Learning together: insights on knowledge production from a study on sexual and gender-related violence

This article reflects on a feminist research project examining responses to sexual and gender-related violence (SeGReV) in universities in Mexico's Central Altiplano region and Catalonia (Spain). Aiming to generate joint knowledge and foster dialogue across contexts, the project faced challenges in achieving a truly horizontal and participatory methodology, despite its feminist and decolonial intentions. By critically analysing our own research process, we highlight the need to reflect on power dynamics and call for a practice of 'response-ability' that acknowledges privilege and inequality. The article advocates for rethinking research methodologies to embrace difference, resist homogenisation, and promote collaborative, feminist as well as decolonised knowledge production. Ultimately, it presents feminist research as a transformative practice that values diversity and challenges dominant, universalist narratives in academia.

Keywords: feminist methodology; decoloniality; critical reflection; diffraction; sexual and gender-related violence

Introduction

This article reflects on the research process of a project addressing responses to sexual and gender-related violence (SeGReV) within university contexts—a highly significant issue that has engaged feminist scholars around the world (Ahmed, 2017; Varela, 2020; Cooper-Levitan and Alldred, 2022). By ‘responses', we refer primarily to institutional measures and collective feminist initiatives that address SeGReV, including both formal mechanisms—such as legal instruments and institutional guidelines (protocols)—and informal activist practices aimed at social change. ‘‘Let’s learn together. Responses to sexual and gender-related violence in Catalan and Mexican universities’ (RICIP 00001-ICIP) was a one-year qualitative study (2020–2021), carried out by feminist research teams based in Catalonia (Spain) and Mexico’s Central Altiplano region. It sought to establish a bridge for shared learning between the two contexts, aiming to assess the effectiveness of these responses and explore the potential for new strategies. It combined documentary analysis of university protocols on SeGReV with semi-structured interviews and focus groups involving members of the university community. Eighteen institutional protocols from different universities were analysed, alongside seven interviews and eight focus groups with students, academics, administrative and service staff, and professionals working on gender-equality policies. In both contexts, institutional policies to combat SeGReV have materialised in the form of action protocols (Cagliero and Biglia, 2019; Martín, 2021) approved at different times. Nonetheless, even when reported, violence remains naturalised and is often underestimated. In public universities in Mexico City, this has prompted diverse feminist actions, including strikes and the public naming of perpetrators through *tendederos*, where aggressors’ identities are displayed on posters hung along clotheslines (Rovira Sancho and Morales i Gras, 2022). Importantly, not all such actions were separatist; some emerged from mixed-gender or intersectional

coalitions oriented towards structural transformation rather than segregation. This heterogeneity of feminist organising challenges monolithic interpretations of Mexican activism and highlights the need for contextual sensitivity in cross-national feminist research (Lozano et al., 2021).

Throughout this text, we use the term sexual and 'gender-related violence' (SeGReV) rather than sexual and 'gender-based violence' (SGBV). Although SGBV is widely recognised in legal and policy frameworks, 'gender-related' better captures our contextual and situated approach, as this form of violence is linked to gender without being structured solely by it and therefore affects multiple subjectivities (Alldred, 2023). The term 'related' highlights the relational, institutional, and structural dimensions of violence, including those embedded in knowledge and power relations within universities, and aligns with our feminist and decolonial epistemological perspective (Fox and Alldred, 2022). We nonetheless acknowledge the coexistence of both terms and retain the original terminology when referencing institutional documents or public policies.

Although, as a team and a network of feminist researchers in different corners of the world, we have been committed to building situated knowledges, recognising undervalued knowledge and putting partiality before universality (Haraway, 1988), we acknowledge that the project and its methodological design might not be entirely horizontal, as they were devised according to the Catalan reality based on existing results from other studies on the same subject (Cagliero and Biglia, 2019). This asymmetry partly reflects differences in funding structures, institutional resources, and research traditions across the two contexts, as well as our own positionalities within them. Although 'learning together' was a shared goal, we may not have fully succeeded in practicing a decolonial critique—an essential task given the colonial past and the enduring power relations between Spain and Mexico.

In this sense, this paper serves as a site for exploring, rather than resolving, the tensions between feminist epistemologies and decolonial commitments, and for asking how greater response-ability (Haraway, 2016) might be enacted in future collaborations. Rather than presenting empirical findings, this article critically reflects on the process of knowledge production in our study. Grounded in feminist research as an ethical and political project and a commitment to transforming inequitable social orders (Ackerly and True, 2019), it engages reflexively with the study's limitations and with calls for transparency in transnational feminist collaborations, particularly around positionality, time, and access to resources.

A few epistemological reflections

Feminist thoughts on creating collective knowledge

Drawing on feminist epistemologies, science provides a collective system for validating knowledge, despite its historical exclusion of marginalised groups in favour of white, upper-class men—the figure of the 'modest witness' (Haraway, 1997). Although exclusionary, science still holds collective potential; thus, the knowing subject can be transformed to include multiple voices and perspectives. This vision of doing science in community is linked to the concept of 'diffraction', understood not as replication but as mapping the effects of difference in knowledge production (Haraway, 1991; Kaiser and Thiele, 2014). As Milián (2024) observes through the work of various authors—such as Hesse-Biber, Spivak, Tuana, and Hill Collins—feminist epistemologies further urge reflection on who occupies and is recognised as the subject of knowledge, foregrounding standpoint and subjectivity as politically significant. Black feminist scholarship reinforces this critique by emphasising women's diverse social positions and advancing 'intersectionality' as a critical analytic tool rather than a theory of multiple identities.

