

**HARTAZGO: UNDERSTANDING HOW #YOTECREO EMERGED IN  
VENEZUELA**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores how digital feminist activism sparked, using as a case study #YoTeCreo movement in Venezuela. Using the FemMesh to connect feminists knowledges, nodes and entanglements together with a transnationalized intersectionality, I discuss how this digital activism occurred locally. As this topic is novel and this thesis is exploratory, I combine the theoretical framework mentioned before together with feminist qualitative methodology by interviewing the leaders of #YoTeCreo and answer my research question. I concluded that the spark of #YoTeCreo in Venezuela is a combination of different factors and it is not a transplantation of the #MeToo movement from North to South. Even though the #MeToo was a reference to #YoTeCreo, the cross-border movements of ideas, persons, and places; the role of media and entertainment; the role of migrant women; the feeling of *hartazgo*, a sense of empathy, and sorority were important and entangled factors linked to the spark of this movement.

## **Dedication**

To my grandmother, Berta Isabel, and all the women in the world, let's not be silent again.

#CalladitasNoMore

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Prologue

I begin this study by emphasizing that, for me, feminist knowledges<sup>1</sup> should be created using a collective and collaborative approach. The words, knowledges, and paragraphs you will read throughout this research are, in my opinion, the result of a collective effort. I have been influenced by prior knowledges of feminist scholars that I have gathered and collected to write this study. By bringing in my perspective in convergence with these feminists' perspectives, I shall be able to broaden and extend the growing research on digital feminist activism and feminist scholarship. Specifically, my feminism is inspired by feminist scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway, and Maria Lugones, who emphasize feminism(s) with an intersectional approach.<sup>2</sup> I understand feminism(s)<sup>3</sup> as being diverse and continuous, as well as being historically and culturally located. My understanding of feminism(s) is a political theory that seeks equality, not only from a gender perspective but also from the viewpoint of how identities (gender, class, race, sexual orientation, nationality) function in society through a system of oppression and unequal relations of power. I also reject the universalist view of a 'woman', as this demographic is not a homogenous category. I distance myself from the understanding of feminism(s) in terms of waves, as I see this term as restrictive in that it does not allow the understanding of feminist theory as a continuous evolution. On the contrary, I consider feminism(s) as an entangled tapestry (*tejidos* in my native Spanish) connecting the past and present and continually evolving and growing. Overall, I understand feminism(s) as a practice, not only a theory. I practice feminism inspired by Sara Ahmed, by citing mostly women and feminist scholars to honour their knowledges and contributions.<sup>4</sup> I also practiced feminism in this

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A, Guiding Concepts. In the thesis, you will read the concept feminist knowledge(s) in plural. Like the different schools of thought(s) in feminism(s), I see the creation of knowledge in feminism(s) as diverse, continuous, and not a single or homogenous knowledge. Therefore, I decided to use the plural.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II section on intersectionality.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra* note 1. Feminism is not a single school of thought but includes different schools of thoughts. Therefore, when referring to feminism, I will add an (s) at the end to refer to the variety and diversity of thought contained under this broad umbrella. This also indicates that feminist thinking is not linear but is culturally situated, changing, and ever-evolving through time and place.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017) at 15. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we

study by supporting and elevating women leaders of #YoTeCreo digital feminist activism, sharing my findings with them and making them part of this continual collaborative study.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 #YoTeCreo Venezuela

In April 2021, an Instagram account under the username @AlejandroSotoStrupo was created.<sup>6</sup> This anonymous account invited Venezuelan women who had experienced sexual violence perpetrated by Alejandro Sojo, a Venezuelan singer of the band “Los Colores”, to submit their testimonies for future legal action.<sup>7</sup> The next day, the same social media account posted another story about Sojo that said, “he did not do this once or twice, he has a modus operandi, he knows what he is doing and he was always taking advantage of young women.”<sup>8</sup> In the following days, new testimonies were brought to light on Instagram and Twitter about sexual harassment perpetrated by men, particularly members of music bands and the country's theatre community.<sup>9</sup> Several and dispersed testimonies like these flourished on social media. For example, on April 26, 2021, Andrea González Cariello, using her personal Instagram account, published a video exposing a man from the Venezuelan theatre.<sup>10</sup> In the video, she said: “I thought I was the one with the problem...I was afraid that nothing happened... but now, thanks to

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were told to follow. In this book, I cite feminists of color who have contributed to the project of naming and dismantling the institutions of patriarchal whiteness.

<sup>5</sup> I will further detail my feminist methodology in Chapter III.

<sup>6</sup> AlejandroSojoEstupro, (19 April, 2021) online: Instagram <<https://www.instagram.com/alejandrosojoestupro/?hl=en>> Strupo means having a sexual relationship with a minor, using deception or superiority over the minor.

<sup>7</sup> AlejandroSojoEstupro, "We are collecting testimonies about Alejandro Sojo, Singer of “Los Colores” to take legal action against him, at the moment we have 6 testimonies of image captures, WhatsApp, FB and Instagram conversations with minors (14,15 and 16 years old) with whom Alejandro had sexual relations in Caracas when he was already of age." (19 April, 2021), online: Instagram: <<https://www.instagram.com/alejandrosojoestupro/?hl=en>> [translated by the author]

<sup>8</sup> AlejandroSojoEstupro, “On what planet is it OK to defend a guy like that (he's 23 in this picture) who was seeking pleasure in encounters with 14 year old girls? Look at his face for a moment and imagine him looking for 14 year old GIRLS. He didn't do it once or twice, he has a way of working and he knows what he is doing, he always knew he was taking advantage of young girls.”(20 April 2021), online: Instagram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CN5TT9ND1V5/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>>> [translated by the author]

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Lozano, “Writer Willy Mckey committees suicide”, El Mundo, (May 2 2021) online:

<<https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/literatura/2021/05/02/608ed6e0fdddf8038b45fd.html>> [translated by the author]

<sup>10</sup> Ana Perdigon, “Harassment on the stage: Director of the Skena theatrical group Juan Carlos Ogando has been accused”, RedRadio, (27 April 2021), online:

<<https://redradiove.com/acoso-en-las-tablas-senalado-director-del-grupo-teatral-skena-juan-carlos-ogando/>> [translated by the author]

the efforts of other women, and that I am no longer in the country, I am telling this story so no other women or girls have to experience this.”<sup>11</sup>

On April 27th, 2021, using Twitter and Instagram as their digital platforms, #YoTeCreo (“#IBelieveYou”) digital feminist activism was born out of a statement by 74 Venezuelan women from the music, arts, and entertainment business, most of them living abroad.<sup>12</sup> They defined themselves as a “social movement against violence, harassment, and sexual abuse”, noting that “#YoTeCreo was born to protect, listen to and support survivors in Venezuela.”<sup>13</sup> They wanted to stand up for victims, amplify their voices, confront injustice, and commit to collecting a database of testimonies. Their complete statement, where they discuss their objectives and purpose, is reproduced in English below:<sup>14</sup>

The last few days have been difficult to digest for many Venezuelan women. Testimonies of abuse and sexual violence by musicians and members of the Venezuelan entertainment industry against women and girls are multiplying with impunity, bringing to light the bitter pill that the victims have been suffering in silence for years. For many of us, listening and reading them on social media means two things; pain and anger. The modus operandi of the perpetrators was and still is to use fame and their position of power to exercise it with women who followed and admired them for their artistic work.

In all its disciplines, art is an expressive form of the human being, a place for imagination, thought, technique, talent, and discipline. Art is the place of the sensitive. Essentially, human beings make mistakes, but this feature of humanity must be reviewed deeply and incessantly. Art also has the capacity to articulate the failures and much more when those come from crimes. We believe that art is, then, a disruptor, an interrupter to break the silence and make society review, from all its instances, the mistakes that have led us to this crisis: violence and harassment against women.

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<sup>11</sup> Andreagcm, “A DIFFICULT VIDEO I can't believe that the time has finally come for me to be able to do this. With this I hope to make visible a terrible problem among people I know and hopefully, someone I do not even know can find relief as well.” (26 April 2021) online: Instagram <<https://www.instagram.com/tv/COIq7kMq35v/>> [translated by the author]

<sup>12</sup> YoTeCreoVzla, Press release of “Yo te creo” movement vzla” (27 April 2021 at 2:07 PM), online: Twitter <<https://twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1387106163255398404/photo/1>> [translated by the author]

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Twitter bio (translated from Spanish to English by the author) Social movement against violence, harassment and sexual abuse. ❤️ #YoTeCreoVzla was born to protect, listen and support survivors in Venezuela. In the thesis, I consider #YoTeCreo as digital feminist activism. Still, in this case study, I will refer to the word ‘movement’ when addressing the research participants, since that is the term the founders of #YoTeCreo used it in their statement, and I respect their naming of the group.

<sup>14</sup> It was fully translated into English by the author in order to respect the whole purpose of this thesis: highlighting the voices of the leaders of the movement.

The media, cultural and educational centers, museums, theaters, rehearsal rooms, sets, and recording studios have played an important role in the perpetuation of sexist, degrading, and silencing actions of Venezuelan girls, adolescents, and women.

How are we to achieve change in these structures knowing that our country is going through the worst social and institutional crisis in history?

The answer is always the same: The power resides in us all, and it is time to exercise it by raising our voices, articulating, and confronting injustice.

We, Venezuelan women, members of the arts, press, and communications, stand up today against sexual harassment. Women's rights are human rights, and we refuse to allow gender issues to continue to be kept off the public agenda.

We seek to make visible and amplify the voice of the victims by making our voices/stage/platforms available so that they, the survivors and their right to justice, are the ones who play a leading role.

We urge all Venezuelan arts personnel, media, and leaders to raise their voices against these actions. Abuse and harassment do not exclude nationalities, gender, or social class. This is why we say that the movement needs all of us.

The following are the steps to be followed by this movement, which was born as a response to the systematic abandonment of the institutions to the victims of harassment, abuse and sexual aggression:

- Create a database where we can record figures and information on victims and testimonies of cases within the association.
- Direct these cases to non-governmental organizations that have protocols for the legal and psychological accompanying of victims.
- Organize a concert and massive event in unity with all Venezuelan women artists who are part of the art and entertainment world to make visible and raise awareness of the situation.
- Create awareness campaigns to educate on equity with a gender focus.

To all survivors we say: #YoTeTeCreo You are #NotAloneNeitherInBadCompany.<sup>15</sup>

This statement sparked the feminist digital movement under the hashtags #YoToCreo and #YoTeCreoVzla.<sup>16</sup> Thousands of Venezuelan women took to social media to share their stories of sexual violence and harassment.<sup>17</sup> Pia was one of these

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<sup>15</sup> See: Appendix B: Press release of the #YoTeCreo movement

<sup>16</sup> *Supra* note 1. Here, I refer to 'spark' as the moment digital feminist activism goes viral on social media.

<sup>17</sup> See more: Camile Rodriguez, "Venezuelan Women spark #MeToo movement in Venezuela", Miami Herald (25 April 2021), online: <[www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article251516068.html](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article251516068.html)>; Melissa Vida et al " #YoTeCreoVZLA: The movement that breaks the long silence on sexual abuse in Venezuela", Global Voices (4 May 2021),

women. Using a pseudonym, she shared her experience of alleged violence and abuse by a renowned Venezuelan writer. She began her story by explaining, “I have finally decided to talk about my experience of harassment with Venezuelan writer Willy McKey. I met Willy in 2015 at “microteatro”,<sup>18</sup> I was just starting to soak up the intellectual and cultural movement in Caracas that I was dying to be a part of. In 2015, also, I was 15 years old.”<sup>19</sup> She continues, “as a result of this experience, along with other past experiences with older men who took advantage of me, I developed vaginismus and had problems for years having sex. My body understood the trauma first.”<sup>20</sup> Women in show business also raised their voices and made their testimonies public on Twitter and Instagram.<sup>21</sup> Similar to #MeToo in the United States, #YoTeCreo exposed high-profile men on social media.<sup>22</sup> Some of the men accused of perpetrating sexual violence in the entertainment and music industry resigned from their positions or were fired.<sup>23</sup> The writer that ‘Pia’ exposed died by suicide after admitting his responsibility for the facts of which he was accused.<sup>24</sup>

The State promptly joined the public discourse. Via Twitter, the Ombudsperson encouraged women who were using social media to share their experiences of sexual violence to file reports through the Prosecutor’s Office.<sup>25</sup> Through Twitter and using the

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online: <[globalvoices.org/2021/05/04/yotecreovzla-the-movement-that-breaks-the-long-silence-on-sexual-abuse-in-venezuela/](http://globalvoices.org/2021/05/04/yotecreovzla-the-movement-that-breaks-the-long-silence-on-sexual-abuse-in-venezuela/)>; YoTeCreoVzla, “How it all started, where we are and where are we going” (18 June 2021 at 13:36), online: Twitter <[twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1405942438028578818](https://twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1405942438028578818)> [translated by author]; Florantonia Singer, “#MeToo wave breaks in Venezuela as sexual abuse and harassment cases come to light”, El Pais (May 7 2021), online: <[english.elpais.com/usa/2021-05-07/metoo-wave-breaks-in-venezuela-as-sexual-abuse-and-harassment-cases-come-to-light.html](http://english.elpais.com/usa/2021-05-07/metoo-wave-breaks-in-venezuela-as-sexual-abuse-and-harassment-cases-come-to-light.html)>; Dany Lopez, #YoTeCreoVzla: Shocking confessions of celebrity sexual abuse victims, La Sopa, May 2021, online: <<https://www.lasopa.com/hispanos/yotecreovzla-visibiliza-testimonios-de-victimas-sobre-abusos-de-famosos/>> [translated by author]

<sup>18</sup> Microteatro refers to theatrical format performed in less than 15 minutes for a small audience.

<sup>19</sup> Mckeyabusador, “I’ve finally decided to talk about my experience of abuse with Venezuelan writer Willy McKey: I met Willy in 2015 at microteatro, I was just starting to soak up an intellectual and cultural movement that I was dying to be part of. In 2015, also, I was 15 years old.” (28 April 2021 at 2:11 PM) Online Twitter: <<https://twitter.com/mckeyabusador/status/1387469570236198913?lang=en>> [translated by the author]

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Dany Lopez, “#YoTeCreoVzla: Shocking confessions of celebrity sexual abuse victims”, La Sopa (May 2021), online: <<https://www.lasopa.com/hispanos/yotecreovzla-visibiliza-testimonios-de-victimas-sobre-abusos-de-famosos/>> [translated by author] Ana Alicia, Samantha Bustamante, Ivonne Harting, Hilda Pankarita, Andrea González and Naia Urresti raise their voice and make their reports public.

<sup>22</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 17. See: Dany Lopez, “The Comedian Gabo Ruiz was accused of sexual abuse”, La Sopa (28 April 2021) online: <https://www.lasopa.com/hispanos/se-pone-peor-acusan-al-comediante-venezolano-gabo-ruiz-de-abuso-sexual/> [translated by author]

<sup>23</sup> See more: Gloria Carpo, “Tomates Fritos reports that Tony Maestracchi quit the band”, El Pitazo, (26 April 2021), online: <[elpitazo.net/cultura/tomates-fritos-anuncia-que-tony-maestracchi-renuncia-a-la-banda/](http://elpitazo.net/cultura/tomates-fritos-anuncia-que-tony-maestracchi-renuncia-a-la-banda/)> [translated by author]; Luisa Kislinger, “The End of Innocence”, Caracas Chronicles (30 April 2021), online: <<https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2021/04/30/the-end-of-innocence/>>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Tarek William Saab, “In response to the public and serious allegations against Willy Mckey, Alejandro Sojo and Tony Maestracchi, among others, for the alleged crimes of sexual abuse of minors and sexual violence, the Public Prosecutor’s Office

hashtag #Justice, the Ombudsperson opened an official investigation into Alejandro Sojo, another member of a band, as well as of a comedian for interviewing alleged perpetrators of sexual violence and joking about rape.<sup>26</sup> The Ombudsperson reinforced the commitment of the Public Prosecutor's Office to defend women's rights, which strengthened the regime while allowing the state to appear progressive and feminist.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that punitive interventions by the State in the context of #YoTeCreo were more frequent when the cases dealt with sexual violence against minors.<sup>28</sup>

Less than a week after the creation of the database proposed by #YoTeCreo in the statement, the account received 585 testimonies through the database.<sup>29</sup> Of those, 470 just wanted to be heard, 89 requested psychological assistance.<sup>30</sup> In addition, #YoTeCreo used its platforms (Twitter and Instagram) to give voice to women and girls who wanted to talk about their experiences of sexual violence, amplifying their testimonies by reposting, retweeting or sharing.<sup>31</sup> The hashtag #YoTeCreo had around

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reports that it has opened the respective criminal investigation" (28 April 2021 at 21:01) online Twitter:

<<https://twitter.com/TarekWilliamSaab/status/1387572800844664835>> [translated by author]. See more: Tal Cual, "Prosecutor Office will investigate musician, artists and writers for complaints of child abuse", Tal Cual Digital (28 April 2021), online: <[talcualdigital.com/mp-investigara-al-escritor-willy-mckey-y-a-dos-musicos-por-denuncias-de-abuso-a-menores/](http://talcualdigital.com/mp-investigara-al-escritor-willy-mckey-y-a-dos-musicos-por-denuncias-de-abuso-a-menores/)> [translated by author]; El Nacional, "«Instigation to drug and rape women»: Prosecutor open an investigation against Professor Briceño", El Nacional (29 April 2021) online: <<https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/instigacion-a-drogar-y-violar-mujeres-mp-abre-investigacion-contra-el-profesor-briceno/>> [translated by author]

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Tarek William Saab, "1) The Public Ministry remains firm in its fight in defense of #Women: this crusade has succeed in #victims denounce their aggressors", (29 April 2021 at 18:01pm) online: Twitter

<<https://twitter.com/tarekwiliamsaab/status/1387889943922585606>> [translated by author]

<sup>28</sup> William Saab, *Supra* note 25. For example, back in 2020 a Venezuelan man spoke about his case of sexual violence perpetrated by a man when he was only 11 years old. After he told this story the Public Prosecutor initiated an investigation against the man accused of sexual violence against adolescents. See Tarek William Saab, "#NOW requested by the @MinpublicoVE and agreed by the 26th Control Court: arrest warrant against pedophile LEONARDO ENRIQUE HERRERA PAEZ denounced by numerous victims of sexual abuse against minors and adolescents #JUSTICE" (27 Nov 2020 at 8:38 PM) online: Twitter

<<https://twitter.com/TarekWilliamSaab/status/133240852257158145>> [translated by author]

<sup>29</sup> YoTeCreoVzla, "How it all started, where we are and where are we going" (18 June 2021 at 13:36), online: Twitter <[twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1405942438028578818](https://twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1405942438028578818)> [translated by author] See Voces Vitales "The movement @yotecreovzla enabled this form in which women victims of sexual harassment and abuse by members of the Venezuelan artistic guild can tell their experiences." (29 April 2021 at 12:30 PM) online: Twitter,

<<https://twitter.com/vocesvitaleszla/status/1387806418238050312?s=21&t=uMWJIXGLVUEK5n09IU65mQ>> [translated by author]

<sup>30</sup> Albany Aldara, "One year after the #YoTeCreo movement in Venezuela, what has been achieved?" (30 April 2022), Efecto Cocuyo, online: <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/a-un-ano-del-movimiento-yotecre-en-venezuela-que-se-ha-logrado/> [translated by author]

<sup>31</sup> YoTeCreoVzla, "We are here if you want to share your story. All of our support" (27 April 2021 at 6:32 PM), online: Twitter <<https://twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1387172775937421318?s=21&t=uMWJIXGLVUEK5n09IU65mQ>> [translated by author]; YoTeCreoVzla, "Sensitive Content" (22 June 2021 at 9:35 AM) online: Twitter,

<<https://twitter.com/yotecreovzla/status/1407331435418198020?s=21&t=uMWJIXGLVUEK5n09IU65mQ>> [translated by author]; YoTeCreo, "Testimony de @IamCurlySam" (April 2021) online: Instagram

<<https://www.instagram.com/tv/COL3y1pHqHS/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>> [translated by author]; YoTeCreo, "Testimony of Ana Alicia repost from @anaalicia" (April 2021) online: Instagram

<[https://www.instagram.com/tv/COL\\_7ONnD2z/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>](https://www.instagram.com/tv/COL_7ONnD2z/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>) [translated by author]; YoTeCreo, "Testimony

6,595 tweets, with messages of support for victims reporting sexual violence in Venezuela.<sup>32</sup> The spark generated by #YoTeCreo was followed by a public discussion about cultural practices that normalize violence –such as rape culture, discrimination, and violence against women–led by leaders of the movement and by local activists and NGOs.<sup>33</sup> Feminists, NGOs, activists and human rights defenders supported #YoTeCreo members and united in a joint statement to request justice and protection for women that used social media to share their testimonies.<sup>34</sup> I shared my own experience of sexual harassment a few years ago while I was an intern at a law firm back in Caracas.<sup>35</sup>

This digital feminist activism received enormous media attention from women’s rights activists and journalists. An important local newspaper recognized #YoTeCreo as one of the top 10 women’s actors that impacted the country in 2021.<sup>36</sup> Rapidly, #YoTeCreo was compared to #MeToo.<sup>37</sup> Luisa Kislinger, a women’s rights activist, wrote she “[n]ever had doubts that Venezuela would see its #MeToo movement.”<sup>38</sup> Journalist, Adriana Abramovits also compared the two movements, saying: “I am encouraged by the assumption that it all started with the entertainment industry because that’s what moves the press the most, but I hope this wave spreads to other fields where gender violence will also no longer be allowed.”<sup>39</sup> Different newspapers and journalists

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@grecia.agusta” (April 2021) online: Instagram <<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CON0WooHixe/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>> [translated by author]

<sup>32</sup> Probox & Caracas Chronicles Team, “Twitterzuela Doesn’t Want to Talk About Women’s Rights”, Caracas Chronicles, (March 22, 2021) online:

<<https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2022/03/18/the-situation-for-women-gets-worse-but-social-media-protests-dwindle/>>

<sup>33</sup> See more: Accion Solidaria, “YoTeCreoVzla beyond a trending topic” (July 2021), online:

<[accionsolidaria.info/votecreovzla-algo-mas-que-un-trending-topic/](https://accionsolidaria.info/votecreovzla-algo-mas-que-un-trending-topic/)> [translated by author]; Uquira, “Statement of the YoTeCreo #Together”, (17 May 2021), online: youtube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZ2JnGf03BI>> [translated by author]

<sup>34</sup> Uquira, “Statement of the YoTeCreo #Together”, (17 May 2021), online: youtube

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZ2JnGf03BI>> [translated by author]

<sup>35</sup> I will detail my positionality and my story with the hashtag in Chapter III. See MacoMuskus, “Inspired by all the brave women who have spoken out, today I want to tell you my story of sexual harassment in my first job. Our stories deserve to be told. There are many of us and silence and complicity are enough. (27 April 2021 at 10:16), online: Twitter

<<https://twitter.com/macomuskus/status/1387047911314268160>> [translated by author]

<sup>36</sup> Shari Avendaño, “Ten Venezuelan women who shine in 2021”, Efecto Cocuyo, (24 December 2021) online

<<https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/diez-venezolanas-que-brillaron-este-2021/>> [translated by author]

<sup>37</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 17. See more: Semana, “Yo te creo’: the #MeToo era arrives to Venezuela”, Semana (8 May 2021)

online: <<https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/yo-te-creo-la-era-del-metoo-llego-a-venezuela/202100/>>; Orlando Avendano, “#MeToo movement arrives to Venezuela”, El American, (20 April 2021) online:

<<https://elamerican.com/the-metoo-movement-arrives-in-venezuela/>>

<sup>38</sup> Carpo and Kislinger, *supra* note 23.

<sup>39</sup> Adriana Abramovits, “#YoTeCreo el #MeToo venezolano”, Volcánicas, (7 May 2021) online:

<<https://volcanicas.com/votecreo-el-metoo-venezolano/>> [translated by author]

recognized #YoTeCreo as an important moment in Venezuela to make visible sexual violence and harassment perpetrated against women and girls in the country.<sup>40</sup>

A year after #YoTeCreo, experts in women's rights were interviewed about the importance of this digital feminist activism. Beatriz Borges noted that this hashtag opened the conversation about structural violence against women (VAW); she also mentioned that #YoTeCreo encouraged the creation of support groups and the strengthening of NGO hotlines to support women that had experienced violence.<sup>41</sup> According to Magdymar Leon, feminist and expert in women's rights in Venezuela, #YoTeCreo increased awareness of VAW.<sup>42</sup> After #YoTeCreo, newspapers and media platforms in the country have made more visible cases of VAW than they did before.<sup>43</sup> The growth of feminist digital activism in Venezuela is not unique to Latin America or to the world, as I will explain in Chapter II. In Latin America, and long before #MeToo, digital feminist activists have used hashtags to make visible different forms of violence. The hashtag campaigns #NiUnaMenos (“#NotOneWomanLess”)<sup>44</sup> and #MiPrimerAcoso (“#MyFirstAssault”)<sup>45</sup> are two examples from Latin America of feminist digital activism that bring to light cases of VAW and the conundrum of a patriarchal culture that continues to disrespect and discriminate against women.

### 1.3 Importance of the study

Scholarly studies of digital and hashtag activism have mostly centered on the Global North.<sup>46</sup> Researchers Quan-Haase and Mendes note that “[t]he omission of any reference to geography or a lack of geographic diversity suggests a narrow focus on scholarship based in the Global North.”<sup>47</sup> While there is emerging literature about digital

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<sup>40</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 17.

<sup>41</sup> Aldara, *supra* note 30.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> This hashtag started in Argentina back in 2015 to reject the machismo culture and violence against women and became a movement not only in Argentina but in Latin America. See Cecilia Palmeiro, “Ni Una Menos: From a Collective Shout to a Global Tide” (2019) 23:46 Cuadernos de Literatura 177.

<sup>45</sup> Started in 2016, in Mexico by 2 feminists activists that called themselves “stereotipadas” and invited women to share their first harassment experience on twitter. See Estereotipas, “When was your first assault? Today from 2 pm MX use the #MyFirstAssault. Everyone has a story, raise your voice” (Apr 23 2016 13:44), online: Twitter <[twitter.com/Estereotipas/status/723930478810660864](https://twitter.com/Estereotipas/status/723930478810660864)> [translated by author]

<sup>46</sup> Anabel Quan-Haase et al, “Mapping #MeToo: A synthesis review of digital feminist research across social media platforms” (2021) 23:6 New Media & Society 1700.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* at 1710.

feminist activism and #MeToo as it expanded to Bangladesh, China, and India,<sup>48</sup> there are limited studies examining the implications and origins of #MeToo and digital feminist activism in Latin America. Of particular note are studies from Argentina and Mexico. In one study from Mexico, researcher Rovira-Sancho analyzed how the #MeToo campaign took root in Mexico and how activists carried out a digital campaign in a country overwhelmed by femi(ni)cide and impunity.<sup>49</sup> Another study discussed how #MeToo mobilizations in Mexico have successfully led to widespread consciousness-raising about women's rights in the region.<sup>50</sup> In the case of Argentina, researchers Garibotti and Hopp discussed how #MeToo provided a window of opportunity for previous digital feminist movements to expand and built new ways of organizing feminist activism.<sup>51</sup>

As very little scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the particularities of feminist digital activism associated with #MeToo in the Global South, researchers have encouraged cross-cultural analysis to understand the movement in different spaces and to explore future research that can focus on “[h]ashtags linked to digital feminism in other languages like #YoTambien.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, my project aims to fill the gap around the particularities of digital feminist activism in Spanish and in the ‘Global South’ and to challenge the notion of #YoTeCreo as part of the global diffusion of #MeToo. This study will be one of only a few contemporary academic studies analyzing digital feminist activism in Spanish that is attentive to the particularities and unique cultural and political circumstances of a country where academic research is underdeveloped: Venezuela.

Additionally, empirical methods for studying digital feminist activism are less common when analyzing this phenomenon, and most methods include quantitative

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<sup>48</sup> See more: Wei Sun, “Rice Bunny and #WoYeShi: Online Reactions of Overseas Chinese to the #MeToo Movements in China and the West” (2020) 31:3 *The Howard Journal of Communications* 245. Shampa Iftakhar, “Me Too in Bangladesh: Can You Change?” (2020) 21:2 *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 126. Adrija Dey & Kaitlynn Mendes, “‘It Started with This One Post’: #MeToo, India and Higher Education” (2021) 1–12 *Journal of Gender Studies*. Yin Siyuan & Yu Sun, “Intersectional digital feminism: assessing the participation politics and impact of the MeToo movement in China” (2020) *Feminist Media Studies* 1.

<sup>49</sup> Guiomar Rovira-Sancho, “Activism and affective labor for digital direct action: the Mexican #MeToo campaign” (2021) *Social Movement Studies* 1 at 2. The #MeToo campaign trended between 24 March and 6 April 2019 when several men in arts, literature and academia circles were named on Twitter as sexual offenders.

<sup>50</sup> Edmé Dominguez, “Mexico and Latin America from #MeToo to #NiUnaMenos” in *The Routledge handbook of the politics of the #MeToo movement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021)

<sup>51</sup> Maria Cecilia Garibotti & Marcela Hopp, “Substitution Activism: The Impact of #MeToo in Argentina” in *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 185

<sup>52</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46 at 1716.

rather than qualitative analysis.<sup>53</sup> Researchers such as Mendes and Quan-Haase have noted the “[n]eed for qualitative studies that directly engage individuals who participated in the movement to learn about their experiences in their own words.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, by conducting qualitative interviews with leaders of #YoTeCreo, I will expand the growing literature on feminist digital activism using an uncommon and deeply needed methodology. Both the method of this thesis -- a qualitative study -- and the language and country-specific focus -- Venezuela -- are novel and important to expand and contribute feminist knowledges and the existing research on digital activism.

My study incorporates different contributions. First, by reflecting and understanding the motives of #YoTeCreo Venezuela’s leaders and describing how they engaged with feminist digital activism, new avenues for future research can be opened that include a local component and how digital feminist activism interacts in different cultural and regional environments. Including the influence of political factors, that encourage or deter the use of social media to mobilize online debate on sexual violence.

Second, by registering the testimonies of #YoTeCreo Venezuela’s leaders this study supports feminist memory in Venezuela. The stories of interview participants and my analysis contributes to the history of women’s rights in my home country, and the history of #YoTeCreo. In addition, I included the #YoTeCreo leaders as part of this collaborative project, and after sharing the study’s preliminary findings with the women participants, they expressed their gratitude and enthusiasm for this study.<sup>55</sup>

Third, this thesis also offers cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contributions. By studying digital feminist activism that emerged in the Global South and in Spanish and translating the knowledges and viewpoints of #YoTeCreo leaders to the English-speaking world, I will diversify the sources of feminist knowledge(s) currently available in English. This will allow me to challenge the hegemony of the English language in academia while reaching a broader audience.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* at 1714.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Chapter III.

