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[Practicing solidarity]
— learning from transnational feminist groups in Vienna

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This paper is dedicated to all past and current feminist activists, to all Şehids and especially to the activists and academics from marginalized communities. They have made an invaluable contribution to the feminist movement and theories and continue to do so every day. We all can learn a lot from them.

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1. Introduction

“This is a vision of the world that is pro-sex and -woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth form the material basis of people’s well-being. Finally, my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision-making for people regardless of economic and social location” (Mohanty, 2006, 3).

In her famous book *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty describes her vision of a just and feminist world. It is a strong and detailed vision. She further explains that this vision can only be achieved through a transnational feminist movement in which different feminisms collaborate in solidarity with one another. At first glance, this might seem easy but, by looking at the history of transnational feminist solidarity, the difficulties can be seen. Transnational feminism emerged in response to political conflicts in and amongst women’s movements both in the United States and UN countries in the early 20th century (Conway et al., 2021). There was a key euro-centric assumption that all women shared a similar condition of oppression under patriarchy. Transnational feminism or the so-called global sisterhood was an imperialistic project based on a common identity. In following this idea, western feminists wanted to help the third world feminists through donations, bringing them education and liberating them from their misery, and objectified them in the process. While doing so, they completely ignored their complicity in (neo-)colonial power relations and as a result, their well-meant support actually created power relations between western and non-western feminists. Furthermore, most of their action was taken through a highly problematic paternalist approach. It was the opposite of what Mohanty describes in her vision of solidarity. So the question arises of how to bridge the gap between the historic attempts at transnational feminist solidarity and Mohanty’s vision.

Luckily, there is hope. bell hooks strongly argues that changes towards a more intersectional feminist movement can be identified and that contemporary transnational feminisms are pushing the discourse in a far more progressive direction in the USA and globally (2013, 40). These transnational feminisms create a context for feminist solidarity between masses of women across race and class. It started with a profound focus on whiteness and white privilege and made it
possible to see that intersectional solidarity-based relationships are utterly threatening to *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,* she commented.

The question of how transnational feminist solidarity is practiced and approached in these contemporary transnational feminist movements, and what challenges and limitations there might be, will be further explored in the following master thesis. The thesis will also explore how to deal with these challenges and present a collection of tools with which to be attentive to them. As referenced in the title, five different transnational feminist groups in Vienna were interviewed. Furthermore, the title is based on impressions and terms that I heard in the field and the background thoughts of the thesis. Lots of groups referred to each other and stated that they learnt a lot from each other and value working together and the critiques that they received. It also shows that transnational feminist solidarity is an always ongoing process of learning and reflection. Furthermore, one group used the term feminist strike in parentheses to show that it is one common interest but that it can be attempted by a variety of different actions and approaches. By putting *Practicing Solidarity* in parentheses I accordingly want to highlight the different forms, manners, and ideas in which solidarity can be understood and practiced.

**Chapter breakdown**

This master thesis aims to discuss different forms of transnational feminist solidarity and its challenges and limitations. The outline of the master thesis is the following. Firstly, the methodology, research design and an approach towards an integrated feminist ethic will be presented. It is based on a circular idea. At first, knowledge will be extracted from feminist groups through interviews. Then the data will be analyzed on the basis of a decolonial epistemology, as well as an ethnographical approach. The third part follows the idea of sharing the gathered knowledge and outcome with the interviewed and feminist community through a zine. The entire research is committed to a feminist ethic and in particular to reflective contact with the interview participants.