Feminist epistemologies from the Global South and decolonial perspectives push this critique further by questioning not only who speaks, but from where and within which geopolitical and epistemic conditions that speech becomes intelligible. Scholars such as María Lugones (2011), Ochy Curiel (2007), Sylvia Tamale (2020) and Yuderkys Espinosa-Miñoso (2014) have emphasised that knowledge production itself is entangled with colonial histories of race, gender and sexuality. Their work reveals how the very possibility of 'knowing' has been structured through colonial hierarchies that position white Western subjects as universal and others as particular. From this lens, doing feminist science collectively also requires an act of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009): refusing to reproduce the logics that render certain knowledges marginal, derivative, or folkloric.

While Haraway's concept of diffraction invites us to attend to difference as a generative pattern rather than an opposition, decolonial feminists warn that not all differences are symmetrical. The effects of coloniality produce asymmetries that cannot simply be celebrated as diversity but must be confronted as power relations. Thus, diffraction may be both a methodological aspiration and a challenge. Could we map the 'interference patterns' of two contexts marked by such unequal histories without reproducing the same hierarchies we wished to contest? This question underlies the reflections we present here.

Haraway (2016) uses the term 'tentacular thinking' to promote an embodied-connected-collective way of thinking. The tentacular is related to perception through a body in a world we inhabit, though it also produces nets and networks. This is a form of co-doing and thinking-with that requires response-ability (Haraway, 2016). A concept that has guided us in the process of writing this article. Here, 'response-ability' is the ability not just to respond to something, but to think-with, putting care at the centre of the

exercise (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). At this intersection, the philosophical tension between Haraway's speculative feminism and decolonial materialist critiques becomes productive. Haraway's metaphors—diffraction, tentacularity—allow us to imagine relations otherwise, while decolonial feminists remind us that imagination without material transformation risks re-enacting privilege. Our reading of both traditions seeks not a reconciliation but what Lugones (2011) calls 'world-traveling': moving across epistemic territories with humility, recognising the limits of one's gaze This is how we came to understand learning together: not as the harmonisation of perspectives, but as remaining engaged despite friction and discomfort in the process of knowledge production.

Decolonising knowledge for learning together

Decolonial epistemology shifts the locus of enunciation, grounding it in the colonial wound rather than in Western rationality or canonical thought. Based on the work of Walter Mignolo, it seeks to disengage from the narratives of modernity produced by the West—narratives that assert universality—and to distance itself from Western categories of thought and ontological assumptions. This process of disengagement is referred to as 'epistemic disobedience' (Milián, 2024), which implies a double movement: a refusal to reproduce Eurocentric categories of knowledge and an effort to construct alternative frameworks rooted in the experiences and struggles of those historically excluded from epistemic legitimacy. Feminist scholars such as María Lugones (2011) and Ochy Curiel (2007) remind us that coloniality does not only operate through economic or political domination, but through 'coloniality of gender'—a system that naturalises hierarchies of race, sexuality, and humanity. To decolonise knowledge, therefore, entails unlearning the epistemic habits that sustain this system and opening up space for pluriversal modes of

thinking and being. This commitment resonates with, yet also challenges, Haraway's invitation to practise response-ability and diffraction. While Haraway foregrounds relationality and care, decolonial feminists insist on situating these relations within histories of dispossession and resistance.

Moving beyond Western universalism requires decolonial critiques of knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2007). As Noxolo, following Mignolo, argues, decolonising knowledge entails recognising that it is neither universal nor context-free, but deeply embedded in power relations and historical, spatial and material contingencies (Noxolo, 2017). Accordingly, the academy itself functions as a community of practice centred on the reproduction of settler-colonial knowledge (Tuck and Yang, 2014). From a feminist perspective, decolonising knowledge also involves acknowledging the genealogies of thought that have long been marginalised in canonical feminist theory. The works of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Chela Sandoval (1998) and Cherríe Moraga (1992) within Chicano feminism were pivotal in theorising border epistemologies that unsettle binaries between coloniser and colonised, centre and periphery. Their notion of 'border thinking'—living and producing knowledge from in-between worlds—anticipated what Mignolo later conceptualised as 'epistemic disobedience.' This continuity is not accidental: decolonial feminist praxis has always emerged from the embodied experience of living in colonial difference.

Thus, it is critical to engage with other epistemological traditions, while practising disidentification that resists assimilation by the hegemonic white gaze (Thapar-Björkert and Tlostanova, 2018). The relation between the different cultures and their epistemology must be considered instead of starting from a Eurocentric logic (Gillborn, 2015). For instance, as Curkpatrick (2023) highlights in Australian traditions, language and thought are inseparable from embodied experience.