## 1.4 Context

I was living in the United States when the Harvey Weinstein case exploded.<sup>56</sup> As I watched the case unfold around me, I published an op-ed in Spanish in 2017 titled “*Why do women stay quiet? Ashley Judd didn’t*”, where I discussed reasons why women remain silent about their experiences of sexual harassment and violence.<sup>57</sup> On my way to the office, I clearly remember listening to the interview NPR’s Daily Podcast conducted with the two-brave female<sup>58</sup> reporters from the New York Times who broke the news. It infuriated me how a man could use his power to subjugate and harass women that wanted to succeed. Soon after this article was published,<sup>59</sup> the hashtag #MeToo went viral on social media. During this time, I continued to work on issues related to women’s rights and VAW, and in 2018, my professional career led me to Mexico. I was invited to write an op-ed article that I titled “*#Metoo is here to stay*.”<sup>60</sup> In the article, I wrote that since Latin America is one of the most violent regions in the world for women, we should start having an open conversation about harassment and sexual violence, similar to #MeToo in the United States. VAW, after all, is not unique to Hollywood. Little did I know that just a year later, in 2019, this movement would spark in Mexico, and I would witness this moment again, this time in a Latin American context. I did not expect that harassment and other forms of violence that occur in professional spaces and universities, and tend to be overshadowed by the most extreme forms of VAW like femi(ni)cide<sup>61</sup> and enforced disappearances, were going to be visible during #MeToo in Mexico.<sup>62</sup> #MeToo Mexico brought to light systemic and structural violence that is perceived as ‘lesser’ types of VAW but are important to make visible. It was after two years of #MeToo Mexico that testimonies by Venezuelan women detailing sexual

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<sup>56</sup> Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades” New York Times, (5 October 2017), online: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>>

<sup>57</sup> María Corina Muskus Toro, “Why do women stay silent? Ashley Judd did not”, Efecto Cocuyo, (October 6th, 2017) online: <<https://efectococuyo.com/opinion/por-que-callamos-ashley-judd-no-lo-hizo/>> [translated by author]

<sup>58</sup> I mention “female” because the average person will imagine a man if only the noun “reporter” is mentioned, compared to an assistant or secretary (this is called the unconscious bias).

<sup>59</sup> Kantor and Twohey, *supra* note 56.

<sup>60</sup> María Corina Muskus Toro, “The MeToo movement is here to stay” Animal Politico, (January 29th 2018), online: <<https://www.animalpolitico.com/verdad-justicia-y-reparacion/metoo-llego-quedarse/>> [translated by author]

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix A: Guiding Concept. I will use the concept femi(ni)cide, a concept coined by Diana Russell, when referring to the misogynistic killings of women. However, I have included the “ni” to indicate the Latin American perspective within which the concept is used in this thesis. The concept of femi(ni)cide (*feminicidio*) was coined by Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, to highlight not only the killing of women in high numbers but the impunity and/or acquiescence of the State in these killings.

<sup>62</sup> See Amnesty International, Americas 2020, online: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/report-americas/>>

violence and harassment perpetrated by men in the music and theatre industries started to flourish on social media, including on Instagram and Twitter. In April 2021, I witnessed a new spark of online feminist activism from women in my home country. #YoTeCreo digital feminist activism emerged in Venezuela, as discussed at the beginning of this Chapter.<sup>63</sup> This was the moment, to use Sarah Ahmed's term, it 'snapped'. This term refers to a breaking point, or what she calls a 'feminist snap': when a woman snaps she is saying "I will not reproduce a world I cannot bear, a world I do not think should be borne."<sup>64</sup> Since #YoTeCreo arose in Venezuela, I was intrigued to understand how digital feminist activism can be initiated and to uncover the circumstances that encourage this kind of feminist digital movement to take root.

### **1.5 Overview of the project**

This exploratory research centers on women's experiences in organizing and participating in digital feminist activism against sexual violence and seeks to understand the factors that encouraged the #YoTeCreo leaders to create this movement in Venezuela. As Venezuela is largely unexplored in the emerging digital activism literature, the thesis pursues qualitative methods by conducting in-depth interviews with women who created and led #YoTeCreo. This allows me to understand how this feminist digital activist project emerged from their viewpoint. In listening to women's voices and using a deductive-inductive methodology to analyze the interviews, I answer the research question: *How did #YoTeCreo feminist digital activism emerge in Venezuela?* I am particularly interested in uncovering the connections that, according to the founders of #YoTeCreo, allowed this digital feminist activism to emerge on social media, including what factors encouraged Venezuelan women and girls to use social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, to share their previous experiences of sexual violence. I hypothesized that #YoTeCreo was less the result of a transplant of the #MeToo hashtag from the Global English-speaking North to the Global South than the result of multiple intersections of transnational flows and local factors. In this sense, I argue that

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<sup>63</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmed, *supra* note 4 at 199. The feminist snap when you will not "reproduce a world I cannot bear, a world I do not think should be borne."

#YoTeCreo emerged as a result of multiple nodes and intersections including the success of regional feminist digital activism in Latin America (for example, #NiUnaMenos<sup>65</sup> and #MiPrimerAcoso<sup>66</sup>); the increased awareness of sexual violence and harassment against women globally and in Venezuela; and the central role of media and entertainment in pushing the agenda.<sup>67</sup> I also argue that the women leaders of #YoTeCreo who were abroad contributed to the spark by mobilizing consciousness on feminist activism and intersecting transnational flows they gained abroad to translate it to their home country and vice-versa. This was key for the spark of the movement.<sup>68</sup> Given the repressive nature of the current political regime in Venezuela,<sup>69</sup> some literature suggests that migrant women are likely to feel safer exposing abusers when they are abroad.<sup>70</sup> These women may also have assisted in mobilizing the consciousness of feminist activists in Venezuela using the experiences they gained abroad.

This thesis is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. In Chapter II, I review the literature surrounding digital feminist activism. After, I explain my theoretical frameworks including the FeministMesh (FemMesh), and two conceptual frameworks, intersectional and transnational feminism, that complement each other. I use the FemMesh to comprehend #YoTeCreo not as an isolated or transplanted phenomenon, but as a part of a larger feminist network that is connected to feminist “[s]truggles that have come before and to the ones brewing on the horizon.”<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, I employ the theoretical frame of transnationalized intersectionality (both transnational and intersectional feminism as co-existing theories), to help me situate this research from a specific Latin America perspective that is attentive to how colonial and racialized oppression occurs through local and transnational flows.

In Chapter III, I explain how the qualitative method chosen -- conducting in-depth interviews -- helps me answer my research question. I explain my feminist methodology,

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<sup>65</sup> *Supra* note 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Supra* note 45.

<sup>67</sup> See Lesley Wexler, “MeToo and Law Talk” (2019) *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 343.

<sup>68</sup> See Wei Sun, “Rice Bunny and #WoYeShi: Online Reactions of Overseas Chinese to the #MeToo Movements in China and the West” (2020) 31:3 *The Howard Journal of Communications* 245.

<sup>69</sup> This will be further explained in Chapter II.

<sup>70</sup> Adrija Dey & Kaitlynn Mendes, “It Started with This One Post’: #MeToo, India and Higher Education” (2021) 31:2 *Journal of Gender Studies* 204 at 207

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Afzal & Paige Wallace, “Entangled Feminisms: #MeToo as a Node on the Feminist Mesh” (2019) 36:2 *South Central Rev* 131 at 138.

which includes feminist research that centers on women's experiences, is attentive to gender, discusses reflexivity and employs participatory methods. Finally, I detail the research design, including the research question and hypotheses. I describe the population of interest, how the sampling and recruitment were done and detail the study's limitations.

In Chapter IV, I analyze the interview data and discuss the role of the leaders of the movement in activating #YoTeCreo. I discuss how in an organic manner #YoTeCreo leaders amplified the testimonies of women on social media. I explain that while #YoTeCreo was not a transplantation of #MeToo, #MeToo was the closest reference leaders had to feminist digital activism and was a significant influence. I detail the role of leaders of the #YoTeCreo who lived abroad, and how their distance from the complex Venezuelan crisis allowed them to open up feminist knowledges in ways that would not have been possible at home. I discuss how participants did not have specific experience or knowledge of VAW in Venezuela but understood the historical exclusion and discrimination of Venezuelan women. I also describe how leaders of #YoTeCreo used their social media expertise and influencer status to generate the success of this digital activism. I theorize *hartazgo* (outrage) as the result of the participants' feelings of tiredness, frustration and anger. I show how the spark of #YoTeCreo was, in part, the result of a tipping point after years of Venezuelan women's collective experience of violence over generations, #YoTeCreo connected individual feelings of outrage to a collective impulse driven by sorority. Finally, I explore how the invisible and unpaid work carried out by #YoTeCreo leaders amount to hidden emotional costs of sustaining a movement.

Following the analysis, I answer the research question – How did #YoTeCreo emerge in Venezuela? I identified that the majority of the participants did not identify Latin American digital feminist movements as reference points salient to the creation of #YoTeCreo. Participants did refer to #MeToo as a key inspiration for #YoTeCreo, despite that they did not actively participate in the #MeToo discussion. Also, the participation of Venezuelan migrant women in #YoTeCreo was key for this digital feminist activism to emerge. I explain that the participants did not have specific knowledge of the situation of women's rights in Venezuela. However, they all, through personal experiences, had

embodied knowledge and experienced discrimination. It was particularly important to mention that, #YoTeCreo gained momentum in part because it was initiated by Venezuelan women with fame and status; this tracked the role of famous women in spurring #MeToo. Using inductive analysis, I also conclude that one key factor for the spark was the *hartazgo*, further detailed in this chapter. In addition, as described by the participants, #YoTeCreo was organic, spontaneous, and, I would add, reactive and unplanned. This spontaneity and reactivity can account for how #YoTeCreo gained in popularity quickly but died out equally rapidly.

In the last chapter, I discuss this study's scholarly contributions and highlight areas for future research. The latter includes the role of political and local regimes in incentivizing or disincentivizing participation in online activism and the influence of migrant women's knowledge of feminism(s) to their country of origin and vice versa. Further, exploring the costs, struggles and challenges of sustaining a spontaneous spark in digital feminist activism are important and encouraged. Finally, this study also suggests that the role of celebrities and 'influencers' in creating more awareness of VAW should be investigated further.

## Chapter Two: Literature review and theoretical framework

In this chapter, I analyze the literature surrounding digital feminist activism. I then explain my theoretical frameworks including the FemMesh, and two conceptual frameworks, intersectional and transnational feminism, that complement each other. I use the FemMesh, as will be explained below, to comprehend #YoTeCreo not as an isolated or transplanted phenomenon but as a part of a larger feminist network that connects “[t]houghts and knowledge in an ever-expanding feminist framework.”<sup>72</sup> Drawing from Ergun, I employ the conceptual frame of transnationalized intersectionality (both transnational and intersectional feminism as co-existing theories) to situate this research through a feminist lens that is attentive to power and oppression in the specific Latin American context.<sup>73</sup> After elaborating on both frameworks, I introduce past moments of feminism(s) and women’s rights in Venezuela and in Latin America, including the increased awareness of VAW from a global perspective to a Latin American context and then I deepen the analysis on Venezuela. I also introduce other instances of digital feminist activism, including Latin American feminist references (#NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso) and #MeToo. Finally, I refer to the history of feminism(s) and women’s organizing in Latin America. This overview helps me situate #YoTeCreo as part of a feminist framework in order to understand this instance of digital feminist activism connected to past feminist moments and use this background to later test with my qualitative method.

### 2.1 Digital Feminist Activism

Digital feminist activism has received substantial attention in the past few years. Around the globe, feminist activists have embraced the use of social media to activate,

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* at 134.

<sup>73</sup> See: María Lugones, “Toward a decolonial feminism” (2014) 22:3 *Estudios feministas* 935; Collins, Patricia Hill et al, “Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory: Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory, Patricia Hill Collins, Duke University Press, 2019” (2021) 20:3 *Contemporary political theory* 690.

mobilize, communicate and lead campaigns to increase awareness of VAW.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have created a space for women to break the silence about sexual violence and harassment, by discussing and sharing their experiences with a virtual community.<sup>75</sup> But not all is positive: social media platforms, in particular Twitter, can be a violent and toxic space for women. According to a report by Amnesty International, women in the UK and United States highlighted Twitter as a space of widespread violence and abuse that leads to women self-censoring and to limiting their online interactions.<sup>76</sup> Online violence, therefore, reduces the participation of women in digital feminist activism.

The use of hashtags in digital activism is, according to Mendes et al., “[o]ne of the most popular forms of feminist activism.”<sup>77</sup> Hashtags can work to “[p]roduce communities of conversation among disparate Twitter users.”<sup>78</sup> Hashtag feminism is a way to raise awareness around issues concerning VAW. It draws “[v]isibility to a particular cause or experience”<sup>79</sup> by organizing posts and Twitter data and is a form of feminist online activism.<sup>80</sup> A hashtag creates a habitat in which every interaction with the same hashtag coexists and strengthens a message that adds to message mobilization and collective discussion. However, scholars debate the efficiency of online hashtag feminism in producing offline social change.<sup>81</sup> The main purpose of this thesis is not to analyze the impact of #YoTeCreo, but to study the conditions under which digital feminist activism can emerge.

Some scholars argue that Twitter has allowed a more democratic and horizontal discussion wherein feminist activism applies intersectionality “[a]s a strategy for

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<sup>74</sup> Ainara Larrondo, Jordi Morales-i-Gras & Julen Orbegozo-Terradillos, “Feminist hashtag activism in Spain: measuring the degree of politicisation of online discourse on #YoSíTeCreo, #HermanaYoSíTeCreo, #Cuéntalo y #NoEstásSola” (2019) 32:4 *Communication & Society* 207.

<sup>75</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46 at 1720.

<sup>76</sup> Amnesty International, “Toxic twitter- a Toxic space for women”, (March 2018), online: Amnesty International <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>>

<sup>77</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose & Jessalynn Keller, “MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism” (2018) 25:2 *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 236.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid* at 244.

<sup>79</sup> Rosemary Clark-Parsons, “‘I SEE YOU, I BELIEVE YOU, I STAND WITH YOU’: #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility” (2021) 21:3 *Feminist Media Studies* 362 at 363.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid* at 363.

<sup>81</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 at 237 “While hashtag feminism has received substantial attention from mainstream media, we still know very little about what hashtags like #MeToo actually do; or whether and how they can produce social change.” See more: Clark, Rosemary. 2016. ‘Hope in a Hashtag’: The Discursive Activism of #WhyIStayed. *Feminist Media Studies* 16: 788.

identifying and contesting overlapping power dynamics and axes of inequalities.”<sup>82</sup> In this new era of social media, and according to Zimmerman, Twitter has been an effective tool for “[e]nacting feminist social movements and exposing social inequality and subordination.”<sup>83</sup> Hence, its importance relies on the possibilities of “[i]dentifying privilege, difference, representation, and racism from an intersectional approach.”<sup>84</sup> While digital feminist activism creates spaces for women to identify and expose social inequality and identify privilege, it is important to recognize that hashtag activism and #MeToo have also been criticized for centering the voices of white, middle-class, cis-gendered women.<sup>85</sup> Even a democratic and horizontal platform has its gaps, including how offline social inequalities can restrict access of some groups to these online platforms.<sup>86</sup>

Another benefit of social media refers to the speed of dissemination in which social media platforms, such as Twitter, not only further solidarity and activism but permit diffusion without borders.<sup>87</sup> Reaching larger audiences than through immediate social circles or traditional media by creating a trending topic on Twitter allows digital activists to mobilize consciousness and create more awareness about VAW. According to Clark-Parsons, “[f]eminist counterpublics networked across a variety of online platforms have mobilized highly visible collective action campaigns against online and offline misogyny and fostered transnational feminist communities.”<sup>88</sup> Likewise, Spanish feminist activist, Nuria Varela, argues that online activism can organize and generate collective knowledges that go beyond region or country.<sup>89</sup> Activists have recognized how online digital platforms allow women to connect with a diverse group of women around

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<sup>82</sup> Zimmerman, Tegan, “Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community” (2017) 38:1 *Atlantis* (Wolfville) 54 at 58.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid* at 58.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid* at 60.

<sup>85</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose & Jessalynn Keller, *Digital feminist activism: girls and women fight back against rape culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019) at 9.

<sup>86</sup> Rosemary Clark, “‘Hope in a hashtag’: the discursive activism of #WhyIStayed” (2016) 16:5 *Feminist Media Studies* 788.

<sup>87</sup> Zimmerman, *supra* note 82 at 55.

<sup>88</sup> Rosemary Clark-Parsons, “Building a digital Girl Army: The cultivation of feminist safe spaces online” (2018) 20:6 *New Media & Society* 2125.

<sup>89</sup> Varela, Nuria, *Feminismo 4.0* (Editorial B 2019). See Lidia García Gonzalez, “Feminist Movements in Mexico: Digital Communicative Practices and Risks” (2021) Universidad de Guanajuato.

the world. Using platforms such as Twitter allows activists to shorten distances and build support networks.<sup>90</sup>

Scholars have studied hashtag feminism and the increased use of social media platforms by activists to understand activist interventions using the following hashtags: #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen;<sup>91</sup> #whyIstayed;<sup>92</sup> #MeToo;<sup>93</sup> #BeenRapedNeverReported;<sup>94</sup> and in Spanish #YoSíTeCreo; #HermanaYoSíTeCreo;<sup>95</sup> and #MeTooMx.<sup>96</sup> The findings of these studies discussed the need to conduct more research about feminism(s) in the digital age and in the following paragraphs, I will address this studies.<sup>97</sup>

For example, Clark-Parsons discusses how #MeToo participants performed on two levels of visibility, the individual and the collective. This bridge between personal and collective created an understanding of sexual violence not as an individual issue but as a widespread problem. She argues that scholarship should navigate the contradictions of hashtag activism as “a key step toward theorizing feminists’ digital media practices and building a more feminist approach to networked activism.”<sup>98</sup> She invites further research that discusses the complexities of hashtag activism including their strengths and weaknesses.<sup>99</sup> My research findings include some complexities about performing online digital activism that will contribute to filling this gap.

In a case study on the hashtag #BeenRapedAndNeverReported,<sup>100</sup> researchers assessed how much support women received from people they did not know expressing solidarity in the forms of ‘favourites’/likes (a heart symbol under the tweet), ‘retweets’, or ‘DMs’ (direct messages). This form of solidarity created an understanding among

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<sup>90</sup> See Valeria Angola, “De encuentros, feminismo y tecnología”, Nexos (March 8, 2021), online:

<<https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=53887>>

<sup>91</sup> Zimmerman, *supra* note 82. See more Mikki Kendall, “SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: women of color’s issue with digital feminism” The Guardian, (13 August 2014)

<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/14/solidarityisforwhitewomen-hashtag-feminism>> Mikki Kendall started #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen on August 12th, 2013 and became a trending topic worldwide, with around 75 thousands tweets to create “[a] discussion between people impacted by the latest bout of problematic behavior from mainstream white feminists.”

<sup>92</sup> Clark, *supra* note 86 at 788. The #WhyIStayed “[a]rose in response to a 2014 NFL domestic violence controversy”

<sup>93</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 and 79.

<sup>94</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46.

<sup>95</sup> Larrondo, Morales & Orbezo, *supra* note 74.

<sup>96</sup> Rovira-Sancho, *supra* note 49.

<sup>97</sup> Larrondo, Morales & Orbezo, *supra* note 74, 77, 88.

<sup>98</sup> Clark, *supra* note 79 at 376.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid* at 377.

<sup>100</sup> Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al, *supra* note 85. #BeenRapedAndNeverReported hashtag started in 2014 with the case of Jian Ghomeshi when Toronto Star reporter Antonia Zerbisias created the hashtag in less than 24 hours it was used around 8 million times to reflect the rape culture in Canada and Globally.

hashtag users of sexual violence that went beyond individual personal stories to capture the structural and widespread nature of the problem.<sup>101</sup> The case study called upon “[r]esearchers to continue to explore the experiences of those who are participating in such initiatives, so we can understand the fuller picture and long-term effects and impacts of such feminist activism.”<sup>102</sup> In this study, I discuss the experience of organizing and participating in digital feminist activism of the leaders of #YoTeCreo, thereby contributing to the understanding of this phenomenon and to the existing scholarship on digital feminist activism.

Researchers have also conducted studies on the use of hashtags in Spain. In the first study, they analyzed the use of hashtags such as #YoSiTeCreo (Yes, I believe you), #HermanaYoSiTeCreo (Yes, sister, I believe you), #Cuéntalo (Talk about it), and #NoEstásSola (You are not alone), starting from the date of the judicial ruling of the Wolf Pack Case<sup>103</sup> on April 26, 2018 until the end of August of the same year.<sup>104</sup> In this study, the authors consider the importance of Twitter and its “[i]nfluence and dissemination or viralization of messages,”<sup>105</sup> reinforcing the need to understand the impact and consequences of digital feminist activism. My study expands the findings of hashtag activism from a geographical perspective.

A second study from the same researchers sought to understand the conversation that occurred during the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which took place on 25 November 2018.<sup>106</sup> In this study, the researchers concluded that Twitter has the potential to create dialogue and relationships among different feminist discussions and to offer a more horizontal debate. They also emphasized that Twitter gives visibility to digital feminist activism and has become an effective tool for raising awareness.<sup>107</sup> Relevant to this study, they proposed that there is

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<sup>101</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 at 238.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* at 244.

<sup>103</sup> See more Patricia Faraldo-Cabana, “The Wolf-Pack Case and the Reform of Sex Crimes in Spain” (2021) 22:5 German Law Journal 847. The controversial trial of five men accused of gang-raping a young woman during the San Fermín (Running-with-the-Bulls) festivities in July of that year in Pamplona. The case is known as La Manada, or the Wolf-Pack case, because the men called themselves so in their WhatsApp chat group. The case had been a moment of reckoning, laying bare a deep culture of misogyny both in Spanish society and the criminal justice system.

<sup>104</sup> Larrondo, Morales & Orbeago, *supra* note 74.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid* at 209.

<sup>106</sup> Ainara Larrondo, Ainara & Julen Orbeago-Terradillos, “Digital Prospects of the Contemporary Feminist Movement for Dialogue and International Mobilization: A Case Study of the 25 November Twitter Conversation” (2021) 10:3 Social Science.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid* at 4.

a difference between English-language and Spanish-language digital activism. They found that:

[F]eminism in the Spanish-speaking world [only by analyzing Spain-Argentina and Mexico], then, presents a more subversive character that tends towards protest, unlike that in English-speaking countries where the struggle for equality in relation to the 25 November event is channeled through associations and organizations that are integrated into the structure of the social, political and cultural system.<sup>108</sup>

This suggests that mobilization and activism carried out between English and Spanish contexts is a different type of activism. Whereas, in the English-speaking Global North, the conversation occurs through organizations, Spanish feminist activist discussion is more subversive and less mediated through institutions or organizations.<sup>109</sup> This study not only confirms the importance of researching hashtags in Spanish to understand cultural, regional and political differences but also opens the conversation on the nature and uses of digital activism in Spanish, which I will expand on in my analysis.

According to Varela, digital feminist activism allows diverse groups of women to access a public opinion space that they did not previously have access before the existence of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook due to the patriarchal control of mass media. This allows activists to break the silence that for Varela is “the patriarchal mandate for excellence.”<sup>110</sup>

Researchers on digital feminist activism have addressed different forms of digital feminist activism. The studies addressed how through the diffusion of hashtags and the dissemination of online activism, activists mobilize awareness and can change the perception of VAW as being an individual problem to an understanding of this phenomenon as structural and widespread. Additionally, research on Spanish hashtags suggests the different nature of the conversation that occurs in the Spanish speaking world and the different way of activist organizing. This study will contribute to the complexities of online activism from a new geographical and local perspective.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid* at 10.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>110</sup> Varela, N. (2020). El tsunami feminista. *Nueva sociedad*, (286), 93-106. See Varela, Nuria, *Feminismo 4.0*, at 159.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

This study uses the FemMesh and transnationalized intersectionality (intersectional feminism and transnational feminism) as theoretical frameworks. These frameworks allow me to understand #YoTeCreo as part of a larger feminist network and not an isolated event.

### 2.2.1 The FemMesh

I use the conceptual framework of the FemMesh to understand #YoTeCreo not as an outlying event or a transplantation but as part of a larger feminist network that “[w]orks in entanglements rather than isolated endpoints.”<sup>111</sup> Sarah Afzal and Paige Wallace have described the FemMesh as:

...[a] new way of looking at feminist knowledges through intricate connections and entanglements. Feminist knowledge is traditionally described through the wave metaphor with each wave feeding into the next. This cyclical ebb and flow encourages new feminist knowledges and practices. But waves collect energy and grow steeper as they approach the shore, collapsing when they reach it. Thinking of feminism as waves ensures that once a feminist agenda has been achieved another wave will bring about the next change.<sup>112</sup>

Afzal and Wallace propose moving away from the understanding of feminism as waves that come and go, refocusing attention instead on the FemMesh to draw connections and entanglements between past and present feminist events. For example, they theorize that movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp should not be treated as stand-alone instances of feminist digital activism but as part of the connections between past and present feminist knowledges.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, I understand #YoTeCreo as a phenomenon that is related to past local and regional feminist moments.

In Afzal and Wallace’s FemMesh “user guide”, the user is encouraged to “[a]djust their lenses and see feminism in many different ways” including zooming in and out to show “[h]ow the past is entangled with the present through intersecting and overlapping

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<sup>111</sup>Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71 at 138.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid* at 132.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid* at 136.

nodes.”<sup>114</sup> The nodes are points of intersection of feminist knowledge and “[t]his knowledge becomes enmeshed with an active and visible fight against the everyday violence perpetrated by patriarchal hierarchies of power.”<sup>115</sup> Using the FemMesh, I will zoom out of #YoTeCreo and understand this digital feminist activism as one node connected to a larger structure of feminist knowledges. In my application of the FemMesh, I connect #YoTeCreo to nodes including the increased awareness of VAW from a global and Latin American perspective. Other nodes include other instances of feminist digital activism in Latin American, and #MeToo. My final node is the history of feminism(s) and women’s activist organizing in Latin America.

## **2.2.2 Intersectional and transnational feminism**

In this section, I explain the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and transnational feminism. I then draw from Ergun and employ transnationalized intersectionality as a complementary theoretical frame that will help me situate this research through a feminist intersectional lens that is attentive to power and oppression from a specifically Latin American and colonial perspective.

### **2.2.2.1 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a term coined in academia by feminist and critical race scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, as an analytical tool when reflecting on how legal discrimination operates at the intersection of two or more identity categories. Crenshaw was specifically concerned with conceptualization of single categories of race and sex as they contribute to legal discrimination against Black women.<sup>116</sup> In her own words, she compared intersectionality to traffic lights and roads:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid* at 138.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid* at 134.

<sup>116</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991) 43:6 *Stanford Law Review* 1241.

harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.<sup>117</sup>

It is important to recognize that, historically, the recognition of multiple intersections is prior to Crenshaw, who recognized that she coined the term but not the concept. From a US perspective, the term is most likely credited to Sojourner Truth, a women's rights activist and abolitionist. In Truth's 1851 declaration "Ain't I a Woman?," she reflects on the white 'woman' experience as universalizing every women's experience compared to her experience as a Black woman.<sup>118</sup> Another Black feminist academic that theorized intersectionality is Patricia Hill Collins, who conceptualized the matrix of domination to describe the "overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained,"<sup>119</sup> and explained how intersecting oppression works differently within diverse local realities.<sup>120</sup>

This term has gained popularity and captured feminist thinking for the past decade as a tool used to describe and analyze multiples forms of discrimination.<sup>121</sup> It has also been referred to as a frame, perspective, concept, method, or lens.<sup>122</sup> The central point is that gender should not be categorized or analyzed separately without analyzing race, ethnicity, class, colonization, sexuality, and other axes of oppression. I employ intersectionality as a lens that will orient my analysis to understand digital feminist activism through the structures of power and oppression.

#### **2.2.2.2 Transnational feminism**

On the other hand, transnational feminism refers to the flow, shifts, and cross-border movements of ideas, persons, and places. I build on Conway's concept of transnational feminism, which includes "how identities, places, and knowledge have been and continue to be constituted by translocal flows and exchanges across the

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<sup>117</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex" (1989) University of Chicago Legal Forum 140 at 141.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment" (2015) 38:13 *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 2314.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Crenshaw, *supra* note 117.

<sup>122</sup> Katrine Smiet, *Sojourner Truth and Intersectionality : Travelling Truths in Feminist Scholarship* (Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2021).

borders of nation-states in an era of 'globalization.'<sup>123</sup> This theory centers on the movements and travel of feminist knowledge(s) that, similar to the digital media, transcend borders.

Transnational feminism rejects global sisterhood<sup>124</sup> as a way to universalize women's experiences and discusses a non-hegemonic and cultural approach. Mohanty, for example, criticizes the views of Western feminism and "[t]he assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy that can be applied universally and cross-culturally."<sup>125</sup> She calls for work that is "attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes."<sup>126</sup> Her invitation to scholars is to carefully include a historical and contextual analysis that is not based on universal or historical categories but focuses on interconnected and related issues that can facilitate cross-border alliances.<sup>127</sup>

From a Latin American perspective, transnational feminism analyzes the connections between colonization and the predominance of heteropatriarchy. For Lugones, decolonizing gender means "[t]o enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexual gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social."<sup>128</sup> Lugones argues for a historical and subjective understanding of oppression that includes not only race, class, and gender, as proposed by Crenshaw, but, similar to Collins, also includes colonial, racialized, and capitalist heterosexual gender oppression. In addition, as argued by Lugones, transnational feminism challenges anti-colonial theorists and activists who fail to address the interconnections between colonial power and systems of heteropatriarchy.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Janey Conway, "The transnational turn: Looking back and looking ahead" in Collins, Lynn H, Sayaka Machizawa & Joy K Rice, *Transnational psychology of women: expanding international and intersectional approaches* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2019) at 56.

<sup>124</sup> Global feminism was coined by Robin Morgan as a feminist theory that unite women with common goals and conditions. It has been highly criticized as it offers a single story without understanding oppression and cultural differences. According to global feminist theory, women not only face the same obstacles, but are also united by a 'common condition'.

<sup>125</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without borders decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) at 21.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid* at 223.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* at 37.

<sup>128</sup> María Lugones, "Toward a decolonial feminism" (2014) 22:3 *Estudios Feministas* 935 at 948.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*.

### **2.2.2.3 Transnationalized intersectionality**

Finally, I am attentive to both intersectionality and transnational feminism as part of my theoretical frameworks. Drawing from Ergun's expansion on transnationalized intersectionality, "intersectional feminism and transnational feminism not only are politically complementary theoretical and practical platforms of justice but also need each other to envision and generate more effective coalitional strategies of social change and solidarity building."<sup>130</sup> Both the theoretical frames of transnational feminism and intersectionality need to be applied in a dialogic mode to understand the cross-border movement of #YoTeCreo. #YoTeCreo was born in a digital context and the porosity of digital boundaries, therefore I argue that #YoTeCreo is part of transnational feminism as an instance of cross-border activism, that overlaps and crosses with local particularities, and it is attentive to the regional context.

## **2.3 Nodes**

In the following section, I explain the nodes, as points of intersection and moments of feminism(s) and women's rights, that I theorized to be connected to #YoTeCreo. This includes a) Increased awareness of VAW from a global and Latin American perspective; b) references on prior feminist digital activism (#MeToo and Latin American references on feminist digital activism; c) feminist voices and women's organizing in Latin America.