Subsequently, in the theoretical chapter I discuss the notion of solidarity and introduce different conceptualizations by Audre Lorde, Bini Adamczak, Diane Elam, bell hooks and Chandra Mohanty. This discussion will be embedded in the discourse of transnational feminism. Furthermore, I will outline the framework based on Nikita Dhawan’s essay on *Impossible Solidarities.*

The following empirical part is divided into three subchapters. Each subchapter is based on one of my main arguments and findings, and will be supported by excerpts of the interviews. The main categories are: situating transnational feminist solidarity work, challenges, and limitations of transnational solidarity work and tools to be attentive. The first section will include the groups’ approaches to transnational solidarity work as well as practical examples. The second section will discuss the limitations and challenges that transnational feminist solidarity faces and the third
explores tools to be attentive to the challenges through a collection of suggestions, ideas, and experiences from the interviewed groups.
In the end I summarize the outcome of the research, answer the research question, conclude what can be useful for other transnational feminist groups and highlight where further research is necessary.

**Reflection of own position**

Especially in this field, a transparent and reflexive approach towards my own position within transnational feminism, political engagement and positionality in society is crucial. The way we understand the world is based on our own positioning within it and in the frame of research this can be understood as a form of subjectivity. Research is influenced by experiences and ideologies but also by how an individual is positioned in relation to social institutions, other individuals and in connection with any number of other identity markers (such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and generation)(Pink, 2013, 55). Despite this, Peake and Trotz argue that acknowledging one’s positionality or subjectivity should not mean abandoning fieldwork, rather: “It can strengthen our commitment to conduct good research based on building relations of mutual respect and recognition. It does, however, entail abandoning the search for objectivity in favor of critical provisional analysis based on plurality of (temporally and spatially) situated voices and silences” (Peake and Trotz in Sultana, 2007, 3). Accordingly, I will reflect on my own positioning in the following.

Politically and socially I have always been engaged in radical-left political activism, especially, in recent years, in the area of feminist activism and solidarity building, which also deepened my academic knowledge and led to deciding to write my master thesis in this field. Through my activist experiences I am connected within the feminist activist community in Austria, especially Graz and partially Vienna. Therefore, I am partly an insider to the movement and at the same time an outsider due to my status as a researcher and as I am not part of the interviewed groups (Smith, 1999, 138). This insider-outsider position was both spatially and temporally, not stable and not fixed. I experienced that the dynamics changed with context and the insider-outsider boundary sometimes blurred. I will later expand on this more in the section reflecting on the generated data. I also conducted the interviews in the summer of 2022 during a time when the feminist movement was constantly gaining awareness; where interconnectedness and a collective, global feeling rose, and co-operations between feminist groups and networks in Vienna constantly grew. This was an ideal political-temporal contingency for the research process (Sultana, 2007, 9).

I am clearly located within a dominating country and society and have accordingly certain privileges as a white, middle-class masters student without a migration background. At the same time, I am part of a social minority due to my political choices, struggles, visions for a changed world, gender and identity. Thus, I am speaking as a person situated in the dominating world: “I try
to speak from the space and vision of, and in solidarity with, communities in struggle in the [dominated] world” (Mohanty, 2003, 228). It is a difficult task to put this into practice, and I was often concerned about not representing the participants well in my research. I was “travel[ing] uneasy between speaking ‘for’ them and speaking ‘from’ ”(Abu-Lughod in Colic-Peisker, 2004, 86) a place of solidarity. I attempted through reflection and listening to become more of a medium for the participants message, ideas, and experiences than a creator as Val Colic-Peisker perfectly describes (2004, 86).
2. **Methodology**

There is intense discussion amongst feminist researchers on how to develop feminist research, methodology, and methods. In particular, over the last decades lots of scholars developed and utilized a decolonial, feminist methodology and ethics. This is especially important when working with research participants who belong to a marginalized group as there are power dynamics and relations which need to be considered. One of the most influential scholars in this area is Linda Smith. In her book *Decolonizing methodologies*, she sets out a number of questions for the researcher and their research design. Smith’s questions include: Who owns the research? Who does it? Who does it serve? How will its result be disseminated? (Smith, 1999, 10–16). Such questions are fundamental for a feminist and decolonial approach to research and can only be answered through reflexivity. This involves critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, researcher accountability during data collection, interpretation, and representation as well as self-reflection throughout (Jones; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata in Sultana, 2007, 3). The upcoming chapter will be focused on these questions and approaches.