Achieving horizontal dialogue across contexts requires analysing the intersecting axes of oppression that sustain coloniality without reproducing Western frameworks (Nagar and Swarr, 2010). While feminist epistemologies have challenged the androcentrism of science, they may overlook the privileged positions from which some feminist knowledge is produced (Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014: 10). Concepts such as Haraway's engagement with Trinh Minh-ha's 'inappropriate/d others' point to more productive dialogues, positioning diffraction not only as a way of accounting for difference but also as a method for decolonising knowledge (Haraway, 1991). Yet, as we learned through practice, diffraction and epistemic disobedience do not operate on the same plane. Diffraction, in Haraway's sense, traces patterns of interference to make differences visible; epistemic disobedience demands a deliberate break from the epistemic centre that produces those differences. As a network, we may follow a transnational feminisms proposal, which 'takes seriously the idea that our lives are interconnected—not just that some people are privileged and others are not, but that the very possibility of privilege relies on others not having this privilege' (MacDonald, 2020: 254).

Glas and Soedirgo (2018) propose active reflexivity as a research practice that emphasises ongoing awareness of researchers' positionalities and continuous improvement throughout the research process. This approach fosters meaningful engagement within research teams and with participants, opening up more horizontal and rhizomatic forms of knowledge production with the potential to transform social realities such as SeGReV.

Gathering learnings from our study

Revisiting the project design

Designed as qualitative, multisituated, and participatory, the project was carried out by feminist research teams based in Catalonia and Mexico's Central Altiplano region. It received funding from a Catalan public institution for a one-year period (2020–2021). Despite a shared theoretical framework and common methods, the study was largely shaped by the Catalan context, where SeGReV appears to be institutionally addressed but often remains obscured by political correctness and enduring heteropatriarchal structures (Cagliero and Biglia, 2019).

In contrast, SeGReV is more visible and prevalent in Mexico's Central Altiplano region, where feminist movements—led mainly by young women and students—have generated strong, empowering collective responses (Martín, 2021; Rovira-Sancho & Morales-i-Gras, 2022). These experiences highlight the need for context-sensitive research designs that avoid a white, colonising gaze and adapt methods to local needs.

We chose these contexts to establish a dialogue because Catalonia—an Autonomous Community in Spain—has nine public universities, while Mexico's Central Altiplano region, encompassing several federal entities such as Hidalgo, the State of Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Morelos, and Mexico City, hosts a comparable number of public higher education institutions. At the time, we did not sufficiently reflect on the marks of coloniality embedded in the complex historical and political relationships between Spain and Mexico, or between Spain and Catalonia.

Particularly unequal access to funding for feminist research between Spain and Mexico reveals marks of coloniality. Such disparities create power relations that must be addressed. Given the context-specific nature of researcher positionality (Glas and Soedirgo, 2018), the project would have benefited from active reflexivity and early

dialogue to navigate privilege, inequality, and potential conflicts. Although challenging, embracing diversity and plurality is essential for achieving truly participatory research design.

Reflecting on how we collected the data

We use the term 'protocols' to refer to institutional documents that regulate how universities define, prevent, and respond to cases of SeGReV. These texts often blend legal, administrative, and educational elements: they are simultaneously regulatory frameworks and political tools, emerging from feminist struggles within the academy (Martín, 2021; Cagliero and Biglia, 2019). We selected 18 protocols (8 in Catalonia, 10 in Mexico's Central Altiplano region) in effect between 2020 and 2021 in different public universities (see Table 1) to analyse through a thematic-inductive content analysis of protocols on SeGReV, based in emerging themes (Arbeláez and Onrubia 2014) developed in a previous Catalan study (Cagliero and Biglia, 2019).

Table 1. Protocols analysed in Catalonia and in Mexico's Central Altiplano region

CATALONIA	YEAR	MEXICO'S CENTRAL ALTIPLANO REGION	YEAR
Open University of Catalonia (UOC)	2020	Metropolitan Autonomous University-Iztapalapa	2020
University of Lleida (UdL)	2018	National Polytechnic Institute	2019
University of Barcelona (UB)	2019	Metropolitan Autonomous University-Lerma	2019
Rovira i Virgili University (URV)	2019	Metropolitan Autonomous University-Azcapotzalco	2019

University of Vic (U-Vic)	2015	Metropolitan Autonomous University-Xochimilco	2018
Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)	2018	Autonomous University of the State of Morelos	2018
Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC)	2020	Metropolitan Autonomous University-Cuajimalpa	2018
Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)	2018	Autonomous University of Mexico State	2017
		National Autonomous University of Mexico	2016
		Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla	2012

Source: created by the authors.

For the interviews and focus groups, we employed a stratified (nonprobability) snowball sampling method: the participants were selected intentionally, based on their position, experience, or specific knowledge on the subject, or because they belong to groups whose experiences tend to be ignored, so that we could conduct an intersectional analysis.

We conducted seven semi-structured interviews with university governing members and professionals. Three interviews took place in Catalonia with members of university governing teams, while four were conducted in Mexico's Central Altiplano region with professionals from various universities specialising in gender studies. The interviews explored the meanings and manifestations of SeGReV in universities, the role of intersectionality, and existing protocols and tools to address this violence.