### **2.3.1 Increased awareness of violence against women as a global phenomenon and the overreliance on criminal law**

In the last decade, VAW has received enormous attention globally. This attention has resulted in the criminalization of some types of violence with specific legislation. Various international treaties and instruments have upheld the right of women to be free from violence, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the regional Inter-American Convention

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<sup>130</sup> Patricia Hill Collins et al, "Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory: Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory, Patricia Hill Collins, Duke University Press, 2019" (2021) 20:3 Contemporary political theory 690 at 701.

on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, (Belém do Pará Convention). However, the response of States has been to primarily rely on the criminal law system, and they have been unable or unwilling to provide justice, reparations, and accountability to women victims of these crimes. For example, feminist scholars have demonstrated that, “while the rules of evidence may look gender-neutral on their face, they systematically marginalize and even revictimize women testifying about sexual assault.”<sup>131</sup> Others argued that “state authorities do not treat women well when they do report, which reinforces the norm of non-reporting.”<sup>132</sup> The State's response to eliminate VAW has created impunity and revictimization.

In the case of Latin America, researchers have documented that laws on VAW in the region have been aspirational but weak in implementation.<sup>133</sup> VAW remains a serious problem in the world, and especially in Latin America, where inequality together with patriarchal traditions in culture, religion, social class, poverty, and xenophobia place women at a higher risk of suffering these types of violence than in other regions.<sup>134</sup> Data suggests that VAW is increasing in Latin America, and killings of women have increased by five percent according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).<sup>135</sup> Feminist movements have used online and offline activism to protest against the State's incapacity to deal with these issues.<sup>136</sup> In Latin America, the use of hashtags such as #NiUnaMenos<sup>137</sup> and #MiPrimerAcoso<sup>138</sup> have brought to light the serious problems of accountability and impunity when dealing with cases of VAW, and the long-normalized patriarchal culture that disrespects women.

In the following section, I will situate the reader with the current situation of VAW in Venezuela.

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<sup>131</sup> Mariana Valverde, *Law's Dream of a Common Knowledge* (Wiley Subscription Services, Inc, 2003) at 11

<sup>132</sup> Mala Htun & Francesca R Jensenius. “Aspirational Laws as Weak Institutions: Legislation to Combat Violence against Women in Mexico” in Daniel M Brinks, Steven Levitsky & María Victoria Murillo, eds, *The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Latin America*, ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 141.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> See Amnesty International, *Americas 2020*, online: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/report-americas/>>

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* See UNODC, “Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members, Global estimates 2020” (November 2021), 20, online (pdf): <[www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/UN\\_BriefFem\\_251121.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/UN_BriefFem_251121.pdf)>

<sup>136</sup> Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rape as a grave and systematic human rights violation and gender-based violence against women, A/HRC/47/26, Jun 2021. Governments’ failure to address all the structural, normative and policy factors that result in impunity for perpetrators is now being challenged by many women’s marches and protests, feminist movements, the Me Too movement and civil society movements that are breaking the silence on rape. Examples include those in Chile, Spain, and India.

<sup>137</sup> Palmeiro, *supra* note 44.

<sup>138</sup> Estereotipas, *supra* note 45.

### 2.3.1.1 VAW in Venezuela and State incapacity to address this phenomenon

In this section, I ‘zoom into’ the situation of women’s rights in Venezuela as one node of the FemMesh. I provide a brief overview of the current situation in the country and the effect it has had on women’s rights.

Venezuela is a country currently facing an absence of the rule of law, public institutional undermining and systematic impunity for crimes committed against women.<sup>139</sup> For the past few years, international organizations have recognized that the rule of law has crumbled, the judiciary lacks independence as it is subordinated to the Executive, and that legal institutions are weak.<sup>140</sup> This political problem and the multilevel crisis has led to the recognition that Venezuela has been facing a complex humanitarian emergency for more than five years.<sup>141</sup> Six million Venezuelans<sup>142</sup> have fled the country due to deteriorating living conditions, including malnutrition, food insecurity, and lack of access to health, including sexual and reproductive health, water, and sanitation. This complex humanitarian crisis has had a differentially severe impact on women and girls.<sup>143</sup>

Women and girls rights have been displaced, disregarded and subordinated to the last issue on the public agenda. VAW in the country is an important contributor to inequality and discrimination, including but not limited to barriers to accessing justice for women and girls. In Venezuela, the complexity starts with the complete absence of precise and reliable figures and statistical information. Since 2015, there are no official

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<sup>139</sup> See for example: Brewer-Carias, Allan R, “The Collapse Of The Rule Of Law In Venezuela 1999-2019” (2020) 52:3 New York University Journal Of International Law & Politics 741. Maryhen Jimenez, “La democratización en Venezuela pasa por la reconstrucción del Estado”, Nueva Sociedad No 299, (2022) ISSN: 0251-3552, <www.nuso.org>.

<sup>140</sup> See more Due Process of Law Foundation, “Transition of the Venezuelan Justice System” Transition of the Venezuelan Justice System (June 2020), online (pdf): <[dplf.org/sites/default/files/judicial\\_transition\\_ven\\_eng\\_vf.pdf](https://dplf.org/sites/default/files/judicial_transition_ven_eng_vf.pdf)>

<sup>141</sup> See for example: Human Rights Watch, “Venezuela’s Humanitarian Emergency” (April 2019), online: <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/04/venezuelas-humanitarian-emergency/large-scale-un-response-needed-address-health>> ; WOLA, “Venezuela’s complex humanitarian crisis: Humanitarian response, challenges for civil society”, (15 Sep 2021), online: <<https://www.wola.org/es/analisis/venezuela-emergencia-humanitaria-compleja/>>

<sup>142</sup> See for example: Coordination Platform for Migrants and Refugees in Venezuela (R4V), Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, <<https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants>>; International Organization for Migration, Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis, online: <<https://www.iom.int/venezuelan-refugee-and-migrant-crisis>>

<sup>143</sup> See for example: Kristen Martinez-Gugerli, WOLA, Venezuela’s Gendered Crisis I: Differential Impact of the Humanitarian Emergency, (Jun 2, 2020), online: <<https://www.venezuelablog.org/venezuelas-gendered-crisis-differential-impact-humanitarian-emergency/>>; HumaVenezuela, Follow-up Report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela with the COVID pandemic, Update as of June 2021, <<https://humvenezuela.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/HumVenezuela-Report-June-2021.pdf>>

statistics regarding VAW, there is no systematic collection of data disaggregated by gender, nor are there periodic statistical publications with an explanation of their methodology.<sup>144</sup> Local NGOs have undertaken the role of the State to document, collect data, and gather information on VAW in the country to understand the dimensions of the crisis. For example, since 2020, Centro de Justicia y Paz (CEPAZ) has been documenting cases of femi(ni)cide in Venezuela and abroad. According to their data, 290 and 212 femi(ni)cides occurred in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>145</sup>

On a legislative level, Venezuela was one of the first countries in the region to enact special legislation on the matter in 1998, the Law on Violence against Women and the Family,<sup>146</sup> which was reformed in 2007 with the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence as a promise of a so-called ‘feminist state’ concerned with women's and girls’ rights.<sup>147</sup> The latter was recently reformed in December 2021 to include more crimes and increase penalties, even though there is no correlation between higher penalties and a decrease in crimes.<sup>148</sup> These laws have been insufficient and do not solve the problem of VAW in the country. Local NGOs, such as Acceso a la Justicia and CEPAZ, have identified several problems accessing justice faced by women who have experienced violence, including prejudice and stereotypes; lack of inclusion of intersectionality in judgments; revictimization; judicial delay; interruption of trials; and lack of disaggregated data, among others.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, “Violence and Discrimination Against Women and Girls” (2019) online (pdf) <<https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/ViolenceWomenGirls.pdf>> at 147; Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, Annual Report, Chapter V, Venezuela, (2022) online (pdf) <<http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2021/capitulos/IA2021cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf>>

<sup>145</sup> Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/50/59, Fiftieth session, 13 June - 8 July 2022. Paragraph 39.

“Cepaz documented from January to November of 2021, 258 femicide in Venezuela compared to 103 cases from June until November 2020”. See more NGO Cepaz documented from January to November of 2021, 258 femicides in Venezuela compared to 103 cases from June until November 2020; CEPAZ, “Follow up on femicides from June 14th until November 13th, 2020”, (10 December 2020)

online:<[https://cepaz.org/documentos\\_informes/monitoreo-de-femicidios-del-14-de-junio-al-13-de-noviembre-de-2020/](https://cepaz.org/documentos_informes/monitoreo-de-femicidios-del-14-de-junio-al-13-de-noviembre-de-2020/)>

[translated by author]

<sup>146</sup> Law on Violence against Women and the Family, Official Gazette No. 36.531, September 3, 1998.

<sup>147</sup> Law on Violence Against Women in Venezuela, Official Gazette No. 38.668, April 23, 2007.

<sup>148</sup> Law on Partial Reform of the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence, Official Gazette No. 6.667 of 16 December 2021.

<sup>149</sup> See Acceso a la justicia, “Myths and realities of violence against women in Venezuela” (2021), online (pdf):

<[accesoalajusticia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Myths-and-realities-of-violence-against-women-in-Venezuela-1.pdf](https://accesoalajusticia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Myths-and-realities-of-violence-against-women-in-Venezuela-1.pdf)>;

CEPAZ, “Women on the Edge” (May 2019), online (pdf):

<[cepaz.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WOMAN\\_LIMITE\\_web\\_compressed.pdf](https://cepaz.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WOMAN_LIMITE_web_compressed.pdf)>

The responses to eradicate VAW by the State have been scarce. This is despite the fact that, according to government data reported to the United Nations, Venezuela has specialized jurisdiction to prosecute crimes of VAW and about 120 prosecutors offices.<sup>150</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has “[o]bserved a lack of due diligence in investigative proceedings related to cases of gender-based violence. Although courts and police units specialized in gender-based violence are in place, victims’ accounts indicate that they usually lack a victim-centered approach.”<sup>151</sup> The specialized institutions and prosecutors offices are insufficient to address this problem.

Additionally, there is no access to public information or accountability, therefore, there is no official available data.<sup>152</sup> As an example, according to State figures, 1,155 offenders were convicted for sexual violence in 2021.<sup>153</sup> This number does not include how many reports the Prosecutor’s office received that year, or to which years these cases correspond.<sup>154</sup> Another example of the State’s insufficient response is that the online service that provides information and legal advice for women victims of sexual violence, 0800-Mujeres (0800-6853737), did not offer any service between 2019 and 2020.<sup>155</sup> It resumed service by the end of 2020, a year that was highly lethal for women around the world.<sup>156</sup>

The case of Linda Loaiza Lopez exemplifies the lack of victim-centered approaches and the lack of access to justice for women in Venezuela. Ms. Lopez was subjected to sexual violence and torture, and after the events, she was re-victimized throughout two trials in Venezuela during which her rights were violated due to: failure to investigate, inadequate investigation, and investigation methods that revictimized Ms. Lopez and were tainted by stereotypes and judicial errors.<sup>157</sup> After more than 16 years pursuing justice, she achieved a positive ruling by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States; however, the State has for over four

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<sup>150</sup> Human Rights Council, *supra* note 145 at 39.

<sup>151</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Independence of the justice system and access to justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, including for violations of economic and social rights, and the situation of human rights in the Arco Minero del Orinoco region Report, 29 September 2020, A/HRC/44/54 Paragraph 33.

<sup>152</sup> Human Rights Council, *supra* note 145 at paragraph 39.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid* paragraph 39 and 16.

<sup>155</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Ninth periodic report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela due in 2018, CEDAW/C/VEN/9, (June 2021)

<sup>156</sup> Amnesty, *supra* note 134 and UNODC, *supra* note 135.

<sup>157</sup> See Interamerican Court on Human Rights, Case López Soto & Others v. Venezuela, Executive Summary (September 26 2018) online: [www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/resumen\\_362\\_esp.pdf](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/resumen_362_esp.pdf)

years refused to comply with the Court's judgment.<sup>158</sup> This is the first and only case that specifically deals with VAW in Venezuela that has received a ruling from an international tribunal.

The narrative of the Venezuelan government as a self-declared feminist state permeates public discourse.<sup>159</sup> However, the State has used feminism(s) as a tool to be perceived as progressive, for example by: placing women in positions of power in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; using inclusive language; enacting the first law on VAW in the region of the Americas; naming themselves a 'feminist' State and creating welfare programs that center on low-income women.<sup>160</sup> The reality is that the State has failed to grant women's rights to Venezuelan women and girls, or to reduce inequality. On the contrary, there exists a lack of sexual and reproductive rights, abortion is still illegal, there are contraceptives shortages, and Venezuela has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Latin America.<sup>161</sup> No quota system is in place to guarantee political participation of women in the parliament,<sup>162</sup> and gender-based stereotypes are embedded within public welfare.<sup>163</sup> An example is the government campaign of "humanized childbirth" introduced by President Maduro in March 2020, when he called on "[a]ll women, to give birth to six children. Women are made to give birth."<sup>164</sup> This campaign is deeply rooted in a stereotype of women's only role as caregivers and mothers. Therefore, the idea of the Venezuelan State as a feminist state cannot be sustained.

It is important to highlight that during the #YoTeCreo spark, the State over relied on the criminal apparatus to prosecute named perpetrators and increase carceral punitivism. As mentioned in Chapter I, the Ombudsperson started to prosecute some key figures identified by women activists as perpetrators of acts of violence, which

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<sup>158</sup> See CEJIL, "Linda Loaiza Lopez case", online: <[cejil.org/en/case/linda-loaiza-lopez-soto-2/](http://cejil.org/en/case/linda-loaiza-lopez-soto-2/)>

<sup>159</sup> See more Ana Hernandez, "Socialist Feminism in Venezuela: Revolution on Three Fronts" (2021), *Feminist Studies*, 47:3 at 576; Yoletty Bracho & Marisela Bethancourt "The Feminist Revolution That Wasn't" March 11, 2022, *Nacla*, online:

<https://nacla.org/chavismo-feminism-abortion>

<sup>160</sup> Luisa Kislinger, "Women's Rights in Venezuela: a Hypocritical Mirage Called "Feminist Revolution" *Caracas Chronicles*, (March 8, 2018), online:

<https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2018/03/08/womens-rights-in-venezuela-a-hypocritical-mirage-called-feminist-revolution/>

<sup>161</sup> Yoletty Bracho & Marisela Bethancourt, "The Feminist Revolution That Wasn't" March 11, 2022, *Nacla*, online:

<https://nacla.org/chavismo-feminism-abortion>; Luisa Kislinger, *Feminist revolution? Think again*, *Caracas Chronicles* (March 6, 2017), online: <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2017/03/16/feminist-revolution-think/>

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Hernandez, *supra* note 159 at 576.

strengthened the illiberal regime while allowing the state to appear progressive and feminist.<sup>165</sup> The State used the #YoTeCreo digital feminist movement to strengthen its criminal apparatus for repressive political purposes and in doing so they co-opted the movement. Persecution and imprisonment of opposition leaders and human rights defenders have been long used by the state as a strategy to undermine freedom of expression and civil liberties.<sup>166</sup> Researchers have documented carceral punitivism in Venezuela and the “[s]ystematic killing as a way to enforce social control but also gain support through a tough-on-crime approach.”<sup>167</sup> After #YoTeCreo sparked, the response from the State has been the reproduction of a cycle of power and control, including increased penalties in the new reform of VAW in December 2021, over-regulation, and sending women to report these cases to a criminal law system that is patriarchal and will only serve to perpetuate stereotypes and impunity,<sup>168</sup> (see for example, the case #ProtectThePlayers that will be discussed below in section b).<sup>169</sup> These developments will require further research.

### 2.3.2 Previous digital feminist activism

In this section, I trace previous uses of digital feminist activism by zooming in on cases such as #MeToo, Latin America hashtag activism (#NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso) and other cases in Venezuela. These instances of digital feminist activism are connected to the node of #YoTeCreo. I will explain further these instances of hashtag activism.

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<sup>165</sup> William Saab, *supra* note 25.

<sup>166</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Venezuela: Attacks Against Freedom of Expression Must Cease Immediately” (14 January 2021), online: [www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/14/venezuela-attacks-against-freedom-expression-must-cease-immediately](http://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/14/venezuela-attacks-against-freedom-expression-must-cease-immediately)

<sup>167</sup> Rebecca Hanson & Verónica Zubillaga, “From carceral punitivism to systematic killing: The necropolitics of policing in post-Chávez Venezuela” (2021) 2:1 *Violence: An International Journal* 65.

<sup>168</sup> William Saab, *supra* note 25. See Law on Partial Reform of the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence, Official Gazette No. 6.667 of 16 December 2021.

<sup>169</sup> William Saab, *supra* note 27. See Deyna Castellanos,  COMUNICADO, #NoMasAbusos #ProtejanALasJugadoras #ProtectThePlayers, (5 Oct, 2021 5:02 PM ) online Twitter: <https://twitter.com/deynac18/status/1445494643777425411> See: La Razon, “They begin an investigation into the complaint of 24 soccer players against their coach for “sexual, physical and psychological” abuse, June 10 2021, online: <https://www.larazon.es/deportes/futbol/20211006/ndgtrmynfzbaxanh77pdlogipi.html> [translated by author]

### 2.3.2.1 #MeToo

MeToo as a movement was founded in 2007 by Tarana Burke, an African American woman, to support survivors of sexual violence among Black women and girls in the United States.<sup>170</sup> Burke created this movement to provide healing to African Americans inside and outside the criminal law system. It was first meant to “symbolize the movement’s idea of ‘empowerment through empathy.’”<sup>171</sup> ‘MeToo’ later was amplified through the hashtag as an online instance of digital feminist activism. On October 15, 2017, Alyssa Milano tweeted: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.”<sup>172</sup> Her tweet went viral, and thousands of women used the #MeToo hashtag to share their stories of sexual violence and harassment.<sup>173</sup> It is important to mention that Milano’s tweet did not come unforeseen. It came about after journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey released on October 5 of the same year a New York Times article that discussed the pattern of abuse and harassment perpetrated by Harvey Weinstein. In this article, Milano was one of the key women interviewed.<sup>174</sup> When #MeToo started on social media, Burke tweeted: “It’s beyond a hashtag. It’s the start of a larger conversation and a movement for radical community healing. Join us. #MeToo.”<sup>175</sup> In this tweet, she reminded us of ‘MeToo’ and her work before this became a popular hashtag centered on Hollywood and how the purpose of the movement was to bring light to the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment.

#MeToo is one of the most “high profile examples of digital feminist activism.”<sup>176</sup> The level of diffusion of #MeToo was massive and spread quickly in the United States. Its reception in Latin America, however, was more tempered. According to research by UN Women, within less than 24 hours after Milano’s tweet the hashtag #MeToo was

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<sup>170</sup> MeTooMvmt History, online: <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Alyssa\_Milano, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (15 Oct 2017, 10:21 PM) online: Twitter [https://twitter.com/alyssa\\_milano/status/919659438700670976?lang=en](https://twitter.com/alyssa_milano/status/919659438700670976?lang=en)

<sup>173</sup> See Bianca, Fileborn & Rachel Loney-Howes, *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>174</sup> Kantor & Twohey, *supra* note 56.

<sup>175</sup> Tarana Burke, “It’s beyond a hashtag. It’s the start of a larger conversation and a movement for radical community healing. Join us. #metoo” (15 October 2017 at 7:22 PM), online: Twitter <https://twitter.com/taranaburke/status/919704949751255040?lang=en>

<sup>176</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 at 236.

used half a million times on Twitter and 4.7 million times on Facebook.<sup>177</sup> A year later, data recorded that the hashtag was used 14 million times in public twitter accounts.<sup>178</sup> Some highlight #MeToo as a worldwide phenomenon but the data suggests otherwise. Purna Sen, former Director of Policy at the UN Women, used Twitter data collected by UN Women together with Global Pulse to conclude that from 2016 to 2019, #MeToo and other associated hashtags like #YoTambién and #Cuentalo, used for the case of the Wolf-pack (La Manada) in Spain,<sup>179</sup> were used in all regions of the world.<sup>180</sup> In the case of Venezuela, data shows there were 129,145 tweets using #MeToo and other associated hashtags in Spanish like #YoTambién.<sup>181</sup> However, the evidence shows that 59% of tweet impressions were in Europe and North America, while in Latin America and the Caribbean the percentage was only 20%. The United States, followed by Argentina, India, Japan, and Spain were the countries with the highest volume of tweets. This means that #MeToo did not reach the level of influence that it did in the United States in Latin America, except for Argentina.

To understand why #MeToo had more relevance in some countries than in others Murdie and Lee highlight that “[g]lobalization does not meaningfully drive #MeToo diffusion once domestic political opportunity structures are taken into account.”<sup>182</sup> They conclude that besides internet access and international influences, the domestic political system plays a role in the uses of online feminist activism.<sup>183</sup> The present study will deepen this analysis by including how political factors played a role in the emergence of #YoTeCreo.

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<sup>177</sup> Purna Sen, “#MeToo: Anger, denouncement, and hope” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement*, (2020), at 249. See UnWomen, *Headlines from a Global Movement*, online (pdf): <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Brief-MeToo-Headlines-from-a-global-movement-en.pdf>

<sup>178</sup> Riley Griffin, Hannah Recht and Jeff Green, “#MeToo one year later”, Bloomberg, (October 2018) online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-me-too-anniversary/>

<sup>179</sup> See Patricia Faraldo-Cabana, “The Wolf-Pack Case and the Reform of Sex Crimes in Spain” (2021) 22:5 *German Law Journal* 847.

<sup>180</sup> Sen, *supra* note 177.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Myunghye Lee & Amanda Murdie, “The Global Diffusion of the #MeToo Movement” (2021) 17:4 *Politics & Gender* at 18.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid* at 22.

### 2.3.2.2 Digital feminist activism in Latin America

In Latin America, and long before #MeToo in 2017, digital feminist activism was used as a collective emergence by feminist activists in the region. Through digital feminist activism different forms of VAW have been made visible and have brought to light the serious issue of impunity for this violence; the constant danger of women's lives and bodies suffering from street harassment to more extreme forms of violence like femi(ni)cide; revictimization of women that have experienced violence; and the conundrum of a patriarchal culture that continues to disrespect and discriminate against women.

In Argentina, the #NiUnaMenos digital feminist activist campaign began on Twitter to make visible intimate partner violence and the increased numbers of femicides and other forms of gender-based violence in the country.<sup>184</sup> It started after the pregnant body of Diana Garcia was found in appalling conditions, presumably killed by her partner. This hashtag successfully created a larger feminist agenda in Argentina, including, but not limited to, the decriminalization of abortion. The #NiUnaMenos campaign has been wrongfully attributed in some articles to activism in favour of abortion or #MeToo campaigns, however, it has its roots in the increasing numbers of femi(ni)cide<sup>185</sup> in Argentina. #NiUnaMenos, permeated into countries in Latin America and has become an outcry in one of the most violent regions for women in the world.<sup>186</sup>

In Mexico, feminist activists have used digital activism long before #MeToo to highlight cases of femi(ni)cide and enforced disappearances. For example, campaigns such as #VivasNosQueremos (#WeWantUsAlive) and #NiUnaMás (#NotOneWomanMore) centered their demands on the promotion of justice, including eradicating structural VAW and impunity.<sup>187</sup> These are just two examples of Mexican digital feminist activism.

In 2019, Mexico had its #MeToo campaign, which was less organic and more of a premeditated and calculated use of digital feminist activism by creating anonymous

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<sup>184</sup> Garibotti & Hopp, *supra* note 51 at 196. Even though #NiUnaMenos originally focused on protesting against femicides, it quickly expanded its horizons to include historic feminist demands, such as the legalization of abortion.

<sup>185</sup> See Appendix A, Guiding Concepts.

<sup>186</sup> Amnesty International, Americas 2020, (2021), online: <[www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/report-americas/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/report-americas/)>;

<sup>187</sup> Ruiz Villaplana, "The case of #NiUnaMenos and #VivasNosQueremos" in *Transnational feminist activism to reframe femicide*, (1st Edition, Routledge, 2019)

Twitter accounts to expose alleged perpetrators.<sup>188</sup> It started in 2019 with Ana González, a journalist who decided to use her Twitter account to tell her story of harassment and manipulation by alleged perpetrator, author Herson Barona.<sup>189</sup> Afterwards, other women commented on also being harassed by the same writer. Days later, several Twitter accounts were created under the handle @MeTooMX that included the following usernames: @MeTooCineMX (“#MeToo” Movies Mexico), @MeTooPeriodista (“#MeToo” Journalism), @MeTooCreativas (“#MeToo” Creative Arts), @MeTooMusicaMX (“#MeToo” Music Mexico), @MeTooFotografos (“#MeToo Photography”).<sup>190</sup> Each individual account started to expose, publish, and receive anonymous testimonies of sexual misconduct by individuals in each respective industry. Years before, and during #MeToo in the United States, Karla Souza, a Mexican actress living in the United States, had spoken about her experience, but it was not followed by a massive spark in Mexico.<sup>191</sup>

Before #MeToo emerged in Mexico, #MiPrimerAcoso (#MyFirst Assault)<sup>192</sup> also generated a public discussion on VAW in Mexico. This hashtag was ignited back in 2016 by two feminist activists who called themselves “Stereotipadas” (or stereotypicals) who invited women to share their first experiences of harassment on Twitter.<sup>193</sup> This hashtag was first used in Brazil in 2015, when Brazilian feminists launched #MeuPrimeiroAssedio (“#MyFirst Assault”). In the first week, the hashtag accumulated more than 82,000 tweets that narrated experiences of sexual harassment by women in Brazil.<sup>194</sup> Similar to the transnational flow of #NiUnaMenos from Argentina to other countries in Latin America, #MeuPrimeiroAssedio translated from Brazil to Mexico.

Another example of digital feminist activism is the case of #MiráComoNosPonemos (“#LookHowYouMakeUs”), started by Argentinian actress

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<sup>188</sup> Dominguez, *supra* note 50 and 49.

<sup>189</sup> Ana GG, “Here goes the story of a “powerful” man in the literary circle has beaten, manipulated, gassed, impregnated and abandoned (on more than one occasion) more than 10 women. But since he is a “renowned” writer, no one believes these women.” (21 March 21 2018 at 9:03 PM), online Twitter: [https://twitter.com/anag\\_g/status/1108896945475592192](https://twitter.com/anag_g/status/1108896945475592192) [translated by the author]

<sup>190</sup> Dominguez, *supra* note 50 at 428.

<sup>191</sup> Yuriria Ávila, ¿Cómo surgió el movimiento Me Too y cómo revivió en México?, Animal Politico, March 27 2019, online: <https://www.animalpolitico.com/elsabueso/como-surgio-el-movimiento-me-too-y-como-revivio-en-mexico/>

<sup>192</sup> Esterotips, *supra* note 45.

<sup>193</sup> Ana Campoy, “Thousands of Mexican women are talking about sexual harassment for the first time”, Quartz, ( 26 April 2016), online: <https://qz.com/670523/thousands-of-mexican-women-are-talking-about-sexual-harassment-for-the-first-time/>

<sup>194</sup> Alvaro, Jarrin, et al, “Two Years Before #Metoo, Brazilian Women Were Already Fighting Sexual Harassment”, Brazzil ; Los Angeles (14 January 2018), <https://www.brazzil.com/two-years-before-metoo-brazilian-women-were-already-fighting-sexual-harassment/>

Thelma Fadin. In a press release supported by a group of Argentinian women actors, she shared her testimony of being raped by actor Juan Darthes<sup>195</sup> in Nicaragua when she was 16 years old. Afterwards, she encouraged other victims to report their aggressors. From 2019 until now, Thelma's case is in the process of being investigated by Brazilian authorities,<sup>196</sup> and she has become an active participant in Amnesty International campaigns on VAW.<sup>197</sup> This case also highlights how women with influence status can play a role in consciousness raising on VAW and in the Chapter V of this study, I will expand on this topic.

These examples illustrate how instances of digital feminist activism are not only nodes adding to the FemMesh but also part of transnational feminism. The use of digital activism by women in Latin America transcended borders and traveled from country to country as a means of addressing VAW, with #NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso being the most prominent examples. In the same way, I theorize that #YoTeCreo is enmeshed with previous forms of digital activism as both instances of digital feminist activism actively and visibly fight against violence and the patriarchal society, and this is how two different nodes enmeshed according to the FemMesh.<sup>198</sup>

### 2.3.2.3 Digital feminist activism in Venezuela

Venezuelan women used digital feminist activism to expose and/or to tell their stories of sexual violence and harassment before #YoTeCreo. Using the FemMesh, I trace previous and future nodes of digital activism to #YoTeCreo.

One of the first traces of online activism by Venezuelan women is a case of violence inside a university. In April 2020, a former student of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello used Twitter to detail the harassment she allegedly suffered when she was a student at the university. Women, feminists, and some former students started a social media campaign on Twitter titled #UniSinAcoso (“#UniversityWithoutHarassment”) that went viral and reached the directors and heads of the university. This led to the

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<sup>195</sup> T13, “Mirá cómo nos ponemos” [Look How We Get Excited], YouTube, 16 December 2018, video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiBM-jIrC\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiBM-jIrC_k)

<sup>196</sup> Since it is his current place of residence and Brazil does not allow extradition.

<sup>197</sup> Amnistía Internacional se moviliza y acompaña a Thelma Fadin en su lucha por justicia, febrero 2022, online: Amnistía <https://amnistia.org.ar/amnistia-internacional-se-moviliza-y-acompana-a-thelma-fadin-en-su-lucha-por-justicia>

<sup>198</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71 at 140.

enactment of a university protocol against sexual violence and harassment. Significantly, while protocols in Latin American universities are common, this was the first protocol for sexual harassment and the prevention of discrimination against gender and sexual identity in a university in Venezuela.<sup>199</sup> The work of so many activists, feminists and civil society was key to this policy outcome.

Another example is that in January 2021, the same year of the spark of #YoTeCreo, both Venezuelan and Argentinian women started the hashtag #GarzonViolador (“GarzonRapist”). This hashtag highlighted the request for justice for an 18 -year-old Venezuelan migrant adolescent who was raped by her employer on her first day of work.<sup>200</sup> This case made visible the high risk of violence from an intersectional lens: a young woman, and a migrant. The case calls attention to the lack of protection and gender-based violence Venezuelan migrant women face abroad.<sup>201</sup>

After the revelations from #YoTeCreo, two other actions were taken by Venezuelan women. The first was the scandal surrounding Venezuela’s Youth Orchestra System, where women and girls commented on being subject to harassment and abuse by a professor of the Orchestra. Using a pseudonym, “Lisa” told her story of abuse by two professors, and how this harassment destroyed her future as a professional musician and her love for music.<sup>202</sup> Second, the case of the Venezuelan female soccer team also garnered a great deal of attention. Deyna Castellanos, one of the most important soccer players in the country, together with her colleagues from Venezuela’s Female National Soccer Team, exposed their soccer coach for harassment under both English and Spanish hashtags: #ProtejanALasJugadoras and

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<sup>199</sup> Paola, Andrea, “UCAB’s Zero Tolerance Policy for Abuse” Caracas Chronicles, (August 2021), online: <<https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2020/08/31/ucabs-zero-tolerance-policy-for-abuse/>>; Florantina Singer, “From a tweet to the first protocol against sexual violence in a University in Venezuela” , El Pais, (August 28 2020) online: <<https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020-08-28/de-un-tuit-al-primer-protocolo-contra-el-acoso-sexual-en-una-universidad-en-venezuela.html>> [translated by author]

<sup>200</sup> Ariana Basciani, “Another Layer of the Venezuelan Migration Tragedy” BeLatina, (February 26, 2022), online: <<https://belatina.com/migration-crisis-venezuela-migrant-women/>>

<sup>201</sup> Activistas Ciudadanos, Las voces de ellas, situación de las mujeres venezolanas en movilidad, online (pdf): <https://activistasciudadanos.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Las-vozes-de-ellas-Situacion-de-las-mujeres-venezolanas-en-movilidad.pdf>

<sup>202</sup> Gabriela Mesones Rojo and Osio Cabrices Rafael, “A History of Sexual Abuse in Venezuela’s Lauded Youth Orchestra System- MeToo aren’t the only ones,” ( 1 July 2021), online: <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2021/07/01/a-history-of-sexual-abuse-in-venezuelas-lauded-youth-orchestra-system/> See more Un recorrido cronológico de cómo se entrelazó una historia de abuso sexual en mi vida, <https://vozenaltolisa.wordpress.com/> ,<A chronological tour of how a history of sexual abuse was woven into my life>

#ProtectThePlayers.<sup>203</sup> In their statement, they mentioned that they “decided to break the silence to avoid situations of physical, psychological and sexual abuse and harassment.”<sup>204</sup> Similar to #YoTeCreo, a few minutes after the soccer team used Twitter to expose this case, the Prosecutor's Office announced a criminal investigation through Twitter.<sup>205</sup>

Digital feminist campaigns showed that the feminist movement in Latin America has long used social media tools to raise awareness and to discuss VAW, and more importantly, that #YoTeCreo might not be a transplantation of #MeToo but a node connected to other nodes in the FemMesh. This is consistent with what researchers have explained as the opportunities created through previous hashtag activism. For Garibotti and Hopp referring to #MeToo mention, “[n]o new social movement was formed out of #MeToo, but a preexisting movement that built and expanded over the window of opportunity created through #MeToo.”<sup>206</sup> For Dominguez, another researcher on feminist activism in Latin America, “[t]he mobilizations under the Ni Una Menos movement have, to an extent, successfully rallied the many subsections of the feminist and women’s movement around a shared concern: violence.”<sup>207</sup> These two studies show that new digital movements have been fuelled and made possible by pre-existing social movements. Zooming out of #YoTeCreo and using the FemMesh, I argue that this previous instances of digital feminist activism becomes enmeshed to #YoTeCreo as they actively and visibly fight against violence This will be tested through the in depths interview methods with leaders of #YoTeCreo.