The following chapter outlines the key methods and methodology that I employed for my research of transnational feminist solidarity by interviewing transnational, feminist activist groups in Vienna. Firstly, I will present the research design with its different stages and approaches, followed by the description of a feminist research ethic which is the core of my research approach and the base on which I created the research design. The section about feminist ethics according to Ackerly and True’s conception (2010) will include reflections on my own research and research design. Finally, I will discuss the idea and usage of an ethnographical diary.

### 2.1. Research design

In creating a feminist research design, I decided to use a circular research process, which is non-linear and sensitive to dynamics (Ackerly & True, 2010, 45). The research design is built around the central research question: How do transnational, feminist groups in Vienna practice solidarity and what challenges and limitations do they face?

**Open-source and data security**

As I am writing about solidarity, (in)equity, power relations and positioning, I needed to consider which programs, methods, and tools to use for my thesis. I decided to only use open-source-software. The idea behind open-source-software is that it is accessible to everyone. A core advantage is that everybody who is using this software is part of the open-source community and able to help improve the software, make changes and be able to track who wrote the software and to see the code. Consequently, everybody can assure themselves that there are no hidden
trackers, add-ons, etc. and that their information and data is safe and secure. I chose to work on
an Ubuntu environment with LibreOffice as a writing application. I did the transcribing with easy-
transcript, the analyzing with qualCoder, and I used Zotero as a citation database and manager. All
of this software is open-source and has a high level of data security through only saving data on
your device without sharing or syncing it online.

Sampling
The research is based on a case study of transnational feminist groups in Vienna (Ackerly & True,
2010, 152). I chose this specific case for a number of reasons. Due to my own engagement in
feminist activism, it made sense for me to both utilize and deepen my knowledge in this area on a
scientific level. I selected Austria due to my own location and Vienna because it has a big variety
and history of feminist movements and groups, with more diverse groups and approaches. In
Salzburg, Innsbruck, and Graz – the other bigger cities in Austria – there are only one or two
groups that would fit into my sampling. Another reason that I did not select Graz was because I am
too entangled in the feminist scene, groups, and politics there, and it would be hard to keep my
private and political conversations separate from research-based situations.

For the case study I aimed to find groups that define themselves as feminist activists, do
transnational solidarity work, and are politically left and autonomous, with a variety of identity
markers (sex, class, race, gender) and approaches. I chose the sample carefully and purposefully
to be able to focus on the particular case of transnational feminist groups in Vienna (Ackerly &
True, 2010, 154-156). Through personal contacts, social media and email, I reached out to twelve
groups in total, which could be seen as a convenient selection indicating the limitations of the
sample, which will be discussed later. I also used my position as a gatekeeper to get access to the
groups, which I was unsure about at first. I heard back from ten of them. One group responded too
late due to the summer break, two groups did not have any resources and were on a summer
break and one group wrote that they are currently not active and therefore do not want to
participate. Nevertheless, six transnational, feminist groups in Vienna wanted to participate: Alerta
feminista Austria, FEM AG of the Plattform Radikale Linke, Kollektiv lauter, ciocia wienia, chile
desperto and Tekojin. After the first contact, I clarified any further questions (time, language, online/
offline, security, etc.) through casual communication with them and offered the possibility of setting
up a call before the interview. Two participants took me up on the offer, and it already created a
common ground and developed trust prior to the interviews.

As mentioned above, there are limitations to this sample and the case study as a whole. One is
that it is a very small and quite specific sample compared to the variety of transnational feminist
groups in Austria and especially globally (Ackerly & True, 2010, 159). Each group needed to have
the time to be interviewed, and be interested to speak to me as an outsider. Another limitation was
the language. I was only able to reach out to groups who are speaking English, German, or
Spanish in the interview as I did not have time neither resources to engage translators for other languages. Additionally, I only interviewed one or two people from each group and some questions were personal, it is not possible to say that each interview is representative of the entire group. Nonetheless, I do believe that it is a good sample for an initial inquiry and research on this topic and in this location.