In addition, eight focus groups were held with 42 participants (26 in Catalonia and 16 in Mexico's Central Altiplano region) from different university roles. In Catalonia, all

planned profiles were included, such as students, academic staff, administrative and service staff, and SeGReV professionals. In Mexico's Central Altiplano region, due to COVID-19-related university closures, focus groups with administrative staff were not conducted; instead, groups were held with survivors involved in feminist student activism. Online sessions enabled participation from multiple universities.

Now we identify inequalities in data collection between the two contexts. In Catalonia, despite pandemic-related challenges, the research team had prior experience working together and agreed upon a way of conducting interviews and data collection. In contrast, the Mexican team was collaborating on this topic for the first time during lockdown, which posed additional challenges. Greater sensitivity to contextual differences may have required methodological adaptations that could have further enriched the data.

Although the semi-structured methods employed (interviews and focus groups) allowed researchers to adapt the script to specific contexts, participant involvement in diffraction was not fully foreseen in the research design. This limited opportunities to engage with highly experienced Mexican activists and experts beyond the team's existing academic and personal networks. During the pandemic, for instance, greater efforts were made in Mexico's Central Altiplano region to promote a space emerging from prior academic encounters on SeGReV within university environment. Though we had participated and presented the findings from this research at them, the link was not yet strong enough for us to be able to interview experienced experts who led equality units in UNAM or UAM. It would have been particularly useful to have access to the pioneers from the group 'Cuerpos que importan' [Bodies that matter] at UAM-Xochimilco, whose experience was not compared with the analysis of the university's protocol.

Participant profiles in the focus groups varied markedly across contexts. In Catalonia, prior collaborations and institutional support facilitated access and organisation, whereas in Mexico's Central Altiplano region participation was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, precarious labour conditions and institutional heterogeneity. Salary disparities among administrative staff further revealed structural inequalities that restricted both remote work during lockdowns and engagement in the study. The pandemic also introduced what Craig et al. (2024) term a 'temporal politics of collaboration', as lockdowns and remote communication delayed fieldwork and required the renegotiation of temporal expectations. The resulting tension between administrative timelines and feminist rhythms of care became a key site of reflection, prompting us to understand slowing down—despite funding constraints—as a form of methodological resistance. In retrospect, the lack of fully horizontal collaboration between the Catalan and Mexican teams limited our ability to anticipate these contextual differences.

While demands for protocols in Catalonia were largely institutionally driven by feminist academics, in Mexico's Central Altiplano region they emerged through a broader mobilisation involving both feminist academics and student movements. Had these differences been recognised earlier, we could have agreed on context-specific profiles and dynamics. While not directly comparable, these would have fostered diversity—an essential condition for achieving diffraction. That said, an unexpected and highly positive outcome has been that, by spontaneously adapting the profiles to the specific contexts and needs as the process unfolded, the exclusive participation of survivors in Mexico's Central Altiplano region led to the inclusion of student activists in the groups. Their voices, which we aim to amplify through our work, represent a valuable contribution to this endeavour.

Organising mixed focus groups between Catalonia and Mexico's Central Altiplano region could have fostered intercultural dialogue and deeper learning, although this would have required careful attention to colonial dynamics. We did provide some inter-university exchanges in the Altiplano Central region, where participants from different universities were brought together in the focus groups. As well as providing the research group with valuable information, this created supportive spaces for collective learning and political organisation.

A few reflections on the data analysis

In the case of protocols, the dimensions analysed were year approved, type, legislation referenced specifically, scope of application, subjects, terminology and language used, preventive and educational measures, type and form of procedure activation, structure responsible for the procedure and its duration, intervention measures, reversal of burden of proof, false reports and retaliation, monitoring and other relevant elements mentioned. Once the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, we organised the material into categories that enabled us to group together the verbatims from the transcriptions. We divided the material into two main areas: (1) SeGReV in the university context, and (2) best practices (institutional and non-institutional) and specific proposals for improvement.

The data were interpreted using gender and intersectionality theories to approach SeGReV from a more nuanced perspective (Huacuz, 2011; Alldred, 2023), recognising its disproportionate impact on women and LGBTQI+ individuals. Consequently, we agreed upon the following subcategories: institutional violence, spaces where SeGReV occurs, relationships between aggressors and survivors, structural violence, and symbolic violence. Best practices were grouped into the following axes: institutional action

(proposed improvements), implemented actions, culture of reporting violence, and feminist action both within and outside the institution.

Although some clarification of analytical dimensions took place, we did not sufficiently question whether these dimensions were applicable across both contexts or required to be redesigned. Deeper reflection could have enabled to establish categories to assess the extent to which these norms rely on universalist premises, addressing both decolonial critiques of legal frameworks and the legal hermeneutics of whiteness that frame technicity as impartial while legitimising injustice (Moreira, 2017; Balmant, 2022). Dominant research frameworks promote standardised analyses grounded in universalist knowledge, while a diffractive approach requires recognising difference and the situated nature of knowledge. Engaging with inappropriate/d others revealed that simply being aware of colonialism is insufficient, as research positions may continue to perpetuate power relations.