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<sup>203</sup> Deyna Castellanos, 🇨🇴 COMUNICADO. 🇨🇴, #NoMasAbusos #ProtejanALasJugadoras #ProtectThePlayers, (Oct 5, 2021 5:02 PM ) Online Twitter: <https://twitter.com/deynac18/status/1445494643777425411> See La Razon, “They begin an investigation into the complaint of 24 soccer players against their coach for “sexual, physical and psychological” abuse, June 10 2021, online: <https://www.larazon.es/deportes/futbol/20211006/ndgetrmyfnfbaxanh77pdlogipi.html> [translated by author]

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Tarek William Saab, “#JUSTICE commissioned the 79th National Prosecutor with Full Competence to #INVESTIGATE alleged sexual abuse committed by KENNETH ZSEREMETA together with WILLIAMS PINO to the detriment of players of the #Vinotinto Women's National Team.” (Oct 5, 2021 at 6:30 PM) online: Twitter <<https://twitter.com/tarekwiliamsaab/status/1445516784145104906?lang=en>> [translated by author]

<sup>206</sup> Garibotti & Hopp, *supra* note 51 at 29.

<sup>207</sup> Dominguez, *supra* note 50.

### 2.3.3 Feminist Movements in Latin America

This subsection discusses the history of feminist voices and women's organizing in Latin America as another node in the FemMesh. These Latin American movements are attentive to regional and local contexts, and their regional interactions have allowed transnational flows and dialogues. Latin American feminist movements respond to a local complex contexts that are marked by impoverishment, underemployment and inequality where women face a greater degree of violence and inequality compared to men.<sup>208</sup> Feminist movements in the region are subject not only to challenges wrought by inequality, but also political struggles marked by instability, dictatorship, and authoritarianism.<sup>209</sup>

Latin American feminists like Rita Segato argue against a Eurocentric feminism that universalizes the experiences of women from a white viewpoint and encourages an understanding of patriarchal domination from a regional perspective that incorporates the experiences of nonwhite, Indigenous, and Black women from colonized countries.<sup>210</sup> For example, when discussing democracy and peace, women's movements in the region encourage a discussion of the system of oppression and highlight that patriarchy in the region is also colonialist, racist, and capitalist, and those elements are also constituent parts of an oppressive whole.<sup>211</sup> In the preliminary discussions held before the United Nations International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, Afro-Latinas proclaimed that "[a]ny strategy for development, peace, or equality must necessarily consider the particularities of Black women."<sup>212</sup> Therefore, Latin American feminists have constructed a project that is attentive to a regional focus and that understands feminism(s) as a decolonial, antihegemonic and antiracist project.<sup>213</sup> Feminist organizing in Latin America has a long history of interconnections, which developed after two key

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<sup>208</sup> UNDPD, Trapped: high inequality and low growth in Latin America and the Caribbean, Chapter 1: Trapped? Inequality and Economic Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean, (July 2021) online: (pdf)

<https://www.undp.org/latin-america/publications/trapped-inequality-and-economic-growth-latin-america-and-caribbean>; Marianne Marchand, "Engendering Transnational Movements/Transnationalizing Women's and Feminist Movements in the Americas" (2014) 5:2 Latin American policy 180.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Rita Segato, *La guerra contra las Mujeres* (Traficantes de Sueños, 2016)

<sup>211</sup> Francesca Gargallo, "Feminismo Latinoamericano", (2007) 12:28 Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer.

<sup>212</sup> Alvarez Sonia "Latin American Feminisms "Go Global": Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millennium", (1 Edition1, Routledge, 1998) 293.

<sup>213</sup> Gabriela Bard Wigdor & Artazo, Gabriela, "Latin American feminist thought: Reflections on the coloniality of knowledge/power and sexuality," (2017) *Cultura representaciones Soc* 11:22.

moments: the Beijing discussion and the *encuentros* (meetings). The transnational flow between a multiplicity of women organizing in Latin America has its contemporary precedent in the Beijing process. For Sonia Alvarez, this process contributed to a “[r]edefinition and expansion of the feminist agenda for social transformation.”<sup>214</sup> The *encuentros* was a regional feminist space focused on sharing experiences, ideas, feelings and emotions.<sup>215</sup> This transnational gathering reflected local, national and regional discourses and practices. According to scholars, these activities enabled activists to exchange differences in perspective and construct alternative political and cultural meanings from a transnational approach.<sup>216</sup>

According to Alvarez, feminist movements in Latin America are complex as they do not comply to the classical social movement theory. Alvarez explains from a historical perspective from the 1980s to the 1990s that these regional feminist movements are heterogenous, multifaceted and do not conform to classical social movement theory as they are more of a discourse field of actions.<sup>217</sup> The feminist practices and movements in the region are decentralized and:

[n]ot confined to a set of specific issues of primary or exclusive concern to women- such as sexual violence and abortion-but, as proclaimed by one of the Brazilian movement's slogans during their preparations for Beijing, should also seek to "see the world through the eyes of women;" to view the "general struggle" through a gendered lens.<sup>218</sup>

Similar to Alvarez’s study of feminist movements in the region, but instead focusing on cyberfeminism, researcher Revilla argues that the key characteristics of digital feminist movements in Latin America, in particular, #NiUnaMenos and #NiUnaMás, are diversity, plurality, and networks.<sup>219</sup> She mentioned a tension between homogeneity and diversity, but she recognized that digital feminist activism in Latin America inclines towards diversity due to the multiple identities within cyberfeminism.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Alvarez, Go Global, *supra* note 212 at 299.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid* at 297.

<sup>216</sup> Sonia Alvarez et al, “Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms” (2003) 28:2 Journal of Women in Culture and Society 537. See more Marchand, *supra* note 208.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* Alvarez, Sonia, “Feminismos Latinoamericanos” (1998) 6:2 Estudios feministas 265–284.

<sup>218</sup> Alvarez, Go Global, *supra* note 212 at 299.

<sup>219</sup> Marisa Revilla, “A Del ¡Ni una más! al #NiUnaMenos movimientos de mujeres y feminismos en América Latina” (May 2019) 56:1, Política y Sociedad 47.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

Similar to the *encuentros* from a decade ago, Latin America cyberfeminism has the vocation for dialogues.<sup>221</sup>

Feminist movements and women's organizing in Latin America have been connected to transnational feminism, and their discourses and practices reflect local, national and regional approaches. Since the 1980s they are heterogenous and multifaceted. In their dialogues, including the *encuentros* and the Beijing discussions, they have been attentive not only to patriarchy as a root cause for inequality but also to colonial, racist and hegemonic views. This section will allow me to connect #YoTeCreo as part of transnational feminist movement in the region.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature surrounding digital feminist activism. I detailed how social media platforms, such as Twitter, allow digital activists to mobilize consciousness, further solidarity and activism beyond borders. I affirmed the importance of my study as a contribution to research on feminist hashtag activism in Spanish that is nuanced in its understanding of cultural, regional and political differences.

I used both theoretical frameworks, FemMesh and transnationalized intersectionality to understand #YoTeCreo not as a transplantation from North to South, but as a cross-border activism part of a larger feminist network that overlaps and crosses with local particularities, and is attentive to regional context.

After elaborating both frameworks, I introduced past moments of feminism(s) and women's rights in Venezuela and in Latin America including the increased awareness of VAW from a global, Latin American and Venezuelan perspective. I discussed the State incapacity to deal with issues of VAW and its overreliance on criminal law. Afterwards, I traced previous uses of digital feminist activism by zooming into #MeToo, Latin America hashtag activism (#NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso), and specific cases in Venezuela. These instances of digital feminist activism are nodes connected to the FemMesh which in turn are connected to #YoTeCreo as they actively fight against violence and power structures. Finally, I referred to feminist voices and women's

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid* at 64.

organizing in Latin America as another node in the FemMesh where I discussed how their discourses and practices reflect transnational feminism.

## Chapter Three: Methodology & Methods

Through the lens of its founders, this study describes how #YoTeCreo emerged in Venezuela. Using in-depth interviews, I focus on women's experiences organizing and participating in digital feminist activism against sexual violence. In this section, I explain the rationale for choosing this qualitative method. First, Venezuela is largely unexplored in the literature on feminist digital activism. Therefore, this method will allow me to understand this phenomenon by generating new data. Second, research on digital feminist activism suggests the need to employ this type of method.<sup>222</sup> Drawing from Taylor, I apply feminist research that centers on women's experiences, is attentive to gender, discusses reflexivity and employs participatory methods. Finally, I detail the research design, including the research question and hypotheses. I describe the population of interest, how the sampling and recruitment were undertaken and finish with a discussion of the study's limitations.

### 3.1 Feminist Method and Methodology

Researchers working on feminist digital activism have highlighted the importance of qualitative studies that include individuals who have actively participated in the movement under study.<sup>223</sup> Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller call for "[r]esearchers to continue to explore the experiences of those who are participating in such initiatives so that we can understand the fuller picture and long-term effects and impacts of such feminist activism."<sup>224</sup> Most of the empirical studies in the area of hashtag feminist activism to date have deployed quantitative rather than qualitative analyses. Quan-Haase has highlighted that "[t]here is additional need for qualitative studies that directly engage individuals who participated in the movement to learn about their experiences in their own words."<sup>225</sup> Therefore, in conducting interviews with leaders of

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<sup>222</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46.

<sup>223</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid* at 244.

<sup>225</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46 at 1714.

#YoTeCreo, I expanded on the growing literature on digital feminist activism using an uncommon method.

I also chose to employ a feminist methodology. There are scholarly discussions about feminism(s) as a methodology or as a lens through which one can see and analyze data.<sup>226</sup> From my viewpoint, I wanted to abandon the old paradigms of an androcentric, male, and patriarchal way of designing and executing research.<sup>227</sup> Therefore, inspired by Taylor, I employed four of five features that she considers a feminist methodology should include from a social science perspective: a) gender and inequality; b) experience: everyday experience of gender oppression; c) reflexivity; and d) participatory research.<sup>228</sup>

I started by including gender and inequality and ‘experience’ as key considerations in the research. For Taylor, gender and inequality refer to paying attention to the struggles of women from their point of view.<sup>229</sup> Experience refers to everyday women’s life, and researchers should look to validate and understand the testimonials of marginalized persons traditionally ignored in research.<sup>230</sup> In this case study, digital feminist activism is mostly led by women who use social media platforms to make their voices and experiences heard and to mobilize for social change. Specifically, the #YoTeCreo spark centered on women telling their stories of sexual violence and abuse. For me, the only way to understand how this hashtag activism emerged was to listen to the leaders and creators of #YoTeCreo. As such, conducting qualitative research – specifically, semi-structured interviews – was the most appropriate technique for gathering data about this phenomenon from a feminist perspective.

In choosing this method, I amplified, endorsed and highlighted the voices of women participants. Like Taylor, I acknowledged women’s narratives and elevated the voices of women participants in a scholarly discussion mostly conducted by white, cis, and English-speaking persons.

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<sup>226</sup> See Harding, Sandra, “The Method Question” (1987) 2:3 *Hypatia* 19–35.

<sup>227</sup> Sandra Harding, *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>228</sup> Verta Taylor, “Feminist Methodology in Social Movements Research” (1998) 21:4 *Qualitative sociology* 357 at 362.

According to Taylor there are five features that make the core of feminist methodology, including: a) gender and inequality, b) experience: everyday experience of gender oppression; d) reflexivity, d) participatory research and e) action.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid* at 362.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid* at 365.

Additionally, and similar to Taylor, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as this type of interview allows women to respond to and reflect on the questions I asked them and to be empowered by their own voices.<sup>231</sup> Listening to their voices allowed these women to heal and reflect on their experiences leading this digital feminist activism.

I was also inspired by the participatory methods conducted by Taylor.<sup>232</sup> These included not only researching the community but “[e]mpowering the community by encouraging their involvement in the research process.”<sup>233</sup> I involved the participants in the analysis of results by sharing my findings with them for their feedback and comments.<sup>234</sup> This involved a more complex process, but in doing so, I was focused on “[b]reak[ing] down the false separation and hierarchy between the researcher and the researched.”<sup>235</sup> Because I wanted the women to participate beyond the interview, and without generating free extra labour, after finishing the first draft of Chapter IV (findings), I invited the participants to join an online meeting to explain the findings (giving them five different opportunities to join the session as their schedules dictated or arranging a personal meeting at their request). In the session, I walked them through the analysis process and research tools I used, explained the findings and engaged in an open conversation. Immediately after these sessions, I shared by email the draft of Chapter IV (including findings and analysis according to the description given in ethical approval documents) and gave them one week for any comments or suggestions. Five of the eight participants joined the meeting, and all received the draft of Chapter IV. The participants were enthusiastic about the results and agreed with the findings and made no additional comments. This process allowed me to ensure that my research findings were produced collaboratively without imposing my views. By including women participants beyond the interview, I rejected extractive research methods, where data is collected and gathered in non-participatory ways, and the participants are merely

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid* at 366.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid* at 367. “not only participating in the activist community being studied but empowering the community by encouraging their involvement in the research process Another way that feminist participatory research departs from conventional scientific investigation is through the use of strategies that involve activist community organizations in designing the study and analyzing the results.” Taylor.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid* at 370.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid* at 371.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid* at 370.

'objects' of research.<sup>236</sup> The participants in this research were not treated as "objects of study" to be exploited but as active participants in the study.<sup>237</sup>

### 3.1.1 Positionality and Reflexivity

Another element of feminist research as put forth by Taylor includes reflexivity. Reflexivity is "[a] crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge by means of qualitative research."<sup>238</sup> Here, I discuss my process of reflexivity conducted before the interviews took place. Drawing from Haraway, I recognize feminist objectivity is located and influenced by researchers' positionality, including my own.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, I reject the idea that social science is objective.<sup>240</sup> By analyzing, critiquing, and understanding the means and purpose of my methodology, I avoid falling into assumptions of "objectivity" and "neutrality".

I recognize my role as both an outsider and insider in this research. As an insider, I am a woman, from Venezuela, with previous personal experiences of sexual violence, who also shared her story during the spark of #YoTeCreo.) As an outsider, I am a researcher. My positionality in this particular matter allowed me to relate closely with women participants in two areas. First, as a woman that has experienced violence, and second, as a Venezuelan. This allowed the participants to relate to me with familiarity. Coming from a similar background is an advantage; it made possible to connect with the participants more easily, establishing trust and facilitating the understanding of their slang, cultural contexts, and backgrounds.

The challenge was to use my familiarity in a way that did not unduly influence the responses of the participants and that did not assume that they and I shared the same experiences or positionality.<sup>241</sup> Another consideration I assessed before conducting

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid* at 365.

<sup>237</sup> Kim England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research" (1994) 46:1 *The Professional Geographer* 80.

<sup>238</sup> Taylor, *supra* note 228 at 368.

<sup>239</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988) 14:3 *Feminist Studies* 575.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid* at 575.

<sup>241</sup> Roni Berger, "Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research" (2015) 15:2 *Qualitative research : QR* 219. Bringing the researcher into the researched carries the danger of researcher's self involvement to the degree that it blocks hearing other voices (Cloke et al., 2000). Like Finlay (2000) stated 'I had to guard against assuming that my participants and I shared the same language ... if I failed to do so, I might have missed the point' (p. 537). The question then becomes how to use one's own experience, which offers intimate familiarity and hence potentially deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and at the same time, not impose researcher's experience on participants (Pillow, 2003).

these interviews was how to address the fact that I had prior contact with some participants from previous interactions. For example, I was invited and participated in an Instagram Live session with #YoTeCreo leader, Laura Guevara, to discuss feminism(s). I was also invited as a panelist and keynote speaker to an event organized by #YoTeCreo in New York in October 2021, where I met some of the leaders. Ella Bric, the main leader of #YoTeCreo, was invited as a keynote speaker for a class I prepared with my thesis supervisor, Professor Heidi Matthews. Therefore, I was conscious of my role as someone familiar to the participants but also as the “researcher.” I addressed these challenges in the following ways. First, I initiated the interview by explaining the purpose of the study and the intent of this method. I explained that even though prior conversations had provided me with a certain degree of knowledge of #YoTeCreo, I stressed that I could only use information that was conveyed to me during the interview. Second, I highlighted that prior knowledge from them, or the group, was invalid if it was not presented to me during the interview. I wanted to make sure that they did not abbreviate their stories and emphasized the importance of the study being conducted.<sup>242</sup>

Additionally, I noticed the asymmetrical relationship and understood that, as Kim V. L. England explains, reflexivity “[c]an make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them.”<sup>243</sup> Therefore, to carefully address the power relationship during the interview and the prior contact with the participants, I created a protocol that I followed during the interview.<sup>244</sup> I addressed the power dynamics by ensuring to listen to and not interrupt the interviewees. Before recording, I revisited the consent form and asked individuals again for their verbal consent. I reminded participants that they could skip questions, not respond, or ask for a break whenever they wanted to. I created a safe environment by being in a private space during the interview with my camera always on so they could see me. I created check-in procedures to advance to the next question or sections and not rush into the next part of the interview.<sup>245</sup> In this way, I balanced -not removed- the power dynamics during the interview between myself, the researcher and the participants.

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<sup>242</sup> See Henry, Tracy McConnell et al, “Researching with People You Know: Issues in Interviewing” (2009) 34:1 Contemporary nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession 2.

<sup>243</sup> England, *supra* note 237 at 83.

<sup>244</sup> See: Appendix C: Protocol.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.1.1.1 My story with #YoTeCreo

Unfortunately, like many women, I have experienced sexual violence in various ways and in many settings, including street harassment, gaslighting, sexual harassment, and non-consensual intercourse. I could not have named these experiences when they happened; fortunately or not, I did not have the necessary tools or knowledge to do so. Feminism(s) allowed me to give a name to what my embodied knowledge had felt as a consequence of those experiences. And just a few years ago, I understood that what I had experienced as an intern at a law firm was sexual harassment.

When #YoTeCreo emerged in Venezuela, thousands of women used social media platforms, including Twitter and Instagram, to tell their stories of sexual violence and harassment. I also used social media to tell mine. On the same day that #YoTeCreo emerged on social media through the statement reproduced in Chapter I,<sup>246</sup> and just a few hours before, I released my testimony on Twitter. I did not use any hashtags because #YoTeCreo had not yet crystallized, but I was personally involved in the spark as one of the many Venezuelan women that used social media to tell their stories. As part of this group of women who, before and during #YoTeCreo, used social media to detail their experiences of violence and also as a researcher, I recognize that I am both an insider and an outsider to this research. As an outside viewer of other digital feminist activism like #MeToo in the United States, its iteration in Mexico, and even as a migrant in both countries when the hashtag started, these hashtags did not inspire me to be personal and tell my story in the way that #YoTeCreo Venezuela did.<sup>247</sup> It spoke to my roots and resonated with the *machista* culture in which I grew up in a way that no other digital feminist hashtag had previously resonated with me before. With the moment Venezuela was experiencing, I felt a more personal connection.

This is my story. I was a law student interning at a law firm in Caracas; he was my colleague and had been straightforward in telling me that he liked me. I did not

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<sup>246</sup> YoTeCreo, *supra* note 12.

<sup>247</sup> MacoMuskus, “Inspired by all the brave women who have spoken out, today I want to tell you my story of sexual harassment in my first job. Our stories deserve to be told. There are many of us and silence and complicity are enough. (Apr 27 2021 10:16), online: Twitter <<https://twitter.com/macomuskus/status/1387047911314268160>>[translated by author]

reciprocate. After a year, he became a lawyer at the firm and, therefore, my supervisor and boss. He had power and was willing to use it.<sup>248</sup> He often called the interns' office and asked for me. When I would arrive at his office, he would close the door and point out how pretty I was or make some other comment about my body. I remember his secretary telling him "leave her alone." He would harass me in person and through text messages. These acts increased over time. He ambushed me in the library once, asking for a kiss. Another time he locked the office door where we were both working and demanded that I kiss him on the mouth. I told him I would scream if he did not let me out. He opened the door. Everyone knew, but culturally, this was accepted; people thought "he likes her" and would laugh.<sup>249</sup> My memory fails me, I don't remember if he or I left the office, but somehow the harassment stopped. I went to study abroad, and I learned about human rights and gender. It was years before I could name what had happened to me as sexual harassment. After telling my story, during the #YoTeCreo spark, two things happened. First, I received tremendous support from Twitter users and friends. Two female colleagues that worked at the law firm with me at the time of the events apologized to me for not being proactive and supportive. Second, a former law professor and another male former boss, asked me: "why didn't you say anything?" "why won't you tell us his name?" I responded that I was telling my story to demonstrate a culture that normalizes harassment, by naming the harasser the nature of the conversation centers on the perpetrator and not the culture, which is for me, what needs to change. At the time, around 2010, reporting sexual harassment was not culturally accepted, and I would have been excluded and labelled as a person who was difficult to work with. I tell my story here to be honest and transparent and to reflect on my relationship to the research and how my story is connected to the research itself. My story might call into question the 'objectivity' of the research for some; however, in using feminist standpoint knowledges, I am committed to centering women's stories and their voices, and that also includes my own.

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<sup>248</sup> MacoMuskus, "Abuse of power: When the intern became a "lawyer" he began to harass me. He would call me to assign me "tasks" at 6pm, always closing the door of his office. He would tell me to go with him to Caripe, where he was from. He wanted me in his office (control/power)" (Apr 27 2021 10:16) Online: Twitter <[twitter.com/macomuskus/status/1387048310989414410](https://twitter.com/macomuskus/status/1387048310989414410)>[translated by author]

<sup>249</sup> MacoMuskus, "Inspired by all the brave women who have spoken out, today I want to tell you my story of sexual harassment in my first job. Our stories deserve to be told. There are many of us and silence and complicity are enough. (Apr 27 2021 10:16), online: Twitter <<https://twitter.com/macomuskus/status/1387047911314268160>>[translated by author]

## 3.2 Research Design

### 3.2.1 Research Question and Hypotheses

My main research question was: *How did #YoTeCreo feminist digital activism emerge in Venezuela?* Two sub-questions accompany this question: *What were the possible circumstances or elements that, according to the founders, encouraged the spark of #YoTeCreo? And what encouraged the founders of #YoTeCreo to participate in the creation of #YoTeCreo?*

The hypotheses I tested with the women participants include:

- a) #YoTeCreo was less the result of a transplant of a hashtag (#MeToo) from the Global English-speaking North to the Global South than the result of multiple intersections of transnational flows and local factors;
- b) #YoTeCreo emerged as a result of multiple nodes and intersections of the FemMesh, including the success of regional feminist digital activism in Latin America, for example, #NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso; the increased awareness of sexual violence and harassment against women globally and in Venezuela; and the role of media and entertainment in pushing the agenda forward;
- c) The women leaders of #YoTeCreo who were abroad contributed to the spark by mobilizing consciousness around feminist activism and intersecting transnational flows gained abroad to translate it to their home country.

### 3.2.2 Interview Methods

I conducted one-on-one interviews in a semi-structured format asking open-ended questions which allowed women participants to tell their stories and relate their lived experiences without leading their answers. The predeveloped questions <sup>250</sup> included five main themes: a) leadership and women's participation, their motives, and their understanding of #YoTeCreo; b) knowledge of previous digital feminist movements; c) the role of women in media and entertainment; d) awareness of sexual violence and harassment in Venezuela; and e) for migrant women, their role as Venezuelans abroad.

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<sup>250</sup> See Appendix D: List of questions.

I did not ask the women to detail or comment on their experiences of sexual violence. However, most of them shared some previous experiences of sexual violence with me in the context of responding to a question. I listened to and acknowledged their stories. This thesis starts by understanding that women have agency and ownership over their own stories and can decide with whom to share them. The decision of the women participants to discuss personal matters, including previous sexual violence experiences, speaks to the confidence and connection they had with me during their interview.

### **3.2.3 Population of interest and sampling**

#### *Population of interest*

For this study, my population of interest was the 74 signatories of the statement that started #YoTeCreo.<sup>251</sup> I chose this identifiable population due to the nature of the thesis as an exploratory/descriptive study that centers on the leaders of #YoTeCreo who were key to the emergence of this instance of feminist digital activism in the country. The participants were not simply participants in or users of the #YoTeCreo hashtag but were leaders of #YoTeCreo. By leaders, I am referred to women who were involved in the creation and activation of this hashtag activism.

This case study is novel and unique in scholarship on digital feminist activism. When there is an innovative topic from a methods perspective, the proper type of research is descriptive/exploratory. To understand the 'lay of the land', researchers should start with a small population of analysis. In this study, I started with the leaders of #YoTeCreo as the first step to understand how this digital feminist activism emerged in Venezuela. Future research that expands to a larger population of interest can follow.

#### *Sampling*

The sampling for qualitative research is smaller than in quantitative analysis "[b]ecause qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meaning (and heterogeneities in meaning)—which are often centered on the how and why of a particular issue, process,

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<sup>251</sup> YoTeCreo, *supra* note 12.

situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions.”<sup>252</sup> I conducted a purposive sampling from the 74 women who created and signed the #YoTeCreo statement. This is a form of non-random sampling and is intended to produce a smaller and more intentional sample.<sup>253</sup> The rationale behind this decision is that my population of interest is relatively homogenous, consisting of Venezuelan women, connected or related to the artistic world, living in Venezuela or abroad.

From the sample of 74 women, I created a quota sampling.<sup>254</sup> I was interested in stratifying the population of interest into two categories: professional backgrounds and place of residence (in Venezuela and abroad). I created a list and examined their online profiles to determine their professional backgrounds and place of residence, if available. After this process, I selected women with different professional backgrounds within the scope of ‘artists,’ i.e., singers, writers, and producers and even one woman who is a political activist. For the other category, place of residence, I included women living in Venezuela and abroad. This allowed me to test part of my hypotheses on the role of migrant women in activating #YoTeCreo.

It is important to highlight that for this research, a representative sampling was not necessary since the purpose of the study was not to be widely generalizable but to explore and describe a phenomenon, in this case, the spark of #YoTeCreo in Venezuela.

### *Recruitment*

After obtaining ethical approval from the Office of Research Ethics, York University,<sup>255</sup> I reached out to Ella Bric, who has been publicly recognized as the founder of #YoTeCreo.<sup>256</sup> In addition to this public recognition, at least six of the interview participants, her peers, explicitly identified her as the leader and creator of #YoTeCreo.<sup>257</sup> During her interview, Ella distinguished between women who had leadership roles and those who were merely signatories of the statement. She

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<sup>252</sup> Shari Dworkin, “Sample Size Policy for Qualitative Studies Using In-Depth Interviews” (2012) 41:6 Archives of Sexual Behavior 1319.

<sup>253</sup> Bruce Berg L & Howard Lune, *Qualitative Research Methods For The Social Sciences*, Ninth Edition (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2017) 38

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid* at 38. A quota sample is when the researcher uses certain categories like gender, age, education or some attributes to create and fill each category with a quota needed for the study.

<sup>255</sup> Certificate #: STU 2022-040 Approval Period: 05/10/22-05/10/23 Office of Research Ethics, York University.

<sup>256</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 17.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Nana Cadavieco, Laura Guevara, Lolo Bello, Ana Elba, Mafer Bandola y Natasha Tiniacos.

explained that even though publicly #YoTeCreo had 74 women signatories, not all were involved in drafting, leading, and actively participating in the creation of this digital feminist activism. In the interview, Ella mentioned that she started by creating a WhatsApp Group with approximately 23 women, mainly from the music industry. After they drafted the statement, but before releasing it on social media, they sought other signatures, which is why the public statement has 74 signatories. Other women participants confirmed this fact during their interviews, including Laura Guevara, Mafer Bandola, Ana Elba, Nana Cadavieco, and Ariana Gonzalez. Therefore, my population of interest was smaller than I initially expected, as not all of the 74 women signatories fell within the category of leaders.

All the women participants included adult women nationals of Venezuela. Eight of them were living abroad and two of them were living in Venezuela at the time #YoTeCreo emerged. Most women participants and creators of #YoTeCreo are highly influential artists and have many followers on social media. I asked them whether they preferred to participate using their name or a pseudonym, and all of the participants agreed to use their full names for this thesis and any future work that this thesis might produce.

The interview questions were developed before the interviews were conducted, and I shared some of the questions with the participants in advance.<sup>258</sup> One question that developed during the first interviews and was not predetermined was: why did the women use the #YoTeCreo hashtag instead of another hashtag?

I had planned to interview a maximum of 10 women participants but ended up interviewing eight as I reached saturation, or “the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data.”<sup>259</sup> I noticed from interview number six that the answers were recurring and repetitive and determined that interviewing additional participants was unlikely to add further or new data.

I planned semi-structured interviews, meaning interviews without set time limits that would allow the women to explain their viewpoints fully and without the pressure of

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<sup>258</sup> See Appendix E: Contact message. Some of the questions will include: What inspired you to create this movement using social media?; Were you inspired by previous social digital movements?; Are you aware of the situation of violence against women in the country?; How did you relate to feminism?; What did you see happen after the movement started in your country?

<sup>259</sup> Dworkin, *supra* note 252 at 1320.

time or related constraints.<sup>260</sup> Interviews without time limits are another example of a feminist methodology that is supportive of women telling their stories; limiting the interview to a certain amount of time was not, for me, supportive of their narratives or their stories.

The semi-structured interviews took place over Zoom and lasted between one to two hours. They were video and audio recorded. The interviews focused on the five major themes mentioned above. As discussed, I wanted to understand how #YoTeCreo sparked. This included understanding how women participated in digital feminist activism, including their experiences activating and creating #YoTeCreo.