Sensory interviewing

Feminist, anthropological, postcolonial and affect studies focus on a more complex understanding of interviews by considering power relations, as well as the “emotional and relational dimensions of the interview process. Rather than neglecting, avoiding or “controlling” [of] moments of affective attunement as potentially disturbing factors” (Gould in Ayata et al., 2019, 60-65). This allows for the inclusion of embodiments, intensities, and dissonances of the interviewing process that relate both to the interviewer and participants within the research. This means that feelings and emotions also have to be considered. Thus, interviews are understood as affective encounters themselves and therefore have an affect on the relationship between interviewer and participants and their temporal, spatial and emotional context. Emotions are mostly showed in three types: "stating them; using stories or anecdotes to explain their feelings; indicate feelings through their actions and bodily expressions" (Ayata et al., 2019, 70). bell hooks also points out that it “humanizes both the researcher and the interviewee” and empowers the participant by “Allowing people to “talk back” [and thus] gives a voice through interviews to those who have been silenced” (hooks, 2015, 26). The possibility of the proactive engagement of the participants and their control of what is said, is an important aspect of my research design. Additionally, taking emotions into account also creates a place from which the researcher can better understand how the participant experiences their world and offers a means of understanding the interview encounter as a place-event (Pink, 2013, 91). This feminist approach also stresses the need for researchers to be reflexive about their own emotions and feelings, which I did through writing an ethnographical diary, which will be explained in the next section (Pink, 2013, 84). To summarize, emotion and affect based tools are important while conducting an interview and require a reflective and flexible approach by the researcher. Unfortunately, this perspective and frame is limited in my research and analysis due to the slender frame of a master thesis.

Considering the above, I carefully designed a semi-structured questionnaire with a narrative focus and open-end-questions (Ackerly & True, 2010, 168). Some questions arose whilst reading and writing the theoretical chapter for this thesis. This form of interview can take a lot of time depending on how forthcoming the interview participants are. All my interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and in some cases they could have been even longer if I hadn’t navigated the interview back to the initial questions. The timing in an interview is crucial and the semi-structured
questionnaire allowed me to be more flexible and to move the questions around depending on the flow of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews also create a more conversational atmosphere, both for me as the researcher and the interview participants. Likewise, I picked the semi-structured interview as a form of in-depth interview, which made it possible to get a more profound insight into their solidarity work. Additionally, the form contributes to a guided focus, but at the same time creates the possibility for the interview participants to give answers that do not conform to the researchers’ (known or unknown) expectations (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.169). This happened a couple of times when the participants started to describe their own motivation for their work as well as their understanding of solidarity.

The interview was structured into three parts plus an intro and outro. The intro was to introduce myself, my position, my research, and the structure of the interview. I also asked for permission to record the interview but with the clarification that they could stop at any given time or later erase parts of the interview. The first part was about getting to know the person, their group, and their activism. It was an open invitation to share the information that they wanted to share, and I mostly only asked questions to clarify things. Besides, gathering basic data I used this section to build trust, recognize shared interests and to establish rapport (Ackerly & True, 2010, 169). After the first couple of minutes, which were often a bit tense, the participants started to talk more fluently and openly, which continued throughout the interview, despite the challenging topics.

The second part was about describing and sharing their understanding of solidarity and the importance of it for and within their work. It was a mix between standard and later on more reflective questions. The third section was the more private, challenging and emotional part, as it was dealing with the limitations of solidarity work. Firstly, on a more theoretical level and then based on their own experiences. A couple of times it was quite silent for a minute or two as the participants needed to think and probably evaluate what they wanted to say and could share (Ackerly & True, 2010, 169). Through keeping a calm interview setting and due to the trust-building beforehand, imaginative and personal responses were formulated by the interview participants. I also started the third section with the words: “Every relationship is embedded by power relations and hierarchies, which are also part of political solidarity work and relationships.” I did that to set a frame for the following questions to assure the participants that I would not judge their struggles or problems within their groups, relationships, or work (Ackerly & True, 2010, 170). In one interview the participant started to cry as a reaction towards the question about power relations, as she had previously a bad experience with that topic. Nevertheless, the person decided to continue to share the experience and also the process of healing from these events later on.