This limitation became evident in the content analysis identifying 2007 as a key year for protocols development following international agreements. We should have conducted a more in-depth review of the principles of decolonial feminisms, which incorporate: ‘a condemnation of the ideological and economic dependence introduced into third-world countries by developmentalist policies and of the process of institutionalising and technocratising social movements that imposes a global rights agenda that serves neocolonial interests’ (Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014: 8). Whereas Catalan universities developed protocols shortly after, Mexican institutions delayed implementation, prioritising alternative policy instruments. This contrast reflects broader dynamics of coloniality/modernity that mask hierarchical practices (Segato, 2016). In Latin American countries, there is continuity between the overseas colonial administration and the republican administration that came after, following the wars of

independence. The state maintains many forms of colonial domination, where ‘guarantees of judicial order can be suspended’ (Mbembe, 2006: 39).

In Catalonia, content analysis revealed significant gaps and inconsistencies, whereas in Mexico’s Central Altiplano region feminist academics and students have driven demands for more participatory protocols, as seen at UNAM. These demands are linked to broader feminist struggles for justice in a context marked by gender-based violence and femicide, where protocols are considered a minimum requirement to ensure women’s lives free from violence within universities. This was powerfully expressed through the slogan ¡Vivas nos queremos! [We want ourselves alive].

The analysis stresses the need to consider specific institutional and territorial contexts, as well as relations of subordination and resistance between countries, and questions the reduction of protocols to mere regulatory frameworks. It argues for the decolonisation of legal frameworks through an intersectional approach that addresses racial and class differences (Belmant, 2022). We realised diffraction and epistemic disobedience should be intersected when we questioned how protocols—imported from global governance models—might themselves reproduce colonial modes of regulation. Decolonising knowledge thus meant not only analysing policies but interrogating the institutional logics that define what counts as legitimate response and whose safety matters.

By aligning with an intersectional perspective and acknowledging the agency of individuals who experienced SeGReV, the categories and the analysis for interviews and focus groups could have offered deeper insights into the various contexts. However, the different political panoramas were not debated or considered enough in the analysis process. For instance, the contrast between non-punitive protocols and the lack of justice or guarantees in both contexts could have been a critical point of reflection. For a deeper

diffractive and decolonial analysis, we could have considered the possibility of situated analytical categories for recognising the agency of survivors and account for political and cultural differences, particularly the centrality of femicide and ethnicity in the Mexican context.

When looking at types of violence coinciding with the conceptualisation of gender-related violence we were following, we highlighted protocols that named other factors of discrimination, such as sexual orientation. However, when we adopted an intersectional perspective, we knew that bodies bore other marks of discrimination. How could they be recorded? The 'subjects' dimension, which was designed to specify how the protocols named the people involved ('victim', 'aggressor', etc.), could have been a suitable space for this.

Still, in the case of Mexico's Central Altiplano region, we only found one university (BUAP) that mentioned discrimination based on ethnicity, when Nahua, Hñähñú and Mazahua people are present across the region. The fact that no other university in the Altiplano Central region considered this discrimination is a clear sign of institutional racism and an assumption of white neutrality. Our next question would concern how to apply this line of inquiry to Catalonia, where other cultures or ethnic groups may be present within the student body and may remain unrecognised by existing protocols.

Reviewing some transferring exercises

We will describe two activities carried out during our study and explain how they contribute to the construction cross-border feminist science, despite not having originally planned them within our 'learning together' approach. In early 2021, we organised two academic exchanges between Catalonia and Mexico's Central Altiplano region. In

February, a panel involving academics from URV and UAEH facilitated critical reflections on action protocols against SeGReV, which proved particularly valuable for UAEH feminist academics during the development of their first protocol. A European woman stating what the Mexican feminist academics could not say so forcefully—for fear of being targeted—in front of the university authorities was highly useful. The discussion highlighted the role of researchers' positionality, showing how differential social locations can enable certain interventions while constraining others (Glas and Soedirgo, 2018). This underscores the importance of deepening the discussion on the need to transfer knowledge from a feminist and decolonial perspective, as we are committed to transforming social realities and challenging dominant structures.

In March 2021, we held a virtual conference to present preliminary research findings. Although initially planned as an in-person event, its online format unexpectedly fostered greater transnational exchange and more horizontal dialogue between researchers and non-researchers. Engaging with a decolonial perspective, the encounter could have developed into a truly intercultural dialogue (Walsh, 2012).

We recognised that the initial design reproduced assumptions about what counts as valid data, evidence, and institutional response. Engagement with Mexican feminist colleagues and activists led us to rethink these premises: knowledge was not merely transferred but translated, contested, and re-signified. This translational practice across unequal contexts resonates with Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of 'mestiza consciousness', which embraces contradiction and partiality without erasure. The challenge lay in inhabiting this border epistemic space while acknowledging the colonial asymmetries that shape it.