### 3.2.4 Limitations of the study

This study does not pretend to offer findings relating to the overall nature or success of feminist digital activism or the visions of Venezuelan women who used the hashtag #YoTeCreo. Overall, this research is not intended to be generalizable to other instances of feminist digital activism.

This research does not evaluate whether #YoTeCreo is properly classified as a social movement or not, as it is not the purpose of this study to confirm or deny if #YoTeCreo follows within the category of social or feminist movements. This research does, however, describe the factors that encouraged the women participants to create and participate in digital feminist activism and seeks to understand how #YoTeCreo emerged in Venezuela. Future research can be conducted to understand or challenge whether #YoTeCreo falls within the category of a social movement, if digital feminist activism can be considered as a social movement or if new paradigms need to be developed to make sense of this online phenomenon. When the leaders created #YoTeCreo they called themselves *Movimiento YoTeCreo* (Yo Te Creo Movement), I used the word 'movement' or '#YoTeCreo' during the interviews to refer to this digital feminist activism case study, without necessarily implying whether it fell within the category of a social movement.

Some instances of digital feminist activism, like #MeToo, have been criticized for their lack of inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives.<sup>261</sup> One of the limitations of this

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<sup>260</sup> Taylor, *supra* note 228 at 366,

<sup>261</sup> Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al, *supra* note 85 at 79.

study came from the population of interest chosen, as the majority of my interview participants are women from the artistic community, are highly influential on social media, and therefore held associated power and privilege. Additionally, the participants were all cis, able-bodied, most of them white women. I had planned on including a more diverse group of women in terms of gender identity within my unit of analysis. However, on the list of signatories to the statement, the only trans woman was not a leader of the movement but had only signed and supported the statement.<sup>262</sup>

Another limitation I encountered when reaching out to possible participants for the interviews was that some women failed to answer my messages. I did not hear back from four of them. This did not prevent me from meeting the quota sampling of the place of residence that I needed for this study. I interviewed two women in Venezuela from a total of eight participants.

During the interviews, I found that some women did not have certain information at the moment and/or expressed they did not remember or that they did not know. A more participatory method in the future can be done by sharing the interview questions a day or a few hours before the interview. Only sharing a partial list of questions in advance of the interviews, as I did, may have impacted the results as participants may have been surprised by some questions and did not have an answer ready on hand, and/or did not have the opportunity to reflect on their responses in advance. There are some costs involved in sharing interview questions beforehand. For example, the interviewee might be guided on what key questions or areas are important for the interviewer. Some participants might prepare in advance and spontaneity might be lost. Additionally, honesty might be absent because they consulted or researched the subject beforehand.

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<sup>262</sup> Tamara Adrian, trans women and politician. This was confirmed by her before conducting the interview.

## Chapter Four: Analysis and discussion

### 4.1 Data Collection

After receiving ethical approval from the Office of Research Ethics at York University,<sup>263</sup> I interviewed eight women leaders of #YoTeCreo. Interviews took place on Zoom from May 17 through June 2, 2022. All participants agreed to use their full names for this study. Therefore, and prior to the analysis, I will briefly introduce them to the reader. This includes their place of residence, current number of followers on Twitter and Instagram and a brief summary of what they do, as one of my findings is that their influencer status was key for the spark. The list follows the order in which the interviews took place:

1. Ella Bric, based in New York City, United States (Twitter 7K, Instagram 30K)

She is a trumpet player, singer and producer. She is a two-time Grammy award winning producer. She was the first woman to receive the Latin Grammy Award for best producer of the year in 2018.

2. Mafer Bandola, based in New York City, United States (was in Canada at the time of the spark) (Twitter 1.6K Instagram 11K)

She is an educator, performer, self-taught composer, and a bearer of Venezuelan oral traditions. She is the most prominent female bandola (traditional Venezuelan instrument of four strings) player. She is co-founder of LADAMA, a collective of four women from different countries, who compose music that transcends language and borders.

3. Laura Guevara, based in Mexico City, Mexico (Twitter 37K, Instagram 99K)

She is a singer, composer and songwriter. She recently released a song about dating violence awareness. In 2015, she won four awards at the Pepsi Venezuela Music Awards that honour the country's best music artists. In 2017, she was named Ambassador of Conscience by Amnesty International in Venezuela.

4. Ariana Gonzalez, since 2022 based in Washington DC, United States (was in Venezuela at the time of the spark) (Twitter 8K, Instagram 5K)

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<sup>263</sup> Certificate #: STU 2022-040 Approval Period: 05/10/22-05/10/23 Office of Research Ethics, York University.

She is an educator, political activist, and specialist in public sector project management for local governments and political campaigns.

5. Nana Cadavieco, based in Miami, United States (Twitter 30K, Instagram 9K)

She is an artist, singer and vocal producer. She has collaborated with several bands and artists through the years. She currently works in project management, production and consulting at her own company.

6. Loló Bello, based in New York City, United States (Instagram private account, no Twitter account)

She is an educator, producer and social innovator. She is co-founder of 333 Experience, an award-winning filmmaking company.

7. Natasha Tiniaco, based in New York City, United States (Twitter 4K, Instagram 3K)

She is a poet, scholar and educator, currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Latin America and Latino Cultures at CUNY. She has published two books of poetry. One of them won the National University Prize in Literature in Venezuela.

8. Ana Elba Dominguez, based in Caracas, Venezuela (Instagram 1.5K, no Twitter account)

She is an artist, actress and singer. She plays the cello and was part of Venezuela's Youth Orchestra System. She currently participates in Euforia Rock Sinfonica.<sup>264</sup>

I used the platform Trint to transcribe the interviews in Spanish and then I used Atlas AI software for coding. In terms of my analysis, I was inspired by researchers Bingham and Witkowsky and their deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis.<sup>265</sup> As advised by the researchers, I started with a deductive analysis. This was done using pre-developed codes that aligned with my research question and my hypotheses, including my five major themes.<sup>266</sup> While revisiting interviews more codes were developed using an inductive analysis. This is a “bottom-up” analytic strategy

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<sup>264</sup> Euforia Rock Sinfónico de Venezuela is a musical project that has a unique and innovative format that combines the basic instruments of rock with the classic sound of the symphonic orchestra,

<sup>265</sup> Andrea Bingham & Patricia Witkowsky “Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis”. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: After the interview* (SAGE Publications, 2022) at 133.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid* at 135. Deductive analysis is a process of working “from the ‘top down’, from a theory to hypothesis to data to add to or contradict the theory.

where I let the data emerge from the interviews.<sup>267</sup> During the inductive process, I started to identify patterns and add my theoretical frame to the data. Using a deductive-inductive approach to qualitative methods is key to allow the interviews to speak to the researcher. The deductive-inductive approach is also important from a feminist standpoint because the process of data collection and analysis centres the viewpoints of women participants and not only my predetermined codes/themes.<sup>268</sup>

## 4.2 Analysis

In the following sections, I discuss my findings, which are organized as follows:

1. In an organic manner, #YoTeCreo leaders amplified the testimonies of women being disseminated on social media;
2. #YoTeCreo was not a transplantation of #MeToo, but this was the closest reference the leaders had on digital feminist activism;
3. Leaders of #YoTeCreo living abroad were distanced from the complex Venezuelan crisis and the dictatorial regime, which allowed them both to open up to feminist knowledges and have the freedom to engage in online activism;
4. Participants did not have specific experience or knowledge of VAW in Venezuela but understood the historical exclusion and discrimination of Venezuelan women;
5. Leaders of #YoTeCreo leveraged their social media expertise and influencer status for the success of this digital activism;
6. *Hartazgo*, or outrage, sorority and anger, was a collective impulse for the spark of #YoTeCreo;
7. Emotional costs and the invisible and unpaid work carried out by #YoTeCreo leaders were two hidden costs of online activism.

Throughout my analysis, I am committed to highlighting the voices of women leaders of #YoTeCreo as a key feminist methodology.<sup>269</sup> Participants' own words are

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> Taylor, *supra* note 228.

<sup>269</sup> Bingham & Witkowsky, *supra* note 265 at 136.

indicated by italics and the original Spanish is included in footnotes. I also invite the reader to review their words as spoken words and not written words, as I did not change or adapt them to 'read' better.

#### **4.2.1 In an organic manner, #YoTeCreo leaders amplified the testimonies of women being disseminated on social media**

In this section, I analyzed the responses of participants and concluded that #YoTeCreo was not carefully planned or organized, and that it was more of a spontaneous and organic way of performing online feminist activism. The leaders' main mission was to, through their statement, amplify a conversation that started on social media with the account of @AlejandroSojoStrupo, as detail in Chapter I. By saying "I Believe You" to users of the hashtag, the leaders' centered the discussion on the voices of women without fame or influencer status. The leaders also wanted to dignify stories that may have been otherwise ignored.

At the beginning of the interviews, I asked the leaders what inspired them and what made them take the decision create #YoTeCreo. In the words of Ella Bric, the founder of the movement, this is how it initially happened:

*[I]n April, I was in New York, and I saw that there was a trend on Twitter from some girls with an Instagram account who were talking about Alejandro Sojo. Alejandro Sojo was someone I worked with in a very distant way at a music festival, but I had no idea who this guy was, how, or what his personality was. But, I was really struck by the fact that there were so many victims talking about the same man. And I said: let's make a WhatsApp group, we have to do something! I had never had a team before. I knew nothing about feminism, I knew nothing about activism, and I opened a WhatsApp group because I wanted this not to remain there spread on social media. And beyond that, I wanted the victims of these artists who have influence in the country [Venezuela] to feel that they were not alone. And I created a group of 23 of them, all actresses, singers, one of them a political activist. Another super influencer in digital marketing. And I said what do we do? So, as we were all outraged we said "Well, let's make a statement." And let's release it now so that these chicas (girls/ladies) know that they are not alone. We launched the statement with*

*the signature of 70 plus women. And that great support [70 women and the statement] was what really powered the movement.*<sup>270</sup>

Similar to the literature on the diffusion of digital movements, most women participants agreed that this digital feminist activism was spontaneous, impulsive, fast-paced, organic, and unplanned.<sup>271</sup> To release the statement they co-created, they rapidly decided to use social media platforms and created the username @yotcreovzla on Twitter and Instagram. Without any expectations, and after the statement were #YoTeCreo went viral, participants began to actively organize. It was very common to receive as a response from them that they did not see themselves as creators of a movement, but that they wanted through the statement, to make visible and bring to light the testimonies that were being disseminated on social media, particularly Twitter and Instagram, of women who experienced violence.<sup>272</sup> They mentioned how they were a channel to bring into the spotlight the problem with violence and harassment against women in Venezuela. For example, according to Laura Guevara:

*I do not feel that we created a movement. The movement was created and what we did was to centralize what was happening in a disorganized, spontaneous way, so that there would be one place where people could go and where the information would be centralized. The purpose was to organize the outbreak of complaints that were happening on Twitter and social media in an organic and natural way to highlight a problem that is not isolated, but a complex, structural, and more common problem than was believed or than people wanted or were willing to talk about. And basically, the purpose was to generate a platform, to generate a platform where people could feel heard, and supported. The purpose was to make the problem visible, to make misogyny visible, to make visible the disadvantaged position that women have in a society like the Venezuelan*

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<sup>270</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Y en abril estaba en Nueva York. Y vi que había una tendencia en Twitter. De unas chicas con una cuenta de Instagram que estaban hablando de Alejandro Soto. Ojo. Y Alejandro Sojo fue alguien con quien trabajé de una manera muy lejana en un festival de música también. Y yo no tenía idea de que este muchacho quién era, ni cómo, ni cuál era su personalidad. Pero me llamó muchísimo la atención que eran tantas víctimas hablando del mismo hombre. Y dije: vamos a hacer un grupo de WhatsApp y tenemos que hacer algo. Yo nunca había tenido un equipo. Yo no sabía nada del feminismo, yo no sabía nada de activismo, y abrí un grupo de WhatsApp porque tenía ganas de que, de que eso no quedara ahí en las redes sociales. Y sobre todo, tenía ganas de que las víctimas de esos artistas que tienen influencia en el país [Venezuela] sintieran que no estaban solas. E hice un grupo como de 23, todas actrices, cantantes, una de ellas activista política. Otra súper influencer en la parte de marketing en marketing digital. Y dije ¿qué hacemos? Entonces como todas estábamos indignadas dijimos “Bueno, vamos a hacer un comunicado.” Y vamos a sacarlo ya para que estas chicas sepan que no están solas. Lanzamos el comunicado con la firma de 70 y pico de mujeres. Y ese gran apoyo fue lo que realmente impulsó el movimiento.

<sup>271</sup> Lee & Murdie, *supra* note 182.

<sup>272</sup> Laura and Ariana both agreed that they didn't want to create a movement.

one.<sup>273</sup>

On the other hand, Natasha Tiniacos recognized in the interview that she was the mastermind behind the use of the word 'movement'. She commented:

*[I] suggested the word 'movement', I suggested it because it is dynamic, it is a variety of women. It could not be a revolution because we know that word triggers Venezuelans [referring to the Chavismo used that word] and also revolutions evaporate, it has to be a 'movement'.<sup>274</sup>*

During the interviews, I refer to #YoTeCreo as a movement as this was the name they self-assigned in the statement titled "Movement #YoTeCreo". As noted, my main purpose is not to address whether #YoTeCreo falls within the category of social movement. Women participants offered dissonant responses on whether #YoTeCreo was a movement. Some referred to #YoTeCreo as a movement and others discussed it as a platform that gathered and made visible testimonies of VAW. There is a scholarly conversation around the complexities of digital feminist activism as social movements. For example, #MeToo, one of the most researched instances of digital feminist activism, has been discussed in studies as hashtag feminism and also as a movement.<sup>275</sup> Additionally, the lack of structure of online feminist activism, different from structured social movements, creates difficulties to create responses from a unified way.<sup>276</sup> The diversity in the answers of the participants is a clear example of how women from the same online digital collective had different perspectives on their own purpose. It is also important to highlight that digital activism has changed the traditional ways of conducting and organizing movements, including changing the structure.<sup>277</sup> With

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<sup>273</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo no siento que nosotras creamos un movimiento. El movimiento se creó y nosotras lo que hicimos fue cómo canalizar lo que estaba pasando de forma desordenada, espontánea, para que hubiese un solo lugar a donde se pudiera acudir y donde estuviera como centralizada la información. El propósito era encauzar la explosión de denuncias que estaban ocurriendo en Twitter y en redes sociales de forma orgánica y natural para evidenciar una problemática que no se trata de casos aislados, sino que es una problemática, compleja, estructural y, más común de lo que se creía o de lo que se quería o que se estaba dispuesto a hablar. Y básicamente el propósito era así como generar una plataforma, generar una plataforma donde la gente pudiera sentirse escuchada, apoyada. El propósito era visibilizar el problema, visibilizar la misoginia, visibilizar la posición de desventaja que tenemos las mujeres en una sociedad como la venezolana.

<sup>274</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Entonces sugerí la palabra movimiento, la palabra movimiento la sugerí porque tiene porque es dinámico porque son muchas mujeres. No podía ser la palabra revolución, porque sabemos que detonante para los venezolanos, las revoluciones también se evaporan.

<sup>275</sup> Rosemary Clark-Parsons, *Networked feminism: How Digital Media Makers Transformed Gender Justice Movements* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022) at 70

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid* at 91.

<sup>277</sup> Clark, *supra* note 86.

#YoTeCreo, women participants were 'outsiders' to traditional feminist movements in Venezuela and acted of their own account. Clark-Parsons citing Bennet and Segerbeg describes this shift from collective to connective action.<sup>278</sup> Collective action involves organization and coordination of messages and connective action, which occurs on social media.<sup>279</sup> Researcher Shaw goes further with this distinction between online and offline social movements and argues that theorists of social movements need to modify the theoretical frame to adapt to the increased use of social media and online activism that truly reflects the nature of these online ways of organizing.<sup>280</sup> Further research is needed to understand and develop new theoretical frames that resignify digital activism as social movements.

What was clear from the participants responses was that #YoTeCreo was not carefully planned or organized. Participants did not expect that their statement would become as viral as it did on social media. This was confirmed by both Ella and Ariana, when they mentioned that they did not expect the statement to become viral.<sup>281</sup> Their mission was to amplify a conversation that was already going on social media, as started by the @AlejandroSoJoStrupo account. According to Mafer, their main mission was "to put the magnifying glass. We bring the magnifying glass (...) We are going to put all eyes there."<sup>282</sup> The leaders used their influencer profiles to amplify Venezuelan women's experiences of sexual violence and stand up against sexual violence.

I found that their experiences as leaders spoke of consciousness-raising. Similar to digital feminist activism, leaders of #YoTeCreo generated a consciousness-raising moment in the digital arena for Venezuelans. Like other instances of hashtag activism these events can be instructive and create an opportunity for learning and change.<sup>283</sup> Similar to other digital feminist activism, #YoTeCreo allowed women to network and disseminate information and knowledges. It took advantage of the benefits of the

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<sup>278</sup> Clark-Parsons, *supra* note 275 at 19.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> Frances Shaw, "HOTTEST 100 WOMEN: Cross-platform Discursive Activism in Feminist Blogging Networks" (2012) 27:74 *Australian Feminist Studies* 373.

<sup>281</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: en lo particular yo no esperaba que esto trascendiera, el objetivo era hacer el statement, sacar el comunicado y ya. Ella hicimos esto sin ningún tipo de expectativa, no pensábamos que iba a tener el impacto que tuvo.

<sup>282</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Poner una lupa a una situación. Y eso fue lo principal que nos planteamos. Vamos a poner la lupa. Nosotros traemos la lupa y la lupa son de personas que saben que es importante. Vamos a poner todas las miradas. Hay eso es lo que la misión principal.

<sup>283</sup> Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al, *supra* note 85 at 87.

interconnectedness and speed of social media to disseminate women's stories to a wide audience in extraordinary ways.<sup>284</sup>

Most of the participants reported that they felt a strong sense of responsibility towards the women that were using social media to expose their named abusers. Due to their background, many of the leaders had worked with some of the named abusers before, as happened in the cases of Nana Cadavieco and Laura Guevera. For example, Nana mentioned *"I feel that our role as artists is that we already have the stage, we have to get off the stage and get the victims on stage. I think that is the first thing we needed to do as musicians."*<sup>285</sup> This is also captured in the statement. Also, Lolo Bello mentioned, *"I think there was a necessity to assume in some way the leadership or the responsibility of what was happening."*<sup>286</sup> Ariana, who is not an artist and has worked in Venezuelan politics, mentioned:

*[I] think my perception is that in the case of Linda [Ella Bric] and the other female artists who decided to raise their voices, it was because they somehow felt that those aggressors, who are part of the entertainment industry, contaminated the industry, in this case, the music industry, and I think they felt a commitment. They felt a commitment to tell them that we are not all like that, and this is not normal, this happens, and we condemn it. It was an "I believe you", but it was also a stop sign to aggressors that are part of this industry so that they would not do it anymore.*<sup>287</sup>

This idea of acting in response to the acts of perpetrators and creating solidarity among women who experienced violence is an example of what Hemmings calls "affective solidarity." This kind of solidarity distances itself from identity politics and draws from feelings of discomfort, "rage, frustration and the desire for connection – as necessary for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation."<sup>288</sup> For Hemmings,

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<sup>284</sup> Hemmings, *supra* note 86.

<sup>285</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo siento que el rol nuestro como artistas es que nosotras tenemos la tarima, es bajarnos de la tarima y subir al escenario a las víctimas. O sea, creo que es lo primero que tenemos que hacer cómo músicos que somos."

<sup>286</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Hubo esa necesidad de tener un sitio donde eso pudiera estar como siendo recolectado de alguna manera sí. Asumir cómo esa, de alguna manera no se el liderazgo o responsabilidad de lo que había pasado de decir bueno, hay que al menos hacer una cuenta de Instagram y un sabes, el Twitter, lo que sea,... Para eso, para que se expusiera.

<sup>287</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo creo que mi percepción es que en el caso de Linda y las otras artistas que decidieron levantar su voz, fue porque ellas de alguna manera sintieron que estos agresores que sí son del mundo del entretenimiento, ensuciaron la industria, ensuciaron en este caso la música, y yo creo que ellas sintieron como un compromiso, ellas sintieron el compromiso de decirle no todos somos así, y esto no es normal, esto pasa, y condenamos. Fue un yo te creo, pero también fue una voz de alto para todos los agresores que forman parte de esta industria como para que no lo hicieran más

<sup>288</sup> Clare Hemmings, "Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation" (2012) 13:2 Feminist Theory 147.

affective solidarity is “[t]he basis of a connection to others and desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognizant of power and privilege.”<sup>289</sup> Leaders of #YoTeCreo connected through feelings but also their desire for transformation of cultural practices that are widespread and perpetuate VAW in the country and used their fame and influential power on social media to give their statement power.

### ***I Believe You, let's start by believing the silence breakers***

One question that developed from the interviews and which was not predetermined was: Why did the leaders use the #YoTeCreo (I Believe You) hashtag instead of another hashtag? I did not suggest #MeToo or any other hashtag as I did not want to lead them to an answer. There was unanimity in their answer: they decided to believe women. They mentioned that what often happens with victims of sexual violence is that after the assault, family, friends and even police do not believe them, and they are blamed. For example, Ariana mentioned that before #YoTeCreo sparked, women's testimonies were doubted because they were naming public figures with credibility and fame, and for them, “[t]here was no doubt in our minds that this [referring to women's testimonies] was true and it was very important to us that they [women exposing abusers] knew we believed them.”<sup>290</sup>

Another important response indicated that the leaders did not want to be a passive group of women that also had experienced sexual violence, like #MeToo, instead, they wanted to tell women proactively ‘I believe you’ (#YoTeCreo). They wanted to shift the public discourse away from the ‘victim-blaming’ tendency towards a community of mutual belief and support for women who use social media to expose their testimonies of sexual violence. In the words of Mafer:

*[W]e didn't want to say to 'Me Too', it wasn't 'Me Too' [referring to 'this also happened to me'] that we wanted to identify with, but I believe you, which was like what we wanted to hear and in a way it was going to have more impact socially. Me Too was also a group of victims that shared the same experience, whereas 'I believe you' there's no lie there. And that's where we need to pay attention. So that's what it was. It was like we said: are we*

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid* at 158.

<sup>290</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Para nosotras no había duda que eso era verdad y para nosotros era muy importante que ellas supieran que les creían

*going to be part of a group of people that shared the same experience? or we're going to start teaching people to believe the victim?.*<sup>291</sup>

Ella Bric mentioned that some years back she experienced cyberbullying for expressing her opinion on the lack of representation of Venezuelan female voices in a benefit concert for Venezuelans and that she felt sorrow for not receiving support. During the interview, she said, “*I didn't want them to feel the same way I felt years ago.*”<sup>292</sup> The idea of using #YoTeCreo reflected previous experiences of discrimination where they wished they had the support and solidarity of others.

In using the #YoTeCreo hashtag, participants are identifying what scholars have referred to as “the second assault.”<sup>293</sup> This refers to the revictimization suffered by women after the act of sexual violence itself, where the police, and their friends and family, all doubt their testimony, they are not believed, and their experiences are called into question.<sup>294</sup> When the leaders decided to use the phrase #YoTeCreo they intended to break the chain of shame, which was important in the activation and spark of the movement in Venezuela.

The leaders also engaged in what is called the “politics of listening.”<sup>295</sup> Mendes et al., citing Bassel, discussed how leaders of digital campaigns engaged in the politics of listening as a form of recognition.<sup>296</sup> The act of listening and amplifying women’s stories validates women’s experiences and gives them value. In this case, the #YoTeCreo hashtag dignified the stories of women who used the hashtag.

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<sup>291</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: No queríamos decir a mí a mi bien, no era el: a mí también como que lo que no identificar sino como yo te creo, que era como lo que queríamos escuchar y lo que de una manera u otra como que socialmente iba teniendo más impacto. A mi también era un poco de víctimas que a todas les pasó, el yo te creo es no hay mentira ahí. Y ahí hay que poner atención. Entonces era eso, era como que dijimos que, vamos a ser parte de un grupo de gente que les pasó lo mismo o que vamos a empezar a enseñar a la gente a creer a quien habla.

<sup>292</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo no quería que ellas sintieron lo mismo que yo sentí hace años

<sup>293</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessalynn Keller & Jessica Ringrose, “Digitized narratives of sexual violence: Making sexual violence felt and known through digital disclosures” (2019) 21:6 *New media & society* 1296. See: Wolbert Burgess, Ann et al, “SANE/SART Services for Sexual Assault Victims: Policy Implications” (2006) 1:3 *Victims & offenders* 205–212.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al, *supra* note 85 at 87. As is evident from our interviews with organizers, they are also engaging in a politics of listening (Bassel 2017) at 87. Organizers recognized the value of listening to contributors’ experiences, regardless of how painful they may be. Listening then is a form of recognition “that counters vicious exclusions that combine race, gender, class and means of rendering people socially abject [ . . . ] and . . . unheard” (Bassel 2017, 6). It is therefore one way in which narrative resources can be redistributed to those whose voices or stories are rarely heard (Bassel 2017).

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

#### **4.2.2 #YoTeCreo was not a transplantation of #MeToo, but this was the closest reference the leaders had on digital feminist activism**

As mentioned in Chapter II, my hypotheses included that the women participants would identify a connection between previous digital feminist movements in the region, like #NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso, and the emergence of #YoTeCreo.<sup>297</sup> Part of this hypothesis was not confirmed and my findings in this section include the fact that for the majority of the leaders, #YoTeCreo was the first time they actively engaged in digital feminist activism. Most participants had not previously participated in Latin America digital feminist activism, either by the act of retweeting, sharing content or using hashtags to increase the support or share their stories. On the contrary, #MeToo was mentioned as a key inspiration for #YoTeCreo. Almost all of the leaders of the movement mentioned that #YoTeCreo was deeply inspired by #MeToo. On the other hand, participants had different references and responses to prior knowledge of feminist activism, from references to feminist activism in Russia, some other refer to pro-abortion campaigns in Latin America, other to regional feminist performance. There is uncertainty and it was not clear that they all had similar or shared references to online or feminist activism.

The majority of the interviewees did not refer to previous Latin American digital movements as reference points salient to the creation of #YoTeCreo. The leaders interviewed did not have knowledge about the hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso or where it came from. When asked about #NiUnaMenos, all of them knew about this hashtag campaign, and one participant, Laura Guevara, even highlighted that the hashtag #NiUnaMás (“#NotOneWomenMore”) had its origins in Mexico. They all could identify that #NiUnaMenos refers to femi(ni)cide in the region and that it is used to make visible the killings of women in the region.

During the interview, I ask participants to refer to others references of feminism(s), including digital activism and feminist activism. Mafer Bandola mentioned other instances of digital feminist activism like #YoTeCreoHermana (“#IBelieveYouSister”), explained in Chapter II.<sup>298</sup> Ariana Gonzalez mentioned Pussy

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<sup>297</sup> See Appendix D List of Questions

<sup>298</sup> Larrondo, *supra* note 74.

Riot, a symbol of feminist resistance and activism, as a transnational reference point. Pussy Riot is a group of feminist Russian activists that perform music in public spaces to promote feminism(s) and LGBTQI+ rights and who are against Putin's regime.<sup>299</sup> Ella Bric mentioned FeminismoInc, an NGO in Venezuela that works towards female empowerment and is very relevant in the women's movement in the country.<sup>300</sup> Both Mafer and Natasha Tiniacos<sup>[OBJ:OBJ]</sup> from Chile, a feminist collective that became famous in 2019 with their performance of *Un violador en tu camino* (A rapist in your path) which involves a lyric about rape and State violence and includes a choreography performed by women blindfolded in public places.<sup>301</sup><sup>[OBJ]</sup> Natasha also mentioned the importance of pro-abortion movements in Latin America, in her own words:

*[I] believe that the pro-abortion movements in Latin America are so powerful in Latin America, in Chile, in Argentina, in Mexico. That green handkerchief, [the green wave] that one. That inspires a lot. I believe, or at least I do, that what is happening in Latin America is very good. That. It's important.*<sup>302</sup>

On the other hand, when asked if they had participated in, interacted with or actively engage with digital feminist activism before #YoTeCreo, most of the participants mentioned that they did not participate in online activism, either by the act of retweeting, sharing content or by using the hashtags to share their own stories. Even though they all knew about #MeToo, very few of them actively participated in the online conversation as hashtag users. Only a few of them had previous experience participating in feminist activism, either online or offline. For example, Mafer, who identified as an activist and feminist before #YoTeCreo, mentioned that she had engaged with digital activism before and used her social media platform to share feminist knowledges and thinking. Nana Cadavieco also mentioned going to the Women's March in 2017 in Miami. Laura Guevara mentioned participating in the #MeToo conversation in Mexico, the country where she lives and actively participating in feminist protests and engaging with feminist

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<sup>299</sup> See Masha Gessen, "Pussy Riot: Behind the balaclavas" The Guardian (24 Jan 2014), online: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/24/pussy-riot-behind-balaclava>

<sup>300</sup> See FeminismoInc, Online: Instagram <<https://www.instagram.com/feminismoinc/>>

<sup>301</sup> Paula Serafini, "'A Rapist in Your Path': Transnational Feminist Protest and Why (and How) Performance Matters." European Journal of Cultural Studies 23: 2 (2020) 290.

<sup>302</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Creo que los movimientos a favor del aborto en Latinoamérica que son tan potentes en Latinoamérica, en Chile, en Argentina, en México. Ese pañuelito verde, esa. Eso inspiró muchísimo. Yo creo, o al menos a mí, como esto que está pasando en Latinoamérica está muy bien, está. Eso es importante.

activism. Generally, few participants identified themselves as feminist activists or as having been involved in activism before.

Despite their familiarity with the use of social media as a tool for activism, for the majority of participants, #YoTeCreo was the first time they actively engaged in digital feminist activism.<sup>303</sup> During previous movements, they felt like outsiders, like it was far from their reality, and they could not see how, as Mafer discussed during her interview, ‘that’ [other feminists’ digital movements] can be applied to ‘this’ [Venezuela]. However, women participants could entangle some experiences they witnessed in the United States or Mexico. They were able to relate previous digital feminist activism to what was happening on Twitter in 2021 with the account of @AlejandroSojoStrupo before they made the statement. That is, to me, how they made the connection to previous digital feminist activism.<sup>304</sup> That transnational flow and cross-border dialogue that happens in digital feminist activism they had seen as outsiders was key to the creation of #YoTeCreo in Venezuela.

### **#YoTeCreo was highly influenced by #MeToo**

I asked the participants if they thought that #YoTeCreo was inspired by other digital feminist movements. Different from one of my hypotheses, that #YoTeCreo emerged in apart due to the success of regional digital feminist activism in Latin America, the majority of the women participants noted that #YoTeCreo was deeply inspired by #MeToo.

Most of the leaders detailed that after #YoTeCreo went viral, they researched and checked the ‘MeToo’ movement webpage and were inspired by Tarana Burke’s vision and mission.<sup>305</sup> Mafer mentioned that they looked for other references, however, “*we all had MeToo as a reference, and for me, it was the biggest reference.*”<sup>306</sup> Natasha Tiniaco commented the same, but with a regional twist: “*Yes, it was inspired. We always talked*

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<sup>303</sup> Natasha, Nana, Ella, Lolo, Ana Elba, Ariana. Only in the case of Laura and Mafer they mentioned participating in previous digital feminist activism by the act of sharing information.