The outro gave participants the possibility to ask questions, add anything that they weren’t able to say before and also to share an insight or learning experience that they would like to share with other transnational feminist groups. This made it possible to end the interview on a positive note. At
the end of the interview I also explained that I would send the transcription to them and that they could proofread it and then send it back to me. I also offered to send them printed versions of the zine if they wished.

In total, I conducted eight interviews with nine different participants. All but one of the interviews were online and all were one-on-one interviews except one. One person preferred to talk in English, the other participants preferred German with some words in Spanish or Kurdish (I am not sure about the specific dialect), which were always accompanied by a direct translation by the participants or me. Before the interviews, I revisited the questionnaire a couple of times, had two test runs, discussed it with my supervisors and made some changes to it. I also concretized some questions after the first couple of interviews and added a question about the shared learning experience. (Re-)creating the questionnaire was an ongoing and circular process which required constant reflection on my part.

Transcribing
I transcribed the audio manually with the program easy-transcript. I did not correct any grammatical errors, instead I left them and also translated them as such into English in the citations. As promised, I then sent the finished transcripts to the interview participants so that they would have another possibility to talk back (hooks, 2015) and correct any mistakes, defusions, misunderstandings or withdraw any information they later decided to not share, re-frame or re-word. The participants had two weeks to send me their comments and I received feedback from all nine participants. Most of them were minor mistakes like the misspelling of names. Two groups changed some of their wording and one group decided to delete a small section as it would reveal too much about the structure of their group. After editing the comments I continued to analyze and evaluate the data.

Data analyzing
I used content analysis to analyze the interviews. Content analysis is increasingly used for exploratory and explanatory research as well as in feminist research, but has historically been used in descriptive research (Ackerly & True, 2010, 191). I decided to use it in order to identify patterns within the data as well as links between them. I was following a deductive approach to form categories. Hence, I coded the interviews and created a first structure based on the outline of the research question. According to Ackerly and True (2010, 180) I split the research question into three parts: How do groups do transnational feminist solidarity work? What challenges and limitations do they face? And what tools do they use or suggest to be attentive to these challenges? After the first cycle of coding all interviews, I used the graph function of qualcoder. This function visualizes all codes and categories in the form of a mind-ma As I am a visual person it was quite helpful for me. I rearranged the categories and codes, added new ones, drew lines
between codes to visualize their interdependency, colored them differently and wrote memos about each category and subcategory. Thereby, a coding structure formed and I discovered three main categories: situating transnational feminist solidarity, challenges and limitations, and tools to be attentive. Going back to the data, I recoded the data and filled each category and subcategory with more codes. During the writing process, I rearranged some codes again and, in the end, the coding system displayed in the image below was formed. The boxes with black background are the main categories and the boxes with a grey background are the different codes.

**Figure 1: Mind-map of codes**

Furthermore, I not only used the structured coding system for my analysis, but also created a heat-map through qualcoder, which visualized the frequency of the codes in each interview and made it possible to see (dis-)connections easily as well as providing an overview of which codes might be important. I also used the visual tool of charts to see how the codes were split between the
different categories and subcategories. I used a sunbeam chart as it puts the data into relation with each other. Moreover, I engaged not only in data collection, but also in an implicit analysis, as I was in direct contact and conversation with the interview participants. I was interested in their understandings and in comparing their analysis to existing theories. I analyzed the comments of the participants in terms of the theoretical framework of my research and, as described in the feminist ethics chapter, it was important to me to co-produce the data with the interview participants by engaging them and perceiving them as experts in their field (Ackerly & True, 2010, 179).