Towards a reformulation of the learning together proposal

As we moved beyond the intricacies of the investigation to reframe our 'learning together' proposal, we identified several limitations that had shaped the research process, including work organisation, data collection, and analysis. We recognised the need to rethink how this knowledge had been constructed, acknowledging that methodological choices reveal underlying worldviews (Milián, 2024). This rethinking required an exercise in honesty that involved confronting conflict, exposing the hidden mechanisms shaping data interpretation, and acknowledging failure as part of feminist research practice, despite institutional risks (Patel, 2022). Trought this process, we drew on feminist methodological traditions that emphasise reflexivity, participation and care as constitutive of valid knowledge (Harding, 1987; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz and and Davidman, 1992; Hesse-Biber, 2014; DeVault, 1999; Pillow, 2003). These approaches insist that the researcher is not a neutral observer, but a participant located within structures of privilege and vulnerability.

From this perspective, 'learning together' should operate as both a methodology and ethical principles. Methodologically, it would prioritise participatory processes grounded in dialogue, partial knowledges, and co-interpretation rather than standardised comparability. Ethically, it would entail response-ability: remaining attentive to others' needs, constraints, and positionalities (Haraway, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012), in line with decolonial commitments to historical and power accountability. Rather than seeking consensus, we value now the productive friction between these frameworks as a source of methodological creativity.

This approach would recognise decolonising knowledge as an ongoing, situated struggle enacted through collaboration, critique, and care. It may involve practical adjustments—such as negotiating meeting schedules, translation practices, and writing

tasks—to address unequal workloads and institutional conditions across contexts. The aim is not perfect symmetry but conscious negotiation. Moments where horizontality could not be achieved, particularly when deadlines or funding privileged the Catalan context, are now conceived as part of the learning process rather than as failures. These instances exposed academic time as a colonial resource that privileges certain temporalities of productivity over others (Craig et al., 2024). Consequently, 'learning together' requires deliberate methodological acts of care, including attentiveness to emotional labour, fieldwork constraints, and bureaucratic limitations. Such practices align with DeVault's (1999) call for 'liberating methods' that transform research relationships into spaces of mutual accountability. Similarly, Hesse-Biber (2014) reminds us that feminist research must make its power relations visible. 'Learning together' becomes a continuous exercise in making those relations explicit—naming who has access to resources, who can publish in English, and who bears the emotional labour of transnational coordination. These acknowledgements do not dissolve inequality, but they open up a more honest, situated form of collaboration.

Following McLean, Graham, Suchet-Pearson, Simon, Salt and Parashar (2019), we are trying to critically consider the act of learning as a complex activity through which students, teachers and researchers work together. In this space, we highlight ideas for a learning together proposal, a framework to develop better approaches for future projects.

Designing projects

Adopting these epistemological and methodological perspectives requires critically questioning assumptions often taken for granted in research design, including claims to universal generalisation, the presumed neutrality of theory, and the expectation that research can be fully predetermined in advance (Milián, 2024).

Grounded in situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), respect for the agency of diverse subjectivities (Biglia, 2005), and the decolonisation of feminist knowledge (Grabe, 2022), 'learning together' supports horizontal and participatory methodological designs aligned with feminist, situated, and political commitments. Such an approach enables us to decolonise knowledge, recognise power dynamics, and exercise response-ability to adopt an intersectional perspective. These designs promote dialogue between different contexts and territories that helps us to deconstruct the traces of coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2007; Castro-Gómez, 2007) and commit to transforming reality (Sweetman, Badiee, and Creswell, 2010). Colonial marks are not easy to detect and are based on hegemonic structures that we cannot resolve by doing research, but at least we can create a space to think about them collectively by practising active reflexivity (Glas and Soedirgo, 2018).

Revising our project design from a feminist decolonial perspective also required acknowledging the tendency to treat the Catalan framework as a model to be replicated in Mexico's Central Altiplano region. Although funding structures and prior research experience in Catalonia initially shaped methodological decisions, collaboration with the Mexican team prompted the adaptation of research instruments to local realities, including the redefinition of analytical categories, recruitment procedures, and the notion of 'institutional response'. Following Oakley's (1981) insight that feminist interviewing is a form of interaction shaped by power and empathy, we redefined participant selection and consent processes to foster co-interpretation rather than extraction. Similarly, drawing on Reinharz and Davidman (1992) and Pillow (2003), we should treat methodological friction not as a flaw but as evidence of situated difference, an opportunity to question our own assumptions about validity and rigor.

Our aim was to cultivate a space for tentacular thinking (Haraway, 2016) that could account for available resources, contextual needs, and informed collective decision-making. This required preliminary meetings and participatory dynamics prior to finalising the research design, as well as sustained care work to enable the emergence of multiple voices. In practice, differing institutional tempos—Spanish bureaucratic procedures and Mexican activist urgency—often clashed, revealing the coloniality of time, authorship, and legitimacy in transnational feminist research. Rather than resolving these tensions, this paper seeks to render them visible as part of an ongoing, shared learning process. We consider 'tentacular thinking' not as a metaphor but a pragmatic need: keeping connections alive through uncertainty, translation, and care.

Collecting data

Realities do not always align with research frameworks, as situated knowledge production processes are often non-comparable and yield non-homogeneous outcomes. This requires working with partial (rather than universal data), practising diffraction (that is, recognising difference), and remaining open to being transformed by the research process underway (Biglia, 2005). 'Updating existing methodologies and/or finding other ways of generating knowledge remain open yet exciting tasks and figuring out how to legitimize emerging methodologies in a global context is a worthwhile endeavour' (Milián, 2024: 683).