<sup>304</sup> Sylvanna Falcón & Jennifer C Nash, “Shifting analytics and linking theories: A conversation about the ‘meaning-making’ of intersectionality and transnational feminism” (2015) 50 Women’s Studies International Forum 1. I could grapple with the critical question of how the injustices I witnessed and experienced in the United States may have some relationship or parallel to the injustices I witnessed and learned about in Peru.

<sup>305</sup> MeTooMvmt, *supra* note 170.

<sup>306</sup>Here is the original in Spanish: Todas tenemos referencia al MeToo y para mi fue la referencia más grande que tuve.

about it [#MeToo] as inspiration, but knowing that our culture is very different (...) And, it's not like we had too much time to be quite strategic either."<sup>307</sup> Lolo commented that:

*Yes, I think that. Well, the MeToo is everywhere. The whole digital identity of MeToo was a great reference to us. It was a great reference because that's what we always wanted. We had several as a reference, there was a page that was from some Spanish women that looked great that we had as a reference. We looked for those digital references.*<sup>308</sup>

Even though participants mentioned that after the statement sparked #YoTeCreo, they searched for other references. The majority of them mentioned that #MeToo, in particular, Tarana Burke's MeToo movement was their main source of inspiration. This rejected my hypothesis that Latin America digital activism was going to be key inspiration for #YoTeCreo; it was not.

All of the participants knew about the #MeToo conversation that took place on social media platforms under the hashtag. Some of them also had Tarana Burker's movement as a reference, as opposed to the hashtag.<sup>309</sup> Mafer Bandola, Ella Bric and Lolo referred to Tarana's Burke 'MeToo' movement as key inspiration. Even Ella Bric, the founder of #YoTeCreo mentioned contacting her:

*I tried to reach out to Tarana Burke from 'Metoo', and she was the first person I wrote to on Instagram. Because I had the goal of 'MeToo' embracing us as another wing of the 'MeToo' movement. It was like the expectation, the biggest dream, a movement like Me Too, like supporting what was happening in Venezuela, but it just didn't happen. Hopefully, it will happen in the future.*<sup>310</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter I, when #YoTeCreo became viral in Venezuela it was rapidly compared to #MeToo in the US.<sup>311</sup> I wanted to know in accordance with the

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<sup>307</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Sí se inspiró. Siempre lo comentábamos como inspiración, pero sabiendo que nuestra cultura es muy diferente. Como aquí, como climatizador,este asunto. Y tampoco es que teníamos demasiado tiempo para ser bastante estrategas.

<sup>308</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Sí, yo creo que. Bueno, el MeToo está en todos lados. Toda la identidad digital del MeToo fue una gran referencia. Fue una gran referencia porque es lo que siempre quisimos, cómo estar muy en onda con esa mujer. Teníamos varias que teníamos de referencia, había una página que era de unas chicas españolas que estuvo increíble también que sí tuvimos. Buscamos esas referencias digitales.

<sup>309</sup> MeTooMvmt, *supra* note 170 and Burke, *supra* note 175.

<sup>310</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo traté de reach out a Tarana Burke del Metoo, y fue la primera persona a la que yo le escribí por Instagram.Porque. Tenía la meta de que el MeToo nos abrazara nosotras como otra ala del metoo movement. Era como que la expectativa, el sueño más grande, como que un movimiento, como el Metoo, como que respaldando lo que estaba pasando en Venezuela, pero simplemente no se dio. Ojalá se dé en un futuro

<sup>311</sup> See Chapter I section of #YoTeCreo

viewpoints of participants what they thought about this comparison. Nana Cadavieco shared that *“although Hollywood is the one who temporarily put the expression ‘me too’ quickly on the map, you realize that not only did it come from way back, but it’s everywhere. And that’s where I feel that’s why #YoTeCreo is compared to #MeToo because of its origin, it’s like it was born out of the Hollywood cases.”*<sup>312</sup> For Lolo, the comparison between #MeToo and #YoTeCreo was because in both cases the named perpetrators were ‘media men’. She mentioned: *“it’s that time of social media. Men-abusive-from the Media industry- falling.”*<sup>313</sup> Like Weinstein in #MeToo, in this case, the alleged perpetrators belonged to the entertainment industry (e.g. music, theater) in Venezuela. Also Ariana mentioned: *“We were deeply moved, especially the artists, their sensible heartstrings were moved when they saw that the perpetrators were musicians too.”*<sup>314</sup> The fact that both #MeToo and #YoTeCreo addressed sexual violence perpetrated by men from the entertainment business was, for the participants, the similarities shared between both cases of digital activism.

Different from part of my hypotheses, the leaders of #YoTeCreo mostly relate this digital feminist activism to #MeToo. Even though they did not actively participate in #MeToo they all knew about it and had read about it. I found that #YoTeCreo is entangled with #MeToo, as they are both part of the feminist knowledges and are not isolated phenomena of digital feminist activism.<sup>315</sup> This is how Nana Cadavieco described the relationship in her interview, when she shared that she believed there is a connection between previous movements that entangle with the new ones. She practically described how the FemMesh works with entanglements:

*Different backgrounds or by different clamors, eventually they’re falling into the same conversations. They are tucking in the same themes. And that... that seems to me like an advantage because then, every movement that starts it’s going to end up adding up in a network that goes and adds more information, adding data,*

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<sup>312</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Si bien Hollywood es quien pone en el mapa temporalmente la expresión me too rápidamente. Te das cuenta de que no solo venía muy atrás, sino que está en todos lados. Y es ahí en donde yo siento que por eso se compara el #YoTeCreo con #MeToo porque nace, es como si hubiera nacido de los casos de Hollywood, eso es #YoTeCreo

<sup>313</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Es este momento de eso de redes sociales. Hombre abusador mediático cayendo.

<sup>314</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: De repente las fibras que toquen no, es decir, para nosotros, pues se nos movió una fibra. Sobre todo a las artistas, a las artistas se les movió la fibra. Cuando vieron que los adversarios eran músicos también.

<sup>315</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71.

*which is moving forward and that is advancing little by little the pending tasks a movement could have.*<sup>316</sup>

This confirms what Garibotti and Hopp argue in their study. For them, there are no transplantations of #MeToo but this moment created a window of opportunity for new digital social movements to emerge.<sup>317</sup> Using the FemMesh, we can see that the #YoTeCreo leaders, like #MeToo leaders came from the entertainment industry and most of them lived in the United States. As such, they were able to connect what was happening in Venezuela to their closest reference, #MeToo. This also relates to what researchers called the “contagion effect”<sup>318</sup> that makes diffusion processes of digital activism unpredictable and spontaneous. In this same study, they referred to #MeToo and argue that some outsiders ‘mimic’ the collective action without thoughtful planning.<sup>319</sup> In this case, the experiences that were shared on social media by Venezuelan women made leaders of #YoTeCreo angry together with accumulated feelings of so many years enduring violence that they connected with previous transnational and local flows that reflected a similar cause. This was relevant for the creation of #YoTeCreo.

#### **4.2.3 Leaders of #YoTeCreo living abroad were distanced from the complex Venezuelan crisis and the dictatorial regime, which allowed them both to open up to feminist knowledges and have the freedom to engage in online activism**

When hypothesizing how #YoTeCreo emerged in Venezuela, it was important for me to analyze the role of Venezuelan migrant women. I was particularly interested in discussing with participants the influence of migrant women for the #YoTeCreo spark.<sup>320</sup> This included investigating the idea that women might feel safer reporting abusers when

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<sup>316</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Aunque aunque las tengan distintos orígenes o por distintos clamores, eventualmente van cayendo en las mismas conversaciones que hay que tener Iban arrojando los mismos temas. Y eso, eso me parece una ventaja, porque entonces cada movimiento que comience se va a terminar sumando en una red que va sumando información, que va sumando data, que va adelantando un poco de pendientes o tareas que podría tener un movimiento.

<sup>317</sup> Garibotti & Hopp, *supra* note 51.

<sup>318</sup> Lee & Murdie, *supra* note 182 at 833.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> Sun, *supra* note at 68.

they are abroad,<sup>321</sup> and that migrant women mobilize consciousness on feminist activism they have gained abroad to translate it to their home country, which speaks to transnational feminism and flows of knowledges. I asked migrant leaders how they related to feminism in Venezuela and how they relate to feminism abroad, to understand if feminist knowledges gained in the countries of destination might have had a role in influencing their home country. On the other hand, I was interested in knowing if, due to the current regime in Venezuela, they believed being abroad facilitated their leadership of the movement.

Accordingly, this section has two findings. First, due to the current political context in Venezuela and the State's threat, leaders of #YoTeCreo living abroad felt safer activating this movement from abroad. Second, they began to learn about feminism(s) abroad, as their physical presence in Venezuela where the current complex multi-dimensional crisis blinded them and did not allow them to think beyond political problems to embrace questions of feminist activism.

### **Leaders of #YoTeCreo living abroad felt safer from the State's threat by activating this movement from abroad**

All participants believed that being abroad eased their involvement in the movement, and according to Ella Bric, "*being abroad guarantees certain protections for the team.*"<sup>322</sup> Even Natasha Tiniacos refers to being in panic if she would have done this action in Venezuela:

*Even if I had sent a message and then I had to walk out the door at work and go home, I would have been in panic. Why panicked? Because of fear. The inherent fear in one who has grown up in a solitary struggle, solitary means without the power of the State, that is, without the accompaniment of the State, in a way it is to go against the State.*<sup>323</sup>

On the other hand, Laura Guevara mentioned how being abroad made her feel safe and free:

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<sup>321</sup> Dey & Mendes, *supra* note 70.

<sup>322</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Estar afuera garantizaba ciertas protecciones para el equipo

<sup>323</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Incluso si yo mandaba un mensaje y luego me tocaba salir de la puerta del trabajo hacia mi casa, yo hubiera estado en pánico. En pánico porque? Por miedo. El miedo inherente a uno que ha acrecentado por una lucha solitaria, solitaria quiere decir sin el poder del Estado, o sea, sin el acompañamiento del Estado. De alguna manera es ir contra del Estado

*In fact, many times we're afraid of those who were in Venezuela because we felt they were at risk. Venezuela is already a dictatorship, then the attorney general came out taking advantage of the movement. They politicized it. Like totally. The fact that I was outside Venezuela allowed me, to be honest, to be freer, to be able to feel a little more protected.*<sup>324</sup>

The only two leaders I interviewed that lived in Venezuela mentioned that, during the #YoTeCreo spark, they were more silent and less public in the country compared to the leaders that were abroad. Ariana, for example, said: "*What I can tell you for sure is that for the few of us who were in Venezuela, we did limit ourselves a lot, let's say, we self-censored.*"<sup>325</sup> She added "*we also became very careful about what we said.*"<sup>326</sup>

To my knowledge, there is very little research on the relationship of migrant women in facilitating digital feminist activism in their country of origin, but the existing literature suggests that women might feel safer abroad when their abusers are still in their country of origin.<sup>327</sup> Even though some participants mentioned that they were afraid of possible defamation lawsuits, their biggest concern and fear was being persecuted by the State, who some referred to as a dictatorial regime. Women leaders felt safer not only because they were in a different location from the named perpetrators, but because they were not in Venezuela, therefore, they were not at risk of being persecuted by the State.

The levels of participation of migrant women can be explained thanks to a study that analyzed, through quantitative analysis, the drivers of #MeToo mobilization in a cross-national framework and concluded that "domestic political opportunity structures play a significant role in motivating individual digital feminist activism."<sup>328</sup> The founders of #YoTeCreo therefore felt safer involving themselves in digital feminist activism due to their physical distance from Venezuela.

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<sup>324</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: De hecho, muchas veces a las que estaban en Venezuela nos daba miedo porque sentíamos que estaban en riesgo. Ya Venezuela es una dictadura entonces y luego el fiscal general salió aprovechándose del movimiento. Lo politizaron. Como que totalmente. El hecho de estar fuera de Venezuela me permitía ser más libre, poder sentirme un poco más protegida, la verdad.

<sup>325</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Lo que sí puedo decirte seguro es que para las pocas que estábamos en Venezuela si no llegamos a limitar muchísimo, digamos, nosotros nos auto censuramos.

<sup>326</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: También nos llegamos a cuidar mucho de lo que decíamos

<sup>327</sup> Dey & Mendes, *supra* note 70 at 207. These survivors repeatedly pointed out that they felt empowered to speak because of their physical distance from their place of abuse and the lesser chance of getting 'trolled', due to their absence.

<sup>328</sup> *Supra* at 183 at 848.

Likewise, having self-censorship as Ariana discussed, might have its rationale in the conclusions of the same research that highlights that in a closed political system, women are less likely to participate and speak out. Therefore, it is important to take into account that “feminist and women’s rights activism cannot be separated from democratization and human rights activism more generally.”<sup>329</sup> Digital feminist activism depends on the local political regime. In a country like Venezuela, with a repressive regime and patterns of incarceration of dissidents, as discussed in Chapter II, women’s rights movements are affected, and as a consequence, levels of participation in activism are reduced. It made perfect sense that the leadership of #YoTeCreo came primarily from migrant women.

### **Leaders of the movement changed their perceptions of feminism when abroad**

Regarding how their ideas of feminism changed when abroad, all participants shared a common understanding that in Venezuela the current situation of day-to-day survival blinded them and did not allow them to think beyond political problems to embrace questions of feminist activism. Abroad, they had space and opportunities to discover other references for feminism and activism.

In the case of Nana Cadavieco, who lived in Spain and is now in Miami, she mentioned “*[s]ometimes there comes a time when you are there [Venezuela] and there is too much to handle to notice, which you realize when you leave. There are many more things going on and there are many more problems. There are places that are more advanced.*”<sup>330</sup> Or Lolo Bello, when referring to her relationship to feminism said: “*To realize the things I realized if I had continued living in Venezuela, for example. It was too difficult.*”<sup>331</sup> In the case of Laura Guevara, who currently lives in Mexico City, she mentioned how being in Mexico radically changed her understanding of feminism(s): “*I feel that being in Mexico and now, feeling a feminist and as a woman, researching and searching, reading and searching, sensitizing and seeking how to process and manage my own wounds and my own stories. Now, from this perspective, I*

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* (lee murdie)

<sup>330</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Llega a veces un momento que estando allá [Venezuela] adentro ya hay como mucho que manejar como para darte cuenta, cosa que te das cuenta cuando te vas. De que hay muchas más cosas pasando y hay muchos más problemas. Hay sitios que están más avanzados

<sup>331</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Darne cuenta de las cosas que me di cuenta si hubiese seguido viviendo en Venezuela, por ejemplo. Demasiado difícil.

*feel that feminism has been a very important guide to my political position.*"<sup>332</sup> I personally relate to Laura's testimony, as I also discovered a vibrant, dynamic, and diverse network of feminists in Mexico that inspired me to continue to learn about this topic when I was a migrant in that country.

Participants disclosed how, when they lived in Venezuela, they did not have much involvement with feminism(s). Here are some of their answers:

*My involvement with feminism is much more recent* Nana

*I really had a very vague concept of feminism, and I think my teachers were the same girls who were in the group with me* Ella

*As actively as it has been: recently. In Venezuela, one is subject to survival* Natasha

*I recognize that in Venezuela, in my context, these issues of equality and equity were not well known. Well neither was I, I was very involved in that, but in my house, my mom taught me that we women shouldn't compete with each other, we should help each other women* Laura

*Since the movement started, I actually think the movement opened my eyes to a lot of other things I wasn't aware of.* Ana Elba

*The truth is that I did not relate. I didn't have the mental structure to understand, I didn't have the information* Lolo

*When I began to identify that in politics I was being discriminated against because I was a woman, because of my gender.* Ariana

It is clear from these responses that the leaders started to relate differently to feminism once abroad, and in some cases, like Ana Elba and Ella, they started to relate to feminism(s) once they started to engage with their peers from #YoTeCreo.

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<sup>332</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Siento que el estar en México y el ahora ya sentirme como feminista y como mujer, investigar y buscar, leer y buscar, sensibilizarse y buscar procesar como gestionar mis propios dolores y mis propias historias. Ahora, desde esta perspectiva, siento que el feminismo ha sido una guía demasiado importante de mi postura política.

## Summary

In this section, I addressed the role of migrant women as a key factor in activating #YoTeCreo, including how the participants changed their views of feminism(s) once abroad and had a broader understanding of concepts such as inequality, discrimination, and violence against women. Due to physical distance from Venezuela, many leaders felt safer creating and participating in #YoTeCreo.

This does not necessarily mean that the leaders of the movement translated their feminist views from abroad to Venezuela, but that being abroad allowed them to distance themselves from the complex multi-dimensional crisis in Venezuela and enabled them to open up to feminist knowledges in other contexts like Mexico, Spain, and the United States. Leaders unanimously reported that they did not relate to feminism(s) as a political arena of activism in Venezuela, and that it was not until very recently that they started learning from feminism(s). For example, Ella and Ana Elba took ownership and defined themselves as feminists as a consequence of their work with #YoTeCreo, whereas before they did not recognize themselves as feminists.

I want to conclude this subsection by highlighting the words of Mafer Bandola. She spoke about the power of migrant women abroad and how the complexity of what is going on in Venezuela, for her, needs solutions and actions that come from migrant women:

*The answer lies with those who are in need. And that is what happened, #YoTeCreo movement was created by women with a lot of needs and migrants who felt the power outside the country, which distanced them from social classes, all the divisions that no country should have. And we have to understand that Venezuela has many things that have to come from outside because of these Venezuelans who have left. In other words, this has to be something that explodes outside and causes an implosion. Because inside they are still in a state of survival that does not give them a chance to prioritize everything that is valuable to human beings. So, as there is no chance to prioritize what is valuable to the human being and that has been asleep for more than 20 years, in many aspects it is difficult to see a different leader and a different form of leadership. So, it had to be outside to be able to see so many references and so many ideas and so much experience to solve it to act inside.*<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: La respuesta la tienen los que atraviesan las necesidades. Y eso fue lo que pasó, el movimiento #YoTeCreo se creó de mujeres con mucha necesidad y migrantes que se sintieron el poder fuera del país, que las alejó de todas

This study will not discuss the role of migrants in influencing and bringing knowledge to their home country, as there is extensive research about both the role of what is called the ‘diaspora’ in transferring knowledge to the countries of destination and countries of origin.<sup>334</sup> What is relevant in this research is that Venezuelan migrant women by being abroad felt that they had more freedom to speak out. Additionally, they gained knowledge or consciousness of subjects like feminism and equality and they could connect experiences they witnessed in their countries of destination (#MeToo and #NiUnaMenos) to their desire to engage in digital feminist activism in Venezuela. These transnational flows and cross-border dialogues that went through Venezuelan migrants were key for the spark of #YoTeCreo.<sup>335</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Participants did not have specific experience or knowledge of VAW in Venezuela but understood the historical exclusion and discrimination of Venezuelan women**

In this section, I discuss the women participants' background knowledge on VAW and the criminal system. It was difficult to comprehend from the interviews if their responses reflected preexisting knowledge or knowledge drawn as a result of their leadership of #YoTeCreo. My findings indicate that the participants' did not have background, training or experiences with feminist activism or women's rights before taking on the leadership of #YoTeCreo. Their interviews revealed that their prior personal experiences of discrimination and violence allowed them to stand up and create #YoTeCreo. Also, they all understood women's historical exclusion and

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las clases sociales, todas las divisiones que no fuera tener ningún país. Y que hay que entender que Venezuela tiene muchas cosas que tienen que venir de afuera por estos venezolanos que han salido. O sea, esto tiene que ser una cosa que detona afuera y causa implosión. Porque adentro están todavía en un estado de supervivencia que no da chance de priorizar todo lo valioso del ser humano. Entonces, como no hay chance de priorizar lo valioso al ser humano y que ha sido adormecido por más de 20 años, en muchos aspectos es difícil ver un líder distinto y una forma de liderazgo distinta. Entonces tuvo que ser afuera para poder ver tantos referentes y tantas ideas y tanta experiencia de resolverla para accionar adentro.

<sup>334</sup> See more: Siar, Sheila, “Diaspora Knowledge Transfer as a Development Strategy for Capturing the Gains of Skilled Migration” (2014) 23:3 Asian and Pacific migration journal:APMJ 299; Larisa, Lara, Diaspora And Knowledge Transfer – The Evidence, IDiaspora (February 2021) online:

<https://www.idiaspora.org/en/contribute/blog-entry/diaspora-and-knowledge-transfer-evidence>

<sup>335</sup> Sylvanna Falcón & Jennifer C Nash, “Shifting analytics and linking theories: A conversation about the ‘meaning-making’ of intersectionality and transnational feminism” (2015) 50 Women's Studies International Forum 1. I could grapple with the critical question of how the injustices I witnessed and experienced in the United States may have some relationship or parallel to the injustices I witnessed and learned about in Peru.

discrimination, and how women continue to be left behind by the State's impunity and the Venezuelan society that continues to deny the problem of VAW.

The findings in this section contest one of my hypotheses that one node connected to the spark of #YoTeCreo was the increased awareness of sexual violence and harassment against women globally and in Venezuela.

### **Participants did not have a deep understanding of VAW in the country**

During the interviews, it was common for participants to have little awareness of VAW on a technical level but to generally understand the struggles of VAW in Venezuela. Even one participant mentioned that she is too sensitive to keep up with the news so she stays away from reading the news. With humility, some of the participants mentioned that being abroad limited their knowledge of what is really going on in the country.<sup>336</sup> They had different ways of understanding VAW, identifying it as oppression, State violence or a social problem. Mafer discussed that in Venezuela the system oppressed women. She mentioned: *"I didn't know how many die in Venezuela, for example. Umm zero, I don't know. I have no idea how many. But I come from understanding a context of oppressed women, that is, a system that does not support them."*<sup>337</sup>

Ariana recognized that there is State violence against women, and with anger and frustration, she stated that:

*[W]e are eternally deferred in the public agenda. And those who have the power [State] do not care about women, they do not care so much that they do not offer official figures of anything. They are completely blind to what happens to women. I mean, if it were not for these non-governmental organizations, part of the civil society, we would not know how many Venezuelan women are murdered. We would not know because they do not care. And that is a matter of political will because they have resources because they have the state apparatus. They just don't care.*<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Ella, Nana and Natasha.

<sup>337</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo no sabía cuántas mueren en Venezuela, por ejemplo. Umm cero, no sé. No tengo idea de cuántas. Vengo de entender un contexto de la mujer oprimida, o sea, un sistema que no le da soporte.

<sup>338</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Somos las eternas postergadas en la agenda pública. Y quienes tienen el poder que les secuestraron el poder no les importan las mujeres, no les importa tanto que no ofrecen cifras oficiales de nada. Ellos están completamente ciegos de lo que ocurre con la mujer. Es decir, si no fuese por estas organizaciones no gubernamentales, parte de la sociedad civil, nosotros no sabríamos cuántas mujeres venezolanas son asesinadas. No lo sabríamos porque a ellos no les importa. Y eso es un tema de voluntad, porque tienen recursos, porque tienen el aparato del Estado. Simplemente no les importa.

On the other hand, for Laura, the problem is a social one. She thinks Venezuela is a *machista* country, and that there has been a denial of the problem for a very long time. She mentioned that even during the spark of #YoTeCreo the denial was present as *"one of the biggest frustrations of Venezuela and even during #YoTeCreo process was that everyone was like: no, no, that doesn't exist, no, that's a lie."*<sup>339</sup>

For example, when asked to name a case of gender-based violence in the country, the majority of participants named the case of Linda Loaiza.<sup>340</sup> As discussed, this iconic case demonstrates the barriers that women face when accessing justice in the country. Despite the multitude of similar cases in Venezuela, #YoTeCreo leaders could identify only this case as an example of the lack of access to justice in Venezuela.

I hypothesized that the increased awareness of sexual violence and harassment against women in Venezuela was a key factor that activated #YoTeCreo. However, participants did not have specific knowledge of cases or the particular details of VAW in Venezuela. They did not have background, previous training or experience with feminist activism. They did, however, discuss their personal experiences of discrimination and violence in the entertainment industry. All women participants had a story of discrimination or an experience of violence they shared with me. It is important to highlight that these women participants are disruptors in their fields: by playing bandola, in the case of Mafer, or trumpet, in the case of Ella Bric, both traditional male instruments, or by being women in politics, in the case of Ariana, or by being singers in a masculine industry, in the case of Nana and Laura. They all had stories and previous experiences of discrimination that were embodied. Through their own experiences they all grasped that there was a problem in the country, and they all understood women's historical exclusion and discrimination.

### **Venezuelan women used social media to respond to the impunity of the State**

Each woman I interviewed had her own way of describing how #YoTeCreo relates to the criminal law system in Venezuela. Laura Guevara explained how the use

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<sup>339</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Una de las frustraciones más grandes de Venezuela y de incluso el proceso de #YoTeCreo era como el como no, no, eso no existe, no, eso es mentira

<sup>340</sup> See Chapter II, when discussing the awareness of VAW in Venezuela.

of digital activism is a reflection of the lack of access to justice, noting that in response, social media has become the escape route for many women. For her:

*It is precisely why the complaints occur on the Internet, because there is no legal system or a system that supports women and makes women feel protected, rather there is re-victimization. The victims are usually exposed, all the time, they are put into doubt, they are humiliated. It is horrible. The truth is that the whole system of the police and the judicial system is horrible.*<sup>341</sup>

The participants mentioned that there is no due process or effective legal system. They expressed that the State does not support women or make them feel protected and, on the contrary, victims continue to be revictimized, which puts them in doubt of the system and humiliates them. With regard to State violence, they were very clear that there is no justice in Venezuela, that the judiciary is not independent and that the law is not designed for women that have experienced sexual violence. They also stated that impunity is rampant due to a corrupt system. Finally, they mentioned that victims do not come forward to denounce their abusers because they do not trust the system.<sup>342</sup> In general, participants expressed that the use of social media and hashtag activism is a response to the lack of access to justice for women that experience violence and State impunity.

#### **4.2.5 Leaders of #YoTeCreo leveraged their social media expertise and influencer status for the success of this digital activism**

I discussed with participants whether they believed their position as social media influencers and women from the entertainment business was more important than the message they were communicating, and whether their social media platforms and their

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<sup>341</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Justamente las denuncias ocurren en internet, porque no hay un sistema legal ni un sistema de procesos que respalde a las mujeres y que haga que las mujeres se sientan protegida, más bien hay revictimización. A las víctimas más bien las expone, más bien todo el tiempo, las pone en duda, más bien las humilla. Horrible. La verdad horrible de todo el tema del sistema policial, el sistema judicial

<sup>342</sup> Here is the original in Spanish gathered from various interviews: No hay como un debido proceso. No hay un sistema legal. Ni un sistema que respalde a las mujeres y que haga que las mujeres se sientan protegida, más bien hay revictimización. A las víctimas más bien las expone, las pone en duda, más bien las humilla. Muchos casos que tienen años y siguen sin respuesta. No confían en el sistema. No existe la justicia en Venezuela, que no es independiente, que no es prioridad y que no le importa al régimen. La ley no está diseñada para la justicia, para las víctimas de abuso sexual. Es un sistema corrupto. Nunca han querido realmente resolver los problemas o buscar justicia. Si no existe un Estado de derecho, si no se cumplen las leyes, quien las hace cumplir? La gente no quiere denunciar porque no confían en el sistema.

influencer status were central to the success of #YoTeCreo. In this section I address their responses and discuss how they applied their knowledge of social media, their fame and influencer status to multiply and activate #YoTeCreo. I reflect on their responses that #YoTeCreo gained popularity because the Venezuelan culture is permeated by media and entertainment. It was also key for the spark that the named perpetrators were also members of the music and entertainment business in Venezuela. I then highlight how the leaders used the visibility they gained during the #YoTeCreo spark to amplify other feminist movements in the country.

### **#YoTeCreo leaders knew the power of communication and social media**

When asked about the distinction between the messenger and message, participants communicated that they did not believe the messenger was more important than the message in ensuring the success of the hashtag. In fact, the majority of participants disagreed that the message was less important than their influencer status. However, they all agreed and understand the power of social media and communication and the importance of the messenger. For example, Mafer notes that:

*We all knew the power of communication, we understood and had very internalized the power of communicating. We had some excellent relationships with social networks and we had excellent relationships like making videos, communicating, talking, writing that we were people who liked to communicate.*<sup>343</sup>

They all knew that a message that came from them, considering their wide reach on social media, was going to generate an impact. For example, Ella mentioned how the platform of artists is admirable because they are always surrounded by audiences and have the opportunity to influence.<sup>344</sup>

Participants with smaller social media influence agreed on the power of diffusion that highly influential profiles have on digital platforms. Lolo believed that it was a combination of both the message and messenger that led to #YoTeCreo's success: "The

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<sup>343</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Todas sabíamos el poder de la comunicación, entendíamos y teníamos muy internalizado el poder de comunicar. Teníamos unas excelentes relaciones con redes sociales y teníamos excelentes relaciones como hacer videos, comunicar, hablar, escribir éramos gente que le gustaba comunicar.

<sup>344</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Wynton Marsalis, que dice que la plataforma del artista es una plataforma envidiable, porque nosotros vamos influyendo y influenciando gente. Nunca, nunca, nunca hacemos performer para la misma cantidad de gente'- Nosotros siempre estamos rodeados de audiencias y si tenemos la oportunidad de dar un mensaje, influir en esa audiencia.

message is the most important thing and if it is a combination of the two things, it's wonderful."<sup>345</sup> Ariana, for example, described this power of communication as an outsider, as she does not belong to the music industry but to the political field. She made the analogy of the megaphone to explain this phenomenon:

*I think they were a channel to communicate the message, right? And that's fine because it's not the same. For example, I only have 5000 followers on my Instagram compared to Linda who has up to 28,000. Obviously, we all have a megaphone, but the size of the megaphone changes. Of course that makes noise. And that's fine, I think that people with greater capacity for dissemination should get involved in the campaigns because that is positive for any campaign.*<sup>346</sup>

For Ana Elba, it was the combination of both the high profile and the large number of artists who signed the statement that created the momentum for #YoTeCreo:

*I don't think it was because of individuals, but because many artists of various, or at least musicians, actresses, singers, artists, came together to say enough is enough! All these women are coming together because this is happening in the art world and something happened because they are too many women.*<sup>347</sup>

Similar to the momentum gained by #MeToo, with Alyssa Milano's tweet, #YoTeCreo gained momentum in part because the statement came from Venezuelan women with fame and status.

### **Venezuela is a culture deeply permeated by the entertainment business**

Participants agreed that the success of the movement was related to the fact that entertainment media is consumed by the majority of Venezuelans. The lives of famous people have historically had an impact on public life in Venezuela. For example, it has been documented that one of the factors that triggered one of the most lethal and violent repressions in Venezuela in 2014 was the killing of Monica Spears, Miss

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<sup>345</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: El mensaje es lo primordial y si tienen esa combinación de las dos cosas, pues maravilloso.

<sup>346</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo creo que ellas fueron un canal para comunicar el mensaje, no? Y eso está bien porque no es lo mismo. Por ejemplo, yo, que tengo 5000 seguidores en mi cuenta de Instagram a una Linda que tienen hasta 28.000, evidentemente todas tenemos un megáfono, pero el tamaño del megáfono cambia. Claro que eso hace ruido. Y eso está bien, yo creo que las personas con mayor capacidad de difusión se involucren en las campañas que consideremos eso porque eso es positivo para cualquier campaña.

<sup>347</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo no creo que haya sido por personas, sino porque muchos artistas de varios, o por lo menos músicos, actriz, cantante de un artista, se unieron para decir ya basta! Todas estas mujeres se están uniendo porque está pasando esto en el mundo del arte y algo pasó porque son demasiadas mujeres.

