Marco Buschmann (FDP),<sup>254</sup> is proposing a reform of article 46 of the German Criminal Code (General principles), which, he states, will more severely punish violence against women.<sup>255</sup> Organizations such as the German Women Lawyers Association (DJB) have welcomed the decision; however, it will take some time for the formal draft and process to be done, so assessing the scope and outcome of this proposal will be a task for a future day.

This planned paper on legislation, in which I intended to address the idea of how concepts come to matter in the law, had to be postponed due to time limitations, the freshly emerging debates on the subject, the recent calls to reform the German laws on homicide/manslaughter, and limited funding. But this is not the only topic in this research left pending. Professor Doris Estelle Long—whom I met in late 2018 during a research visit to the US—after listening to my frustrations with regard to accessing femi(ni)cide data in Germany, advised me to write a piece about how data accessibility and transparency impacted my research (I have partially elaborated on this topic in section 3.2). I had not considered this perspective, but I think it is a relevant one. The subject of femi(ni)cide points to other challenges in feminist research, such as the issue of data collection and the non-neutrality of data, as already observed by feminist data scientists. More discussion is needed about the language

<sup>254</sup> “Free Democratic Party” (Center to center-right).

<sup>255</sup> Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, “Buschmann: Gewalt gegen Frauen härter bestrafen,” *FAZ.NET*, 18 July 2022, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/buschmann-will-gewalt-gegen-frauen-strenger-bestrafen-18180425.html>. I am not sure whether in Buschmann’s reform the term “violence against women” will include girls or not.

we continue to work with, such as dualistic frameworks including victim-perpetrator. Another pending subject is the topical issue of how to balance the demands for legal reforms with the need to remain critical of the prison system.

In the research plan for this project, I considered that my results might make the following contributions: filling the academic gap on femi(ni)cide in Western Europe, encouraging further research, providing useful information for organizations dedicated to combating violence against women and girls, offering tools that help femi(ni)cide researchers in Europe avoid colonial dynamics, and helping researchers in Europe think complexly about femi(ni)cide. I still deem these to be valid and possible impacts of my research. And in a way, I see that some of these things are already occurring; for example, the article “A Theoretical Approach” has resonated with several political actors and researchers in Germany. Indirectly, this research has enabled the emergence of the activist research project Feminizidmap, through which we have managed to provide useful information for different political and societal actors, and at the same time I have managed to disseminate the ideas emerging from my own research. But as is already well known in the academic realm, once our words are put out there, we do not have any more control over them—maybe they will sink and become the compost of library archives, or maybe they will dance and flow to the rhythm of a current wind.

After more than four years living in Turku (more than the number of years I lived in Berlin), new experiences, connections, and ways to live in the world have emerged and continue to do so;  
after a COVID period that intensified my physical (dis)connection with Germany;  
now that the team of Feminizidmap (formed by amazing, intelligent, caring, powerful women based in Germany) has consolidated;  
I start to feel more distant from that role I once took on in relation to Germany and the killing of women and girls;  
I start reconsidering my journey—maybe I should continue somewhere else;  
paraphrasing Virginia Wolf, “I am rooted, but I walk.”

# Abbreviations

BKA	German Federal Criminal Police Office
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DJB	German Women Lawyers Association
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU-LAC FOUNDATION	European Union–Latin America and Caribbean Foundation
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FPCE	Collectif Féminicides par compagnons ou ex
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
SBR	State Baseline Report
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States of America
WPR	What is the Problem Represented to be



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