Pursuing a plurality of voices frequently entails collecting data that diverge from the initial research design. Such shifts must be handled transparently, ensuring that decisions and agreements made during data collection remain visible. This may involve redefining participant profiles or engaging in ethnography and fieldwork, but always through conscious and reflexive choices. Sustaining a fluid and honest dialogue, as well

as recognising the value of the ‘non-result’, is essential, avoiding extractive practices or a ‘survival’ mode approach to research.

Our fieldwork clearly showed how feminist and decolonial commitments operate under real-world constraints. Building on Oakley’s (1981) view of interviews between women as spaces of mutual learning rather than extraction, and DeVault’s (1999) call to ‘listen for’ rather than merely ‘listen to’, we suggest creating dialogic encounters in which participants’ experiences may shape the research trajectory. These efforts, however, unfolded unevenly across our study’s contexts. This asymmetry confirmed Hesse-Biber’s (2014) argument that feminist research must adapt its methods to participants’ material and emotional conditions rather than impose cross-contextual comparability.

Throughout interviews or focus groups, an ethics of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012) was prioritised, ensuring voluntary participation, dialogical consent processes and attention to emotional well-being. In several sessions with survivors in Mexico’s Central Altiplano region, participants redefined the research space as one of support; acknowledging this shift, we suspended data collection in favour of listening and accompaniment. This moment exemplified what Pillow (2003) terms uncomfortable reflexivity, exposing the disjuncture between research intentions and lived realities. Rather than minimising these moments, we should document them as part of the knowledge-production process, recognising discomfort and emotion as constitutive rather than disruptive elements.

A further illustration emerged in relation to access to university authorities. In Catalonia, researchers were largely recognised as legitimate interlocutors, whereas in Mexico’s Central Altiplano region feminist researchers—particularly younger or precariously positioned ones—often encountered institutional suspicion or hostility. This contrast revealed the intersection of coloniality and academic hierarchies. Drawing on

Harding's (1987) concept of 'strong objectivity', we treated these positional asymmetries as data rather than bias, using them to interrogate the conditions of knowledge production. It also reaffirmed that qualitative research on SeGReV is never politically neutral, as each interaction either reproduces or challenges power relations.

Analysing data

In data analysis, avoiding homogenising categories is essential, as these risk universalising knowledge and obscuring the marks of coloniality. Instead, analysis should remain open to debate and grounded in response-ability, treating dialogue as a central source of knowledge. Categories may be collectively produced, but they must remain provisional, allowing for multiple and situated readings.

'Learning together' enables a practice of thinking-with different theories. As St. Pierre (2021) argues, reading and writing 'hard' sustains deep thought, making reductive categorisation unnecessary. This thinking-with extends beyond texts to dialogue among researchers and with participants, while recognising the agency of all subjectivities involved. It also allows for practices of refusal (Tuck and Yang, 2014; Zembylas, 2022), acknowledging that not all aspects of research need—or should—be reported.

In analysing the material, we tried to follow a collaborative, iterative process that combined thematic and diffractive readings. Inspired by Hesse-Biber's (2014) participatory coding strategies and Harding's (1987) notion of 'strong objectivity', we suggest treating interpretation not as an individual cognitive act but as a collective negotiation shaped by positionality. Each sub-team (Catalan and Mexican) conducted an initial thematic analysis using theoretical and inductive coding. This process sometimes generated invisible and no named frictions: while the Catalan team tended to focus on institutional mechanisms, the Mexican team foregrounded activism, affect and survival.

Rather than smoothing these differences, we should treat them as diffractive patterns—that is, as effects of difference that reveal the conditions of knowledge production (Haraway, 1991).

For example, in coding focus group transcripts, the category ‘institutional violence’ was interpreted differently across contexts. Catalan participants spoke of bureaucratic silences and procedural rigidity; while the Mexican ones referred to impunity, fear, and the complicity of authorities. By reading these interpretations through a diffractive lens, we could trace how the same analytical term produced distinct effects in each setting. Following Lugones (2011) and Espinosa-Miñoso (2014), we understand now these divergences not as inconsistencies but as manifestations of coloniality: the same concept, filtered through unequal histories of power, carries different epistemic weights. We argue for resisting uniformity and embracing multiplicity as a legitimate analytical outcome.

Drawing on Spivak, Milián (2024) argues that epistemic silencing is not a residual or distant phenomenon but an everyday reality within European universities and beyond. Addressing it requires first recognising its multiple forms, including those embedded in ostensibly value-neutral theoretical interpretations and analytical practices.

Practising situated knowledges therefore calls for an intersectional approach understood as a tool for critical race analysis and intervention (Gillborn, 2015). Rather than adding identities, intersectionality interrogates the racialised, classed, masculinised and heteronormative logics that sustain colonial and neocolonial relations of domination, attending to their contradictions and effects on agency. As Nagar and Swarr (2010) emphasise, it must integrate critique, action and self-reflexivity—an imperative for research on SeGReV.