Universe, and her husband.<sup>348</sup> In Venezuela there is a culture that reveres Miss Universe and the artist industry. As Natasha mentioned during her interview: “*since we were little, Venezuelans have been breastfeeding with soap operas. We love drama, it’s part of our DNA.*”<sup>349</sup> Ella Bric discussed how the fact that the statement came from ‘famous women’ drew attention to the core issue, that no one is talking about the fact that VAW is widespread in the country:

*Venezuelans consume a lot of culture and they perfectly knew the actresses, the singers, the models, the people who sign that press release. And they said, ‘These are the people I admire. These are the people that I go to see at the concerts. If they’re talking about this together, it’s because there’s something really going on and we’re not having this conversation.’*<sup>350</sup>

Mafer also highlighted the importance of ‘famous’ women discussing sexual violence and how this might have played a role in the spark of #YoTeCreo. She described that followers tend to be attracted to actresses, musicians and influencers due to their talents and watch them from a distance; their lives appear unattainable and when famous women speak to their followers about regular issues, they become more human, more real, and make a connection with their followers. To her this was important:

*Famous women represent a fantasy, mainly there is something that is impossible to achieve for many of them. When a woman with this positioning, with this voice, talks about what is happening to her, gives a magnifying glass to something that is happening and explains it, she becomes more human. And when does she become more human? You start to notice yourself in this person. And you say ‘It happens to her too?’ And then in a single, unison way, once you do something, you explain, you speak, you teach, you give information, you can make a massive impact. The relevance of these women or these profiles speaking of movements is*

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<sup>348</sup> Human Rights Council Forty-fifth session, 14 September–2 October 2020, Agenda item 4, Human rights situations that require the Council’s attention, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The January 2014 protests gained momentum after a series of violent attacks increased concerns over the situation of insecurity in the country. This included the killing on 6 January 2014 of a former “Miss Venezuela” and her husband in a roadside robbery and the alleged attempted sexual assault in early February against a university student.

<sup>349</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Desde que estamos chiquitos, a los venezolanos nos amamantan con la telenovela. En el fondo nos encanta el drama, es parte de nuestro ADN.

<sup>350</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: El Venezolano consume mucho cultura y sabían perfectamente las actrices, las cantantes, las modelos, las personas que estaban en ese comunicado. Y dijeron: ‘Estas son las personas que yo admiro. Estas son las personas a las que yo voy a ir a ver a los conciertos. Si ellas están hablando de esto unidas, es porque hay algo que realmente está pasando y no estamos teniendo esta conversación.’

*of great relevance due to the fact that they act in a way, or take action that can be multiplied many times. They are generators of lines of opinion to create, to build or to destroy.*<sup>351</sup>

Some participants<sup>352</sup> mentioned that this was bidirectional: it was not only because the statement was signed and released by famous women but also because the named perpetrators were members of the music industry, persons that they knew and admired, that drew attention to the hashtag. They were ‘media men’ and according to Lolo: *“It was people who were famous and in Venezuela it had many grievors, many mourners, people who loved them very much, people who would cut the wrists for them. And all of a sudden, bam! It was completely exposed, completely exposed to level of abuse.”*<sup>353</sup>

Closely resembling to #MeToo hashtag, #YoTeCreo was mainly centered on famous, white, cis, high-profiled personalities in Venezuela.<sup>354</sup> Without any plan, as discussed earlier, #YoTeCreo participants brought to light the widespread problem with sexual violence in the country and their influencer status was key for the spark in Venezuela.

### **Influencers’ visibility amplified other feminist movements in the country**

Similar to #MeToo, after the spark of #YoTeCreo participants used their power and visibility to highlight the work of local NGOs that for years have been working in Venezuela to stop VAW. For example, Ella mentioned: *“[f]rom the beginning, we had the need to recognize their [local feminist NGOs]’ work. And what we did was to replicate all*

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<sup>351</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Las mujeres famosas representan una fantasía, principalmente hay algo que es imposible alcanzar para muchas. El “yo jamás voy a hacer eso, jamás voy a lucir así...” que arrecho esta tipa, que increíble lo que hace que” Cuando una mujer de ese posicionamiento, de esa voz, habla de lo que le pasa, da lupa a algo que está pasando y lo explica, se vuelve más humana. Y cuándo se vuelve más humana? Tú empiezas a verte en esta persona. Y dice. A ella también le pasa? Y entonces de manera unisona, una sola vez que hagas algo, que expliques, que comentes, que enseñe y que des información para impactar de manera masiva puedes impactar de manera masiva. La relevancia de que estas mujeres o estos perfiles hablen dentro de los movimientos es de gran relevancia por el hecho de que ellas actúan en una manera, en una acción, digamos que puede ser multiplicada muchas veces. Ellas son generadoras de líneas de opinión para crear, para construir o para destruir.

<sup>352</sup> Lolo, Nana, Laura, Ariana, Natasha

<sup>353</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Gente que era famosa en esa micro burbuja, Venezuela que tenía muchos dolientes, muchos dolientes, gente que los quería mucho, gente que se cortaban las venas por ellos y tal. Y de repente, pum! Expuestos completamente. Expuesto completamente a los abusadores que eran y que son y yo creo que fue eso. Y yo creo que honestamente fue eso fue la cantidad. O sea, fue justo [el tipo. el tipo de abusador. como el. sabes, el perfil de ese abusador era el tipo mediático de más el tipo que el típico que el amigo de todas y que decían que era perfecto. y de repente el mega villano o sea el bicho literalmente abusaba de mujeres ninas, adolescentes

<sup>354</sup> Quan-Haase et al, *supra* note 46 at 79.

*the work they were already doing because of the media and communicational power we had.*"<sup>355</sup>

## **Summary**

This section highlights how #YoTeCreo's success was closely related to the importance of media and entertainment in Venezuelan culture. In particular, the social media influencer status of the organizers played a key role in the movement's message being received by the public. Similar to #MeToo, #YoTeCreo was created by high-profile influential women, and in both instances of hashtag activism the named perpetrators were also 'media men'. It is important to emphasize the local and contextual perspective in Venezuela, where cultural influencers play an outsized role in activating public empathy. In an important way, the spark was due to the connection admirers or followers had on the leaders of #YoTeCreo.

The use of celebrities and influencers to increase awareness of social justice and women's rights is not new. For example, very recently in Latin America, Colombia legalized abortion for up to 24 gestational weeks, and this success was achieved through a strategic litigation and social awareness campaign.<sup>356</sup> The 'Causa Justa' movement<sup>357</sup> requested the support of celebrities and used social media platforms and even reggaeton songs to mobilize consciousness: "[t]hey had campaigns on Twitter, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, and marched across the country."<sup>358</sup> The 'Causa Justa' mentioned how they were also inspired by the green wave, or the movement towards the legalization of abortion in Argentina. To generate change, reform laws or have a social impact, it is key to incorporate celebrities and influencers as they can reach a broader public audience. They are key in the dissemination process and can

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<sup>355</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Nosotros desde el principio teníamos la necesidad de reconocer el trabajo de ellas [local feminist NGOs] . Y lo que hicimos fue replicar todo el trabajo que ya venían haciendo por el poder mediático y comunicacional que teníamos nosotras."

<sup>356</sup> Julie Turkewitz, "How Colombian Feminists Decriminalized Abortion: With Help From Their Neighbors", New York Times, (February 23, 2022) online: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/americas/colombia-abortion.html>>; Luciana Peker, "Catalina Martínez Coral, de Causa Justa, en Colombia: "La lucha de las mujeres del sur inspiró a las del norte", (May 29 2022), online: <<https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/2022/05/29/la-colombiana-elegida-por-time-entre-las-100-mas-influyentes-la-lucha-de-las-mujeres-del-sur-inspiro-a-las-del-norte/>>

<sup>357</sup> The Causa Justa movement is a group of more than 100 organizations and 140 activists that aimed to eliminate abortion as a crime from the criminal code.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

organically use their existing platforms to increase awareness on a variety of topics. This case study suggests that celebrities and ‘influencers’ have the ability to reach a broader audience and create more awareness on VAW.

#### **4.2.6 Hartazgo, or outrage, sorority and anger, was a collective impulse for the spark of #YoTeCreo**

In conducting an inductive approach, I allowed codes to emerge from the participants’ own words and phrases and identified other elements outside of my core themes that, according to them, contributed to the viralization of #YoTeCreo.<sup>359</sup> In making meaning from the interviews, I identified patterns across the data that allowed me to come up with two new themes. These include: a) *No es una, somos todas* or ‘it is not one woman, we are so many’ and b) *hartazgo* or outrage.

#### **No es una, somos todas (It is not one woman, we are so many)**

The leaders were able to identify the importance of the @AlejandroSojoStrupo account and the many reactions by Venezuelan women it mobilized. Therefore, participants identified as key to the spark the massive number of women that started talking and that their testimonies were replicated on social media. For Ella, the spark was made by women that were speaking out on social media. Natasha noted that: *“Because they were accumulated testimonies that were not solitary against artists who also had other accusations. There were several. It was not just one. But it was because it was massive because it was such a powerful group.”*<sup>360</sup> Lolo also mentioned that both the quantity and timing, like a snowball effect of testimonies on social media, were important.<sup>361</sup> Mafer mentioned the fact that there were many women that after the release of the account @AlejandroSojoStrupo who were *“acting in unison”* and sharing stories about the same perpetrators was relevant to the spark.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Bingham & Witkowsky, *supra* note 265 at 236.

<sup>360</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Porque eran testimonios acumulados que no eran solitarios hacia artistas quee tenían además otras acusaciones. Eran varias. No era una sola. Pero ha sido porque fue masa, porque fue un grupo tan potente.

<sup>361</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Lo que inspiró todo fue la cantidad de denuncias y todo lo que empezó a pasar como de la manera tan rápida y como tan importante.

<sup>362</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Varias mujeres al unísono

Ariana also mentioned that a key element for the spark was sorority, unity of women that experience violence from the same aggressor and the support received from other women:

*Because when one started to tell her story, then others started to comment on that post, other victims of the same aggressors also shared what had happened to them. And then the sorority of women that were not victims of the aggressors but that we also raised our voices and supported them. All of this triggered the viralization of the movement.*<sup>363</sup>

What participants are describing here is affective solidarity.<sup>364</sup> According to researcher Rovira, in her study of #MeToo Mexico, she describes this effect as ‘affective labor’. Both in the case of Mexico and in #YoTeCreo, “[a]n affective community was built on the premise of considering that every testimony of sexual violence was worthy of being taken into account.”<sup>365</sup> The fact that the testimonies of women in social media were being listened to, recognized and valued, turned #YoTeCreo into a collective online space for sorority and solidarity between women and girls who have experienced violence and who have built an affective community together.

### **Hartazgo, or Outrage**

The interviews indicated the pervasiveness of a feeling that I defined as *hartazgo* or ‘outrage’. Participants commented on their experiences of feeling tired, frustrated, and annoyed by the normalization of violence in the country. In particular, they were tired of years and years of holding onto acts of violence by the State and by the (lack of) societal response. For example, Laura mentioned:

*I think the biggest ingredient was like, impunity. The fact that there was too much repressed frustration. And there was like a kind of a collective gaslighting. "It's all right. No, that's not happening. Venezuelan issues are Venezuelan issues, not women's issues." So, I felt like there was a lot of frustration, a lot of impotence and a lot of resentment, and there was no way out. And what started as simple Twitter comments from women who*

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<sup>363</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo creo que fue clave la sororidad. Es decir. Porque cuando una empezó a contarlo. Las que comenzaron a montarse sobre eso fueron otras víctimas de esos mismos agresores que también compartieron lo que les había pasado. La solidaridad de las mujeres que no fuimos víctimas de estos agresores que levantamos la voz por ellas y en apoyo a ellas fue lo que detonó toda la viralización.

<sup>364</sup> Hemmings, *supra* note 288.

<sup>365</sup> Rovira-Sancho, *supra* note 49 at 14.

*were frustrated, who were angry, who were in pain. It ended up becoming a mirror for all of us, where we all saw ourselves and said Wow! This has happened to me too.*<sup>366</sup>

Ella also spoke about the necessity of this moment: “*Venezuelans are desperate to talk about these issues. Women are tired. I think it is the need, it is the need of the people.*”<sup>367</sup> Ana Elba also expressed feeling tired, tired of years of responding to VAW by sweeping it under the rug.<sup>368</sup>

Ella and Natasha both referred to how they saw and even envied the explosion of #MeToo in the United States and how they were looking forward to that moment happening in Venezuela. In Natasha's words:

*“It seemed to me that the time had come for the bomb to explode in Venezuela and it made a lot of sense to me that it would happen. It made a lot of sense that it was happening. It seemed to me that it arrived late, being in the United States and seeing the MeToo movement from here, living it always as one tastes the things that are foreign, with a certain envy.”*<sup>369</sup>

All of the participants commented on feelings of anger, frustration, and tiredness, and shared experiences that spoke to me about *hartazgo*. The leaders' experiences suggest moments of *hartazgo*, as an explosion that is interconnected to the FemMesh as “part of a larger cyberfeminism structure that has fostered a mainstream conversation about systemic oppression.”<sup>370</sup> Gabriela Cano, a Mexican historian, has commented that ‘*hartazgo*’<sup>371</sup> It is deeply permeated by what is called the fourth wave of feminism, referred to as cyberfeminism. *Hartazgo* is not a theoretical concept and is

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<sup>366</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Yo creo que el mayor ingrediente fue como la impunidad, a impunidad. El hecho de que había demasiada frustración reprimida. Y había como una especie de gaslighting colectivo. “Todo está bien. ‘No? Eso no está pasando. Los problemas de Venezuela son los problemas de Venezuela, no los problemas de las mujeres.” Entonces siento que había mucha frustración, mucha impotencia y mucho resentimiento, que no tenía un cauce, que no, no tenía salida. Y lo que empezó como simple, simples comentarios de Twitter, de mujeres que se sentían frustradas, que tenían rabia, que tenían dolor. Terminó convirtiéndose en un espejo para todas, donde todas nos vimos y dijimos Wow! A mi también me ha pasado esto.

<sup>367</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Y el venezolano está desesperado de hablar de estos temas. La mujer venezolana esta cansada. Yo creo que es la necesidad, es la necesidad de la gente”

<sup>368</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Estamos cansadas de vivir lo mismo.

<sup>369</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Es urgente, era una urgencia. Me parecía que la bomba de tiempo le había llegado la hora de explotar en Venezuela y para mí tenía mucho sentido que sucediera. Me parecía que llegaba impuntual, no estando en los Estados Unidos y viendo el MeToo movement desde aquí, viviéndolo siempre como se saborean las cosas ajenas, no con cierta, con cierta como envidia.

<sup>370</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71 at 134.

<sup>371</sup> Karen Ballesteros, “Cuarta ola del movimiento feminista: el hartazgo ante siglos de extrema violencia” *ContraLinea*, (08 Mar 2020) online:

<<https://contralinea.com.mx/interno/featured/cuarta-ola-del-movimiento-feminista-el-hartazgo-ante-siglos-de-extrema-violencia/>>

not even an English word, however, in Chapter I, I discuss how this study is a contribution to a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic conversation. Therefore, I want to use this research to allow new theoretical contributions. *Hartazgo*, for me, is culturally located in a Latin American context where impunity is rampant, and it means the tipping point of years of collective experiences of violence; cumulative experiences from friends, moms, aunts, sisters, and over generations. It is a moment where you say: no more, it touches your heartstrings, and it is a moment where you decide you will not handle this further. It is connected to feelings of anger and frustration, but it is much more. It indicates embodied knowledges,<sup>372</sup> and thoughts entangled and connected to the “ever-expanding” feminist knowledge that is connected to a motherboard of feminist knowledge.<sup>373</sup> Similar to Sarah Ahmed’s description of the feminist snap,<sup>374</sup> *hartazgo* is collective, not individual, and it is nurtured and fueled by the sorority between so many women who, by sharing their experiences with one another, actively decided to act by creating the digital feminist activism: #YoTeCreo.

#### **4.2.7 Emotional costs and the invisible and unpaid work carried out by #YoTeCreo leaders were two hidden costs of online activism**

In this section, I describe two findings that emerged from my inductive analysis. These findings invite future research on the costs, struggles and challenges of sustaining a spontaneous spark of digital feminist activism. This section explains the participants’ concerns about the emotional ‘tax’ that comes from leading digital feminist activism and the invisible costs of the free labour they dedicated as part of the #YoTeCreo.

##### **4.2.7.1 Emotional costs**

Many participants discussed the emotional costs the activation of #YoTeCreo had for them, which they described as a set of complicated contradictions. Some mentioned how the spark opened wounds from previous experiences of sexual violence. Others commented that they were shocked by the harsh testimonies they read and also by

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<sup>372</sup> Haraway, *supra* note 239. I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges.

<sup>373</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71 at 135.

<sup>374</sup> Ahmed, *supra* note 4 at 190.

realizing the prevalence of sexual violence close to their industry. Finally, the most famous women mentioned how by activating #YoTeCreo, they were scared to put their careers at risk by possible backlash, and some commented that now they receive online threats. Previous studies of online activism highlight how online and offline threats are deployed as mechanisms for silencing women. In the case of #MeToo Mexico, Mexican activists also reported suffering from online violence and threats.<sup>375</sup>

### **#YoTeCreo leaders lacked the tools to deal with the spark**

The leaders described how they came to #YoTeCreo ill equipped to manage its challenges. As noted, none of them had previous experiences with digital activism or feminist activism generally. They were not lawyers or psychologists with the necessary tools to deal with the number of cases they documented and the women's stories of abuse, harassment, and sexual violence they encountered. They mentioned how due to their lack of coping skills it was hard to sustain the momentum and that they were not prepared for what happened after the statement. In the words of Ella: *"We had the burden of the whole country on the shoulders of 23 women who were actively working to keep the movement going."*<sup>376</sup> It was clear that they did not expect the hashtag to go as viral as it did, and that it got out of hand for them to handle.

### **They opened their own wounds**

Most of the women leaders mentioned that many of them had their own wounds from previous experiences of violence and, as a result of the spark, these wounds were opened. Mafer and Ariana agreed that all of them had experienced violence, in different forms, but all the leaders had wounds. This had consequences. For example, Laura mentioned how, among the members that started the WhatsApp group of 23 women, some left the group because they could not handle the emotional costs, and currently just a few of the original group members continue to be engaged with #YoTeCreo. During her interview, Nana explained how she has brain fog from that time and has forgotten many facts. Laura mentioned: *"We confront our own beliefs, traditions,*

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<sup>375</sup> Rovira-Sancho, *supra* note 49 at 13.

<sup>376</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Nos tocó la carga de todo el país en los hombros de 23 mujeres que estaban activamente trabajando para que no se nos moviera tampoco el movimiento.

*privileges, perspectives, prejudices, and our own machismo. I mean, it was harsh.*<sup>377</sup>  
From another viewpoint, Ella mentioned that *“the team was gradually evolving into a healing team for ourselves because most of us were also survivors.*<sup>378</sup>

In research on the promises and pitfalls of #MeToo, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller addressed similar findings that they called the ‘emotional tax’ that leaders of digital feminist activism campaigns experienced from leading and supporting women who have experienced violence. Like the leaders of #YoTeCreo, these activists felt the need to take breaks, limiting their work or even quitting their activism.<sup>379</sup>

### **The breaking point**

Some of the participants mentioned that the suicide of one of the named perpetrators, after Pia’s testimony on Twitter,<sup>380</sup> was a breaking point for them. The alleged perpetrator in this case [REDACTED] was a friend or acquaintance of some of the leaders. Many of them got scared and decided to leave the group, and the leadership suffered as a consequence. As a final comment at the end of her interview, Ariana decided to talk about the impact of this moment: *“We had several meetings during many nights with psychological counseling to also know how we were handling it. And on how not to feel guilty. And I don’t know if some had mentioned it before, but I think that was one of the hardest things I had to deal with.”*<sup>381</sup>

One of the perpetrators accused as part of #MeToo Mexico also committed suicide. After this event contributions to the movement slowly reduced.<sup>382</sup> Studying the factors that discourage digital feminist activism or cause a movement to wane is an opportunity for future research.

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<sup>377</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Confrontarnos nuestras propias creencias, traiciones, privilegios, perspectivas, prejuicios, y machismos. O sea, fue rudo.

<sup>378</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: El equipo se fue transformando en un equipo de sanación para nosotras mismas, porque la mayoría de nosotras también éramos sobrevivientes.

<sup>379</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77.

<sup>380</sup> Pia, *supra* note 19.

<sup>381</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Nosotras llegamos a tener varias reuniones durante varias noches con asesoría psicológica para también saber de qué manera lo manejamos. Y cómo no sentirnos culpables. Y yo creo que eso no sé si algunas la menciona, pero yo creo que eso fue una de las cosas más duras que me tocó. ”

<sup>382</sup> Rovira-Sancho, *supra* note 49 at 13.

#### 4.2.7.2 The invisible and unpaid work carried out by #YoTeCreo leaders

Important complexities and challenges attend the work of leading digital feminist activism. In this case, participants discussed how they found it difficult to cope after their statement was released, due to the level of work involved. This work included giving interviews on tv and radio; participating in online events, including organizing live on their social media accounts; documenting cases; organizing and attending meetings with local NGOs to refer cases; and dealing with direct messages from women requesting their support on Twitter and Instagram. Participants highlighted the hours of the day they dedicated to #YoTeCreo and some mentioned that they even put on hold their own personal and professional projects to deal with the amount of work they had after the hashtag went viral.

Research on digital feminist activism has documented how this online activity includes unpaid labor, and how difficult it is to seek financial support for this type of work.<sup>383</sup> Ironically, like other offline, unpaid and invisible women's work, sustaining digital feminist activism can lead to burn out, and the unsustainability of the movement. Ella shared her experience with this: "*we were in a very vulnerable position because we didn't have funds, we didn't have the economic infrastructure or the time to sit down and create the platform.*"<sup>384</sup> This speaks to the burden of online activism and the difficulties of sustaining online feminist activism.

Unfortunately, digital feminist activism like #YoTeCreo is, as described by the participants, organic, spontaneous, and, I would add, reactive and unplanned. The leaders of the #YoTeCreo did not expect #YoTeCreo to go as viral as it did. This spontaneity and reactivity contributed not only to the #YoTeCreo spark, but also to the quick dissipation of the movement.<sup>385</sup> This trend was also observed in the case of #MeToo Mexico: "[i]t was intense and brief. It was trending at the end of March 2019, but by mid-April interest in it had plummeted."<sup>386</sup> The invisible and unpaid nature of the

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<sup>383</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 at 239.

<sup>384</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: Estábamos en una posición muy vulnerable porque no teníamos fondos, no teníamos la infraestructura económica ni el tiempo para sentarnos a hacer una plataforma.

<sup>385</sup> See Shruti Jain, *The Rising Fourth Wave: Feminist Activism on Digital Platforms in India*, Observer Research Foundation. Issue Brief No. 384 (July 2020).

<sup>386</sup> Rovira-Sancho, *supra* note 49.

leaders' work, combined with its emotional 'tax', online threats and backlash (including the suicide of named perpetrators) were all deterrents for engaging in digital feminist activism. Expanding on the impacts and effects of feminist digital activism is an opportunity for future research.

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings**

I began this study with the hypothesis that #YoTeCreo was not a transplantation from the North to the South, but came as the result of multiple intersections or nodes of transnational and local feminist movements. Using the FemMesh and transnationalized intersectionality, I hypothesized that different nodes are connected to this case of digital feminist activism in Venezuela. These nodes include: successful experiences of digital feminist movements in Latin America (for example, #NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso); increased awareness of sexual violence and harassment in Venezuela, transnational flows in the region, the role of migrant women living abroad and finally, the social media influencer status of #YoTeCreo members as another key factor to the spark of this digital feminist activism.

Using a deductive-inductive approach to the data collected from interview participants, I described the elements that, according to the participants, made the #YoTeCreo emerge in Venezuela. These findings allowed me to answer my research question: how did the #YoTeCreo emerge in Venezuela, and what were the possible circumstances or elements that, according to the founders, encouraged the spark of this feminist digital social movement in Venezuela? And, what encouraged the founders of the movement to participate in the creation of this movement? In this section, I go through my hypotheses and detail the elements that were confirmed and rejected by my data.

In contrast to one of my hypotheses, most participants were not familiar with and had not participated in or had prior knowledge about Latin American digital feminist activism, such as #NiUnaMenos and #MiPrimerAcoso. Most of the leaders were newcomers to feminist activism and this was the first time they had engaged in online cyberfeminism. The majority of the participants did not identify Latin American digital

movements as reference points salient to their creation of #YoTeCreo. Participants had different references and prior knowledge of feminist activism, including pro-abortion campaigns, but there was uncertainty about a connection between Latin American digital feminist activism and #YoTeCreo as a key component of this phenomenon.

Participants did refer to #MeToo as a key inspiration for #YoTeCreo, despite the fact that they did not actively participate in the #MeToo discussion. They all knew and had read about this hashtag activism, as #YoTeCreo leaders were closely related to the music industry, and Hollywood. Most of them, living in the United States, connected what happened in Venezuela to their closest reference: #MeToo. This does not mean that there was transplantation of the #MeToo movement, but that #YoTeCreo, as a node in the FemMesh, is entangled with #MeToo. Both #YoTeCreo and #MeToo are interconnected nodes of feminist knowledges rather than isolated instances of digital feminist activism. Similar to instances of digital feminist activism in Latin America.

By employing the FemMesh, I make the case that #YoTeCreo is related to the nodes created by digital feminist activism in Latin America, even if there was some uncertainty in the response of the participants. The point of intersection of these feminist knowledges by disrupting patriarchy and power are enmeshed. Since the creation of the Instagram account @AlejandroSojoStrupo, leaders of #YoTeCreo were able to grasp what was happening in Venezuela, employ it locally and stop feeling like outsiders to these instances of digital feminist activism. #MeToo and digital feminist activism in Latin America are enmeshed by actively denouncing and fighting VAW in their localities.<sup>387</sup> This finding is consistent with literature that details how new digital movements have been fuelled and made possible by pre-existing social movements.<sup>388</sup>

In line with one of the hypotheses, the participation of Venezuelan migrant women in #YoTeCreo was key for this digital feminist activism to emerge for two reasons. First, due to their current physical distance from Venezuela, they felt safer creating and participating in this expression of digital feminist activism. This finding confirms the literature on the role played by local political conditions in the uses of online activism.<sup>389</sup> The participants who lived abroad shared a common understanding

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<sup>387</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71.

<sup>388</sup> Dominguez, *supra* note 50 and Garibotti & Hopp, *supra* note 51.

<sup>389</sup> Lee & Murdie, *supra* note 182.

that in Venezuela the current situation of day-to-day survival blinded them and did not allow them to think beyond political problems to embrace questions of feminism(s). Being abroad allowed them to distance themselves from the complex multi-dimensional crisis of Venezuela and enabled them to open up to feminist knowledges, create space and discover other references for feminism(s) and activism. Later those knowledge were employed for the creation of #YoTeCreo.

Contrary to one of my hypotheses, the participants did not have specific knowledge of the situation of women's rights in Venezuela. They did not have background, training or experiences involving feminist activism or women's rights. But they all, through personal experiences, had embodied knowledge and had experienced gender-based discrimination. They all understood women's historical exclusion and discrimination, and how women are being left behind by the State's impunity and the Venezuelan society that continues to deny the problem of VAW.

In line with one of my hypotheses, #YoTeCreo gained momentum in part because the statement came from Venezuelan women with fame and status similar to #MeToo. It was also mentioned as significant to the spark that Venezuelan culture is permeated by media and entertainment and that the named perpetrators were 'media men'. As a consequence of their status and fame and in an organic way, #YoTeCreo participants brought to light the widespread problem of sexual violence in the country.

But, how did #YoTeCreo emerge in Venezuela? The deductive-inductive approach allowed me to describe that it was mostly because of the *hartazgo* that #YoTeCreo became as viral as it did in Venezuela. *Hartazgo* is connected to feelings, it is embodied knowledges from years of experience of VAW that goes over generations. As mentioned above, *hartazgo* is collective not individual. This *hartazgo* lead to an statement, not by a single women, but by 74 Venezuelan women that collectively decided to engage in digital feminist activism as a consequence of their experience of violence. The importance of feelings entangled with paralel moments of digital activism is one of this study's richest finds.

It is important to address the experiences of women leaders in online activism. In this case, it was clear from the participants' responses that #YoTeCreo was not carefully planned or organized. The level of viralization the statement had was unforeseen to

them. Their primary mission was to amplify the voices of women that were using social media to tell their stories and experiences and to stand up against sexual violence. In doing so, the leaders of #YoTeCreo organically generated a consciousness-raising moment in the digital arena for Venezuelans like no other time before.<sup>390</sup> After the statement went viral, they had to engage in unpaid labour. This supports research on digital feminist activism that documents how this online activity constitutes unpaid and invisible women' and the difficulties women encounter in seeking financial support for this type of work.<sup>391</sup>

An element that is important to highlight as a key ingredient for the spark was the leaders' capacity to connect with women through feelings but also their desire for the transformation of cultural practices, including the phenomenon of the "second assault", that are widespread and perpetuate VAW in the country.<sup>392</sup> For me, it was outstanding their rationale for choosing '#YoTeCreo' from many hashtags. By saying #YoTeCreo to women participants of the hashtag, they amplified the conversation on VAW and centered the discussion on the voices of women without fame or influencer status, thus dignifying stories that may have otherwise been ignored.

Many participants also discussed the costs of activating #YoTeCreo. To me, this was in part because of how #YoTeCreo leaders described that they came ill-equipped to manage its challenges. None of them had previous experiences in digital activism or feminism. They were not lawyers or psychologists with the necessary tools to deal with the number of cases they documented and the women's stories of abuse, harassment, and sexual violence they dealt with. They mentioned how due to their lack of skills it was hard to sustain the momentum and that they were not prepared for what happened after the statement.

#YoTeCreo was spontaneous, and this created a difficulty in their long term existence. The emergence of digital feminist activism as organic and unplanned can make this instance skyrocket with fame, similar to a influencers status, and then slowly decrease. It is important to highlight the impact of these instances of online activism are

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<sup>390</sup> Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al, *supra* note 85 at 87.

<sup>391</sup> Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, *supra* note 77 at 293.

<sup>392</sup> Mendes, Keller & Ringrose, *supra* note 292 at 1296.

yet to be determined.<sup>393</sup> However, they might open a window of opportunities for later generations to reimagine a feminist future.<sup>394</sup>

#### 4.4 Future research

While corroborating some elements presented by the literature on digital feminist activism and transnationalized intersectionality, this study's findings illuminate new considerations and avenues for future research.

This research opens new opportunities for future research on the role of political and local regimes in incentivizing or disincentivizing participation in online feminist activism. In a country like Venezuela, with a repressive regime and patterns of incarceration of dissidents, women's rights movements are affected, and as a consequence, levels of participation in activism are reduced. Analyzing the political context in relation to digital activism is an opportunity to expand future research.

Another new avenue for further research is the influence of migrant women's knowledge of feminism(s) to their country of origin. This study opens the opportunity to explore how migrant women might be translating their knowledges for change in their home country and vice versa, in particular with regard to feminism(s). For example, it occurs to me that it will be important to analyze the role of migrant women from Latin America in activating new pro-abortion movements in the United States with the current overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and how transnationalized intersectionality might play a role in this activation. By transferring the knowledge they gained in their countries of origin, including the successful cases of Colombia and Argentina, they might bring that feminist knowledges over to campaign and activate in favor of the legalization of abortion in the United States.

Future research on the costs, struggles and challenges of sustaining a spontaneous spark of digital feminist activism is important and encouraged. Expanding on the impacts and effects of feminist digital activism is also an opportunity for future research. Further research that addresses and develops new theoretical frames for understanding digital activism within the context of social movement theory will be

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<sup>393</sup> Clark, *supra* note 79 at 393.

<sup>394</sup> Afzal & Wallace, *supra* note 71 at 135.

important. Finally, this case study also suggests that celebrities and 'influencers' have the ability to reach a broader audience and create more awareness of VAW, and this role should be further investigated.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

I started this project to understand how a digital feminist movement can emerge, and I used the case study of #YoTeCreo Venezuela. For the past twelve months, I worked on constructing the research questions, my motivation, the methods and methodology, and ethics documents, with a firm commitment to writing a feminist project. From May until June 2022, I had the great opportunity and honour to interview eight women leaders of #YoTeCreo. Some interviews even brought tears to my eyes. I spent weeks coding and listening, again and again, and again, to the interviews so I could grasp their meaning and understand how this movement sparked. This study is shaped by the insights, knowledge and understanding of the #YoTeCreo leaders. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this is a continual collaborative study.

I believe this study to be novel and unique as it expands the growing research on digital feminist activism and hashtag activism by highlighting transnational and local flows. It also grows the existing literature on feminist digital activism in Latin America, in particular in Venezuela, where scholarly research is on the topic is scarce. This study is also unique in its employment of a feminist methodology that centralizes the experiences of women leaders of digital feminist activism through in depth interviews. As Mafer mentioned in her interview: *“The answer lies with those who are in need.”* One can learn so much with humility and kindness from women and people with whom we conduct. From a feminist perspective, the only way of doing feminist thinking and research is by listening to women’s voices and centering their stories. I encourage researchers to continue to develop qualitative studies that elevate the voices of women participants in scholarly discussions that are mostly conducted by white, cis, and English-speaking persons.

This study is also deeply personal, as detailed in the section on positionality and reflexivity in Chapter III. This study touches my heartstrings, as a woman that has experienced violence and also as a national of Venezuela who was an insider during the #YoTeCreo spark. By researching and studying my own home country and bringing this knowledge to the English-speaking world, I bring new perspectives, knowledge and views to academia. A personal connection to the research does not mean it lacks

professionalism; this study has been conducted with rigour, passion, and discipline with regard to the theoretical framework, methods, and analysis of results.

Throughout this study, I have made the case for the need to attend more carefully to the role of political and local regimes in incentivizing or disincentivizing participation in online feminist activism. Also, I have highlighted the need for future research on the influence of migrant women's knowledge of feminism(s) to their country of origin and vice versa, in particular with regard to feminism(s). Women participants discussed briefly the costs, struggles and challenges of sustaining a spontaneous spark in digital feminist activism, therefore and further research on online activism that discuss these challenges are important and encouraged.

This case study of #YoTeCreo Venezuela shows, strikingly, that digital feminist activism does not rely upon previous academic knowledge or activist experience, but can be generated by a collective sense of the necessity for change, and the desire to bring it about. It also highlights how leaders of #YoTeCreo used their social media expertise and influencer status to generate the success of this digital activism. In the great words of Ella Bric, she says: *“I think that many people sometimes think that in community work or activist work you have to have a degree (...) I think they lack the desire to want to make a change and make the decision to do it even when they don't feel they have the tools.”*<sup>395</sup>

I was personally impressed by how a group of women with hardly any previous formal knowledge of feminism(s) or experience in hashtag activism could generate the spark they did in Venezuela. This was due to their high sense of empathy, sorority, and commitment to amplifying women's voices and experiences. #YoTeCreo created a collective online space for sorority and solidarity between women and girls and built, maybe temporarily, an affective digital community within Venezuelan women. This was due to the power of empathy, as a condition for understanding systemic violence and is

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<sup>395</sup> Here is the original in Spanish: *creo que mucha gente a veces piensa que los trabajos con las comunidades o los trabajos de activismo tienes que tener un título en, en no sé, en economía, en política para hacer política. Yo creo que les faltan las ganas de querer hacer un cambio y tomar la decisión de hacerlo aún cuando no sientes que tienes las herramientas. Pero yo tuve la fortuna de rodearme con mujeres que estaban completamente preparadas en el tema y me nutrí, aprendí y creé un espacio de discusión de manera interna.”*

the basis for coalition building.<sup>396</sup> It is also about sorority, connection and desire for change.<sup>397</sup>

As mentioned above, through the emotions and feelings expressed during the interviews by #YoTeCreo leaders, this thesis brings new theoretical contributions through the understanding of the concept of hartazgo. I highlight that the core elements of hartazgo are first, the collective and cumulative experiences of violence from different generations of women and girls. Second, accompanied by the feeling of anger, outrage and embodied knowledges it is a moment when you decide you can't take it anymore. Third, it is culturally located in a context where impunity is widespread. Finally, the hartazgo does not thrive on individuals but it is linked with collectiveness and nurtured by sorority, empathy and solidarity.

Beyond understanding how this instance of digital feminist activism sparked, this project also highlights a deep problem in Venezuela: violence against women is rampant and the State has persistently failed to adequately address this phenomenon. Women are fed up and the *hartazgo* is widespread in Venezuela. The State continues to ignore the needs of women and to over rely on the criminal system in ways that are counterproductive to achieving truly transformative justice. The answer to the pervasive problem of VAW is unlikely to be found in the carceral state; indeed, as this study shows, it may lie in the hands of women who have experienced this violence and who work together to create novel, embodied activist communities.

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<sup>396</sup> Hill Collins, *supra* note 119.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Guiding concepts

To make sure that key concepts are depicted in the ways I have decided to use them throughout the thesis, I have prepared a list of concepts that will be used for a common understanding of the readers when I mention them.

#### 1. Feminism(s)

Feminism is not a single school of thought but includes different schools of thoughts. Therefore, when referring to feminism, I will add an (s) at the end to refer to the variety and diversity of thought contained under this broad umbrella. This also indicates that feminist thinking is not linear but is culturally situated, changing, and ever-evolving through time and place.

#### 2. Feminist knowledge(s)

In the thesis, you will read the concept feminist knowledge(s) in plural. Like the different schools of thought(s) in feminism(s), I see the creation of knowledge in feminism(s) as diverse, continuous, and not a single or homogenous knowledge. Therefore, I decided to use it plural.

#### 3. Entanglements<sup>398</sup>

I draw from Afzal and Wallace's theory of the *FemMesh* and consider that digital feminist movements are entangled are interconnected, intertwined to past moments and overlapping nodes of feminist collective knowledges. This will be further explained in Chapter II.

#### 4. Intersectional Feminism

I will be oriented by intersectional feminism, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins' matrix of domination, which refers to how identities (gender, class, race, abled, migration status) function in a system of oppression and power in a society. These concepts will inform my analysis and understanding of the interrelated and entangled identities, and experiences women have and will allow me to position myself and challenge the overgeneralized idea of "women" as a homogenous interest group.

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<sup>398</sup> Afzal, Sarah & Paige Wallace, "Entangled Feminisms: #MeToo as a Node on the Feminist Mesh" (2019) 36:2 South Central Review 131.

## **5. Women**

I will not be using from a gender binary frame but in a more inclusive frame, including trans, queer, cis women, and gender nonconforming. I believe in the power of naming to recognize and make visible a struggle or a cause, and I will, throughout the thesis, make sure to name whenever the difference is relevant. I mention this recognizing a recent movement within feminism(s) that does not recognize trans women as women. My feminism is intersectional and trans-inclusive. However, I do not wish by this to create a false knowledge that women's experiences are homogenous, they are not.

## **6. Women that have experienced violence**

I have made a commitment not to use the word “women victims” or “victims”, or “women that suffer from violence.” Instead, I will use the terminology of “women that have experienced violence” to decouple women’s identity from their victimhood and their relationship to weakness, helplessness, or vulnerability.

## **7. Migrants**

I recognized that there exist a variety of terms such as displacement, refugee, migrant, and asylum seeker, that indicate specific rights (or an absence of rights) due to the person concerned. I recognize the importance of each term, but in this thesis, this technicality does not have a key role in the core of the thesis. I will use the term “migrants” to encompass persons that are outside of the country where they are nationals without identifying the legal or factual particularities of their situation.

## **8. Spark**

I will use the word “spark” to refer to the moment feminist digital activism goes viral.

## **9. Femi(ni)cide**

I will use the concept femi(ni)cide, a concept coined by Diana Russell,<sup>399</sup> when referring to the misogynistic killings of women. However, I have included the “ni” to indicate the Latin American perspective within which the concept is used in this thesis. The concept of femi(ni)cide (*feminicidio*) was coined by Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, to highlight not only the killing of women in high numbers but the impunity and/or acquiescence of the State in these killings.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Radford, Jill & Diana E H Russell, *Femicide : the politics of woman killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992).

<sup>400</sup> Marcela Lagarde de los Rios, “Del Femicidio Al Feminicidio.” *Desde el jardín de Freud : Revista de Psicoanálisis*, no. 6 (2006): 216–225.

## **Appendix B**

### **Press release of the #YoTeCreo movement**

#### **English (translated by the author)**

The last few days have been difficult to digest for many Venezuelan women. Testimonies of abuse and sexual violence by musicians and members of the Venezuelan entertainment industry against women and girls are multiplying with impunity, bringing to light the bitter pill that the victims have been suffering in silence for years.

For many of us listening to and reading them on social networks means two things; pain and anger. The modus operandi of the perpetrators was and still is to use fame and the position of power to exercise it with women who followed and admired them for their artistic work.

Art, in all its disciplines, is an expressive form of the human being, a place for imagination, thought, technique, talent, and discipline. Art is the place of the sensitive. Essentially the human being makes mistakes, but this feature of humanity must be reviewed deeply and incessantly. Art also has the power to articulate the failures and much more those that become crimes. We believe that art is, then, a disruptor, an interrupter to break the silence and make society review, from all its instances, the mistakes that have led us to this crisis: violence and harassment against women. The media, cultural and educational centers, museums, theaters, rehearsal rooms, sets, and recording studios have for many years played an important role in the perpetuation of sexist, degrading, and silencing actions of Venezuelan girls, adolescents, and women.

How to achieve change in these structures knowing that our country is going through the worst social and institutional crisis in history?

The answer is always the same: The power resides in us all and it is time to exercise it by raising our voices, articulating, and confronting injustice.

We, Venezuelan women, members of the arts, press, and communications, stand up today against sexual harassment. Women's rights are human rights and we refuse to allow gender issues to continue to be put off the public agenda.

We seek to make visible and amplify the voice of the victims by making our voices/stage/platforms available so that they, the survivors and their right to justice, are the ones who play a leading role.

We urge all Venezuelan arts personnel, media, and leaders to raise their voices against these actions. Abuse and harassment do not exclude nationalities, gender, or social class. This is why we say that the movement needs all of us.

The following are the steps to be followed by this movement, which was born as a response to the systematic abandonment of the institutions to the victims of harassment, abuse and sexual aggression:

- Create a database where we can record figures and information on victims and testimonies of cases within the guild.
- Direct these cases to non-governmental organizations that have protocols for the legal and psychological accompaniment of the victims.
- Organize a concert and massive event in unity with all Venezuelan women artists who are part of the art and entertainment world, to make visible and raise awareness of the situation.
- Create awareness campaigns to educate us on equity with a gender focus.

To all survivors we say: #YoTeTeCreo You are #NotAloneNeitherInBadCompany

### **Original- Spanish Below**

Los últimos días son difíciles de digerir para muchas mujeres venezolanas. Los testimonios de abuso y violencia sexual por parte de músicos y miembros del gremio del entretenimiento venezolano a mujeres y niñas se multiplican con impunidad, sacando a la luz el trago amargo que las víctimas han pasado en silencio durante años. Para muchas de nosotras escuchar y leerlos en las redes sociales significa dos cosas; dolor e impotencia. El modus operandi de los perpetradores fue y sigue siendo usar la fama y la posición de poder para ejercerlo con mujeres que los seguían y admiraban por su trabajo artístico.

El arte, en todas sus disciplinas, es la capacidad expresiva del ser humano, lugar de la imaginación, el pensamiento, la técnica, el talento y la disciplina. El arte es el lugar de lo sensible. Esencialmente el humano comete errores, pero ese rasgo de la humanidad debe ser revisado profunda e incesantemente. El arte también tiene la potencia para articular las fallas y mucho más estas que devienen en crímenes. Creemos que el arte es, entonces, agitador, irruptor, para romper el silencio y hacer que la sociedad revise, desde todas sus instancias, los errores que nos han llevado a esta crisis: la violencia y el acoso contra la mujer.

Los medios de comunicación, centros culturales y educativos, museos, teatros, salas de ensayos, sets y estudios de grabación durante muchos años han desempeñado un papel importante en la perpetuación de acciones sexistas, degradadoras y silenciadoras de la niña, adolescente y mujer venezolana.

¿Cómo lograr el cambio en estas estructuras sabiendo que nuestro país atraviesa la peor crisis social e institucional de su historia?

La respuesta siempre es la misma: El poder reside en nosotros y es hora de ejercerlo alzando nuestra voz, articulando y haciendo frente a la injusticia.

Nosotras, las mujeres venezolanas miembros del gremio artístico, de la prensa y comunicaciones, nos levantamos hoy contra del acoso sexual. Los derechos de las mujeres son derechos humanos y nos negamos a que los asuntos de género sigan siendo postergados de la agenda pública.

Buscamos visibilizar y ampliar la voz de las víctimas poniendo a la orden nuestras voces/tarimas/plataformas para que sean ellas las sobrevivientes y su derecho a la justicia, quienes tengan el protagonismo.

Instamos a todo el personal del gremio artístico venezolano, de los medios y a los líderes a que eleven su voz en contra de estas conductas. El abuso y el acoso no excluye nacionalidades, género ni clase social. Por esto decimos que el movimiento nos necesita a todos.

A continuación dejamos por escrito los pasos a seguir de este movimiento que nace como respuesta frente al abandono sistemático de las instituciones a las víctimas de acoso, abuso y agresión sexual:

- Recolectar una base de datos donde registremos cifras e información de víctimas y testimonios de casos dentro del gremio.
- Canalizar estos casos hacia las organizaciones no gubernamentales que ya cuentan con protocolos para el acompañamiento legal y psicológico de las víctimas.
- Organizar un concierto y evento masivo en unidad con todas las artistas venezolanas que son parte del mundo del arte y el entretenimiento, para visibilizar y crear conciencia de la situación.
- Crear campañas de concientización para educarnos en la equidad con enfoque de género.

A todas las sobrevivientes les decimos: #YoTeCreo No estás #NiSolaNiMalacompanada aquífirmamos:

Ella Bric

Nina Rancel

Nana Cadavieco

Verónica Ruiz del Vizo

Vera Linares

Marianne Amelinckx

Florencia Alvarado

Joanna Juliethe

Ana Elba Domínguez

Laura Guevara

Fabiola Moreno

Mariana Marval

Claudia Prieto

Natasha Tiniacos

María F. García Machado (Nani)

Karen Martello

Mafer Bandola

Joanna Haussman  
Marla Flores  
Shia Bertoni  
Diana Patricia "La Macarena"  
Coraima Torres  
Marianne Suárez  
Marisa Román  
Nicole Anriette Vargas  
María Antonieta Hidalgo  
Ya'ara M.M (La Santa Bandida)  
Claudia Cedeño  
Isabel Seijas  
Nadia Barreto  
María Fernanda Rodríguez Carrero  
Andreína Mercedes Fuentes Angarita  
Valentina Martínez  
Clary Ledezma Villarroel  
Luisiana Galicia  
Gloria Chacón  
Eloísa Maturén  
Ariana González  
Manuela Bolívar  
Jessica Miranda  
María Gabriela De Farías  
María Fernanda Burbano  
Tamara Adrián  
Mónica Quintero  
Estefanía León  
Marisela Lovera  
Marianela Illas  
Cassandra Mayela  
Dani Richani  
Gabriela Domínguez  
Lya Bonilla  
María Gabriela Torres M.  
Ana Elba Domínguez  
Valentina Betancourt  
Pia Páez  
Anny Baquero Benedetti  
Evelia Di Gennaro

Prakriti Maduro  
Marcy Alejandra Rangel  
Valentina Alvarado Matos  
JEVA Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas – Juntas en Venezuela y Afuera  
Camila Mirabal  
Marcela Girón Alejandra Solano  
Valeria Falcón  
Melissa Weil  
Gabriela Ruiz  
Valentina Royero  
Pimpi Castro  
Nella Rojas  
Nahir Ramírez  
María Belén Daboin  
Manu Manzo  
Nati Román  
Marhú Mc Cormick

## Appendix C

### Protocol before and during the interview to address possible psychological risks

This protocol aims to mitigate the minimal potential psychological/emotional risks identified:

#### Background

I anticipate that almost all the participants will be survivors of some form of sexual violence like myself, and unfortunately, 1 in every 3 women in the world.<sup>401</sup> Sexual violence can happen to any woman and is not the victim's fault. This does not mean that is not hurtful or damaging; experiences of sexual violence have an impact in minds, souls, and bodies of women.

However, the questions (Appendix D) and the purpose of the interview do not require interview participants to share details about their experiences of sexual violence. Instead, this study is focused on women's experiences in joining, organizing, and participating in a digital feminist social movement against sexual violence. Nevertheless, interview participants may experience feelings of discomfort, anxiety, or anger recalling some previous experiences. If, at any moment in the interview, a woman decides to disclose her experience of sexual violence with me this protocol will help me navigate it. **This project starts from a position that takes seriously women's agency and autonomy. During my interviews, I will create space for women to tell their stories when they decide to do so. This approach resists labelling women as victims and gives them agency over their own narratives. The act of storytelling can be helpful to survivors. Although I will not ask women to share their stories, I will create a safe environment for women who decide to share their experiences with me.**

The interview participants will be adults (eighteen years of age or older) and will consist mostly of women's rights activists, members of NGOs, and women that have already shared publicly their stories of sexual harassment and/or abuse. Most of them are experts on the subject and are used to sharing their perspectives and opinions on social media, the news, and on television.

Despite the participants' public involvement and activism around the topic of sexual violence, there are still minimal risks associated with this research. The consent form (Appendix B) will (a) indicate the possibility of psychological/emotional risks associated with the research and (b) will include a reference guide with resources for psychological services for women victims of sexual violence relevant to the geographic location of the participant.

The following protocol aims at minimizing potential psychological/emotional risks.

#### 1. Before the interview

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<sup>401</sup> Violence Against Women, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

### **a. Approach participants**

The literature on mitigating emotional risks in research recommends pre-screening prospective participants where the research involves some potential risk.<sup>402</sup> Some practices indicate that individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, or PTSD who are not currently under the care of a health service provider or equivalent should refrain from participating in interview-based research.

However, I am wary of violating prospective participants' privacy by collecting personal mental health data. Given the minimal risk associated with this research, participants' privacy needs to be balanced against the need to mitigate risk. The minimal psychological/emotional risks can be addressed with an appropriately tailored consent form (see Appendix B), pre-interview, and follow-up check-in procedures.

Once a prospective participant has contacted or responded to the researcher by e-mail or direct message in social media or through the snowball technique, the researcher will reply as follows:

#### **If contacted by email,**

- Asking the prospective participant to confirm that they satisfy recruitment criteria
- Attaching the consent form to the email
- Asking for a phone call, and confirming their availability for scheduling a short introductory call

In a short introductory phone call (*15 minutes maximum*) with the prospective participant, the researcher will review possible interview questions and the consent form and canvass availability for a virtual zoom call. This phone call will also serve as a first contact with women participants before the official interview to generate trust and create a safe space.

#### **If contacted by DM, ask for an email first and then:**

- Asking the prospective participant to confirm that they satisfy recruitment criteria
- Attaching the consent form to the email
- Asking for a phone call, and confirming their availability for scheduling a short introductory call

In a short introductory phone call (*15 minutes maximum*) with the prospective participant, the researcher will review possible interview questions and the consent form and canvass availability for a virtual zoom call. This phone call will also serve as a first contact with women participants before the official interview to generate trust and create a safe space.

**Location of interview.** via Zoom or any other online platform previously agreed with the

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<sup>402</sup> Labott, Susan, Timothy P Johnson, Norah C Feeny, and Michael Fendrich. 2016. "Evaluating and Addressing Emotional Risks in Survey Research." *Survey Practice* 9 (1). <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2016-0006>.

participants (i.e. WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram call). The Zoom invite will include a password and waiting room to verify the participant and ensure safety. As detailed in the consent form, the recordings will be stored on an encrypted USB device in my personal computer, not by using a cloud-based service.

## **2. During the interview**

### **a. Create a safe atmosphere**

This includes the researcher using a camera and being in a silent, private space (no one behind or any other sounds).

### **b. Recognizing power dynamics**

The researcher will take steps to ensure the participant feels they are in control of the interview. The researcher will listen attentively and will not interrupt. Additionally, the researcher will:

- Review again the consent form and address any question the participant might have before beginning the interview;
- Remind the participant that they have a copy of the form via email.
- Obtain consent again verbally before starting the interview. Consent will include:
  1. Consent to record the interview audio and video.
  2. Consent to use parts of the interview in an anonymous way.
- Remind the participant that she can skip questions and that their participation is voluntary, and she can change her mind and withdraw at any time.

### **a. Check-in procedures<sup>403</sup>**

- The researcher will request permission to proceed through each question, asking, “*now we are going to move to the next question, is it okay with you?*”
  1. If the participant answers negatively, the researcher will ask the participant if she wants to:
    - a. Take a break
    - b. Reschedule to another day
    - c. Whether she needs support ( if so, the researcher will refer her to the resources identified in the consent form)
- If the participant is showing high levels of stress or anxiety, i.e. crying, incoherent speech, nervousness, then the researcher will:
  2. Stop the interview
  3. Ask if she wants to:
    - a. Take a break
    - b. Reschedule to another day
    - c. Whether she needs support (if so, the researcher will

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

refer her to the resources identified in the consent form)

The general idea is that the researcher will address indicators of high levels of anxiety or emotional distress. If these are assessed as being present, then the researcher will ask the participant whether she wishes to stop the interview, take a break, and/or reschedule.

**c. Do not show judgment or surprise to participants answers**

The researcher will take care to maintain a neutral disposition throughout the interview. In particular, they will not respond to answers by showing signs of surprise or shock, either through body language or words.

**d. End of interview**

After completing the questions, at the request of the participant or after a maximum of 1 hour, the researcher will ask the participant how they are feeling and if they have further questions.

The researcher will remind the participant of the mental health and crisis centre resources indicated on the participant's copy of the consent form.

The researcher will make a commitment to send the results of the research, including methodology and findings, and make it available to the participants on the understanding that this is a collaborative process and they will be able to, a) comment and provide feedback and b) make changes if there was a misinterpretation of their testimony.

***Resources used for developing this protocol***

*Labott, Susan, Timothy P Johnson, Norah C Feeny, and Michael Fendrich. 2016. "Evaluating and Addressing Emotional Risks in Survey Research." Survey Practice 9 (1), (2016) <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2016-0006>,*

*Training Interviewers for Research on Sexual Violence A Qualitative Study of Rape Survivors' Recommendations for Interview Practice, Campbell, (2009) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801208331248>*

*Taylor, Verta, "Feminist Methodology in Social Movements Research" (1998) 21:4 Qualitative Sociology 357.*

*Learning critical feminist research: A brief introduction to feminist epistemologies and methodologies Britta Wigginton, Michelle N Lafrance, (2019) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0959353519866058>*

*Doing Sensitive Research Sensitively: Ethical and Methodological Issues in Researching Workplace Bullying*, Declan Fahie, (2014)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940691401300108>

*Research Interview and Distress Protocol* developed by Claire Burke Draucker, Donna S Martsof and Candice Poole (2009),

[https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-01-13/pdf\\_0.pdf](https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-01-13/pdf_0.pdf)

## Appendix D

### List of interview questions

#### a. About the leadership

- i. What inspired you to create this movement using social media?
- ii. Why did you decide to create this movement?
- iii. What do you think were the ingredients that led the movement spark?
- iv. What was the purpose of creating this movement?
- v. What did you expect or hope to achieve?
- vi. On a general level, do you expect an impact or did you perceive an impact after YoTeCreo came to Venezuela?
- vii. Do you think this movement can change the understanding of sexual harassment and assault in the country?

#### b. Previous social movements

- i. Did previous social digital movements inspire you?
- ii. Do you think the #YoTeCreo is different from other digital movements? If so, how?
- iii. Did you know about #MeToo in the US or elsewhere?
- iv. What did you know about the #metoo?
- v. If they did know about it, did you participate in the discussion? How? Did you read about it? Use the hashtag?
- vi. Would you say the #yotecreo was inspired in the #metoo?
- vii. Did you know about other digital feminist movements before?
  1. Are you aware of #MiPrimerAcoso?
  2. Are you aware of the #NiUnaMenos movement?
  3. What do you know about it?
  4. Did you participate in any of those movements by using the hashtag?

#### c. Role of media

- i. Do you think that the messenger is more important than the message?
- ii. Do you think that when women that are considered “famous” raise their voices are more important than regular women?
  1. Why?

#### d. Awareness of GBV in Venezuela/Criminal Law deficiencies

- i. Are you aware of the situation of violence against women in the country?
- ii. What do you know? Where do you read about it?
- iii. Do you think previous events on VAW in Venezuela lead to this moment?
  1. If yes, which ones?

- iv. What do you think #YoTeCreo tells us about the law, including the criminal system?
- v. What do you think are the barriers women face in the criminal system?
- vi. Have you ever related to the criminal system?

**e. For migrant women**

- i.* How did you relate to feminism in Venezuela?
- ii.* How do you relate to feminism abroad?
- iii.* Once abroad, did your understanding of feminism change?
- iv.* Do you think being abroad facilitated the fact of you telling your story and participating in the movement?

**In Spanish,**

a. Liderazgo

- i. ¿Qué te inspiró a crear este movimiento a través de las redes sociales?
- ii. ¿Por qué decidiste crear este movimiento?
- iii. ¿Cuál era el propósito de crear este movimiento?
- iv. ¿Cuáles crees que fueron los ingredientes que hicieron saltar la chispa del movimiento?
- v. ¿Cuál es tu historia utilizando el hashtag? ¿Qué te llevó a ese momento?
- vi. ¿Qué esperabas o esperas conseguir?
- vii. A nivel general, ¿esperas un impacto o percibiste un impacto después de que #YoTeCreo llegara a Venezuela?
- viii. ¿Crees que este movimiento puede cambiar la comprensión del acoso y la agresión sexual en el país?

b. Otros movimientos feministas digitales

- i. ¿Te han inspirado los movimientos sociales digitales anteriores?
- ii. ¿Crees que el #YoTeCreo es diferente a otros movimientos digitales? Si es así, ¿cómo?
- iii. ¿Conocías el #MeToo en Estados Unidos o en otros países? ¿Qué sabían del #metoo?
- iv. Si lo conocían, ¿participaron en el debate? ¿Cómo? ¿Leíste sobre el tema? ¿Usaron el hashtag?
- v. ¿Dirías que el #yotecreo se inspiró en el #metoo?
- vi. ¿Conocías antes otros movimientos feministas digitales?
  - 1. ¿Conoces el #MiPrimerAcoso?
  - 2. ¿Conoces el movimiento #NiUnaMenos?
  - 3. ¿Qué sabes de él?
  - 4. ¿Participaste en alguno de esos movimientos utilizando el hashtag?

- c. Para mujeres migrantes
  - i. ¿Cómo te relacionas con el feminismo en Venezuela?
  - ii. ¿Cómo te relacionas con el feminismo en Venezuela?
  - iii. ¿Cómo te relacionas con el feminismo en el extranjero?
  - iv. Una vez en el extranjero, ¿cambió tu forma de entender el feminismo?
  - v. ¿Crees que estar en el extranjero facilitó el hecho de contar tu historia y participar en el movimiento?
- d. Rol como mujeres en el mundo del entretenimiento
  - i. ¿Crees que el mensajero es más importante que el mensaje?
  - ii. ¿Crees que cuando las mujeres consideradas "famosas" alzan la voz son más importantes que las mujeres normales?
  - iii. ¿Por qué?

## Appendix E

### Contact Message

*My name is Maria Corina Muskus Toro, and I am a Venezuelan feminist lawyer. Currently, I am a Research LLM Candidate at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto, Canada where I am conducting a research study on how the feminist digital social movement #YoTeCreo, associated with the #MeToo, arrived in Venezuela.*

*My methodology involves one-on-one interviews with key members of the #YoTeCreo in Venezuela. Therefore, I am looking to you as a key leader of the movement.*

*As a research participant, you will be interviewed by me about your engagement with the social media movement #YoTeCreo in Venezuela. While your identity will be known to me, for the purpose of the research, you may choose to use a pseudonym.*

*Some of the questions that will guide this interview include: what inspired you to create/participate in this movement?; what is your story using the hashtag?; what do you think will [happen or happened] after telling your story?; what did you see happen after the movement started in the country?; what are your personal views and your stories about the movement, before and after?*

*You will not be asked to detail, tell, or discuss your experience of sexual harassment or violence, as this is not the subject of the research. As a woman and an interviewer: I believe you.*

*This human participant research has been approved by York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.*

*The certificate of approval number is STU 2022-040, and a copy of the certificate can be viewed.*

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In Spanish

*Mi nombre es María Corina Muskus Toro, soy una abogada feminista venezolana. Actualmente, estudiante del LLM en investigación en la Escuela de Derecho Osgoode Hall, Universidad de York, Toronto, Canadá, donde estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación sobre cómo el movimiento social digital feminista #YoTeCreo, asociado con el #MeToo, llegó a Venezuela.*

*Mi metodología implica entrevistas mujeres líderes clave del #YoTeCreo en Venezuela. Por lo tanto, estoy buscando entrevistar a tí como lidereza clave del movimiento.*

*Como participante de la investigación, serás entrevistada por mí sobre tu compromiso*

*con el movimiento #YoTeCreo en Venezuela. Aunque conoceré tu identidad, a efectos de la investigación, puedes optar por utilizar un seudónimo.*

*Algunas de las preguntas que guiarán esta entrevista son: ¿qué te inspiró a crear/participar en este movimiento?; ¿cuál es tu historia con el hashtag?; ¿Se ha inspirado en anteriores movimientos sociales digitales?; ¿qué viste que pasó después de que el movimiento comenzó en el país?; ¿cuáles son tus opiniones personales y tus historias sobre el movimiento, antes y después?*

*No se pedirá que detalles, cuentes o discutas experiencias de acoso o violencia sexual, ya que no es el tema de la investigación. Como mujer y como entrevistadora: Yo te creo.*

*Las conclusiones de la investigación avanzarán en el conocimiento feminista y en el estudio del derecho y la sociedad. Si bien no hay beneficios económicos directos, al contar tu historia podrías inspirar a otras mujeres y es una oportunidad para sanar, que alguien escuche tu experiencia es un beneficio directo. También apoyarás en la comprensión del movimiento y las causas fundamentales de estos movimientos sociales feministas digitales.*

*Esta investigación ha sido aprobada por el Consejo de Revisión Ética de la Universidad de York y se ajusta a las normas de las directrices de ética de la investigación del Tri-Consejo canadiense.*

*El número del certificado de aprobación es STU 2022-040, y se puede ver una copia del certificado.*