Transferring knowledge

Science's growing emphasis on knowledge transfer to society increases the requirements for projects to receive funding. Our project, however, sought to move beyond a technocratic model shaped by neocolonial interests (Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014). 'Joining and becoming active in networks that are multidisciplinary and dealing with critical perspectives and/or methodological explorations can also offer new views to research' (Milián, 2024: 684). Creating cross-border feminist research networks therefore requires attentiveness to difference and colonial relations, while fostering horizontal encounters (MacDonald, 2020) between researchers and non-researchers. This approach shifts the focus away from pain or guilt towards the collective imagining of possible futures (Patel, 2022; Zembylas, 2022).

In feminist and decolonial frameworks, knowledge transfer cannot be understood as one-way dissemination from experts to passive audiences. Instead, it is a relational process that involves co-creation, reciprocity and accountability. As Mohanty (2003) and Lugones (2011) remind us, transnational feminist work must resist the logic of 'exporting' knowledge from the Global North to the Global South under the guise of collaboration. We therefore suggest approaching knowledge transfer as a situated, cyclical process in which insights circulate between contexts and are transformed by that movement. Transferring something with response-ability is to stay accountable for how it travels, whom it reaches, and what it does in each place.

'Learning together' entails recognising privilege and understanding its responsible use in specific contexts. From a transnational feminist perspective, we acknowledge our interdependence and the collective effects of unequal power relations (MacDonald, 2020). This resonates with Mohanty's (2003) notion of co-implication, which calls on those with privilege to mobilise it in support of collective action. Rather

than simply minimising bias, this approach takes difference seriously as a condition for diffraction.

Concluding remarks

In designing this project, we adopted the metaphor of 'learning together' to frame a collective, diffractive approach to knowledge production aimed at confronting SeGReV across university contexts on both sides of the Atlantic. As this metaphor did not fully realise our expectations, we have systematised here a set of reflections on the research process itself. Positioning ourselves as learners rather than knowers, we recognise that critical reflection on methodological choices was necessary to improve future research. Learning, understood as a transformative and ongoing practice, involves openness, guidance and constant revision. While our findings may not be novel, we hope they will be useful for others engaging with feminist epistemological perspectives. In line with McLean et al. (2019), we argue that an always-learning stance can help unsettle colonising practices within institutions.

Our reflections confirm that feminist and decolonial research is not only concerned with producing critique but with transforming the conditions of knowledge production. Learning together required confronting asymmetries of power, language and temporality, and reimagining research as a practice of care and response-ability. Theoretically, our proposal sits at the intersection of Haraway's (2016) speculative feminism and decolonial feminist critique. Rather than resolving their tensions, we show how their friction generates methodological creativity: Haraway's (2016) notion of response-ability foregrounds care and co-implication, while decolonial feminism—through Lugones (2011), Curiel (2007) and Espinosa-Miñoso (2014)—situates these relations within histories of colonial domination and resistance. This tension reveals

collaboration as negotiation rather than harmony, and disagreement as a condition of feminist solidarity.

Methodologically, we learnt from the project that transnational feminist collaboration cannot erase power but must make it explicit and subject to redistribution. Practices such as co-authorship, multilingual dissemination and flexible timelines are therefore central to decolonising methodology. By foregrounding these practices, we hope contributing to debates on rethinking reflexivity, ethics and participation beyond extractive or technocratic models. Our 'failures' to achieve horizontality thus become data for reimagining the possibilities and limits of feminist collaboration within institutional constraints.

As learners committed to tentacular thinking, we identify a key lesson: how to organise collectively to produce knowledge within powerful structures that normalise inequality. Yet we also recognise that academic knowledge alone cannot redress structural imbalances rooted in colonial relations, particularly given that its standards 'do not always do enough to ensure that social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful' (Tuck and Yang, 2014: 223). We therefore offer these reflections as an exercise in active reflexivity (Glas and Soedirgo, 2018) and decolonial accountability, engaging critically with our own complicities (Patel, 2022). Vigilance is required to avoid reproducing colonial models of knowledge, as awareness alone is insufficient.

Although we adopted an intersectional perspective, we did not fully integrate decolonial critique at the project design stage. Future work must embrace the dynamism of positionality through active reflexivity, avoiding the uncritical imposition of fixed understandings of identity (Glas and Soedirgo, 2018). Our attempt to build a bridge between contexts insufficiently addressed the colonial histories shaping each site. As we learned, invisible colonial marks—such as the differing starting points of a white Catalan

team and a racialised Mexican team—shaped decisions throughout the research process. Acknowledging this is a necessary first step.

Finally, our methodological reflections highlight that homogenisation in data analysis risks reproducing universalising patterns that marginalise diverse experiences, strategies of resistance and ways of addressing SeGReV. Emerging categories alone do not guarantee a non-universalising analysis. A decolonial and intellectually honest research process is therefore essential to ensure that cross-border feminist projects do not inadvertently reproduce coloniality of power. We argue for the continual deconstruction of privilege and for research practices that foster thinking-with, disruption and openness to learning, reflecting, and trying new approaches (McLean et al., 2019). Ultimately, we understand care in knowledge production as a 'labour of love' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012), which underpins our reformulated proposal for learning together.

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