Nevertheless, as I wrote the theoretical chapter I learnt about and emphasized certain theories, concepts and problems, which unconsciously created some hypotheses, like the constant issue of power-relations between different positions within solidarity-based relationships. It is common to notice evidence for and against these hypotheses during the research process (Ackerly & True, 2010, 181). I am aware that I cannot know the sum total of those findings and prejudgments but, through using a feminist research ethic and practicing reflexivity, I believe I did the best to my ability.

Presentation of outcome and sharing knowledge

On the one hand I wrote a conclusion of my findings from my analysis and put them into the context of the theoretical framework that I described before in form of an academic text. And on the other, I followed the idea of Pranee Liamputtong and other decolonial scholars who encourage students and other scholars to publish and present the outcomes of their work in different forms such as poetry, art, (non-)fiction books, etc. and not only in academic writing (Liamputtong, 2010, 122). Taking on this challenge and also to share the gathered knowledge and outcome of my master thesis, I decided on publishing a zine besides my thesis. Zines are “a range of small-batch, DIY “magazine-like” publications” (The Bindery, 2020). They are an established tool within the political-left and feminist community to share and distribute knowledge and experiences outside the capitalist system on a low-budget with simple tools. A key element is their being easy and free to access as well as their accessible language and a bottom-up and insider perspective on the discussed topic. Their appearance is simple, but their content can be a mash-up of art, letters, stories, and emotions. Most of the time they are also published under creative commons and therefore everybody can duplicate and reprint them. Because there is no need for an explicit author or publisher, a zine is a safe and independent platform for the expressions of underrepresented and marginalized voices (ZineWiki, 2021).

The zine bares the same name as the master thesis. The text was composed by me and the design and the graphics were done by Ren Aldridge – a feminist comrade, artist, and friend. I also asked different feminist activists if they wanted to contribute something to the zine. Some sent me song lyrics, poetry, art, some thoughts, etc.. It was interesting to see what connections other
people draw when thinking about transnational feminist solidarity. I also included passages from
the interviews and other texts from my thesis. Due to the contributions it became quite a
collaborative process, which I enjoyed. The printing and designing of the zine was financially
supported by the Rosa-Luxembourg Foundation in Germany and the Alternative Referat of the ÖH
of the Karl-Franzens University in Graz. Both did not change anything or have any say in the
content. Due to the cooperation, the printing needed to be done at the ÖH printing service, which is
local but would not be regarded as a feminist, decolonial or critical organization. The zines are for
free but there is a written request to donate if possible to the groups that participated in the
research because without them this zine would not be possible.
The zines will be distributed to the interview participants who all wanted to receive a couple of
copies, as well as to a variety of political-left information shops, events, groups and on webpages
on which zines are shared like zinewiki.com or wemakezines.com.

2.2. Feminist Ethics

The following reflections are within the framework of a feminist ethic, which I used as the starting
point and origin of my research. For that I followed Ackerly and True’s (2010, 20-40) as well as
Linda Smith’s (1999) leading questions: attentiveness to power, boundaries of inclusion and
exclusion, relationships, sharing knowledge and committing to self-reflection.

Attentiveness to power in the research design
In the last two decades, feminist researchers have been becoming more attentive to the politics of
knowledge production, epistemology, and processes of research. They are becoming increasingly
analytical and reflexive about their fieldwork and research processes, challenging pre-given
categories and narratives, and being sensitive to power, knowledge, and context (England; Katz;
Hurd; Moss in Sultana, 2007, 4).

Epistemology lays the groundwork on which research is based. It decides which theories, literature
and narratives we value and use; what we understand as true; which voices of researchers we
listen to and amplify. For my thesis I decided to follow a feminist and decolonial epistemology. This
means questioning the “western dualistic understandings of rationality, reason, and the mind set
against irrationality, emotion, and the body. Postcolonial scholars argue that western cultural
conceptions pervade our attempts to know, which posit an autonomous knowing subject
counterposed to an other to be known” (Ackerly & True, 2010, 27). This includes not only the
rejection of associations such as oriental or exotic, but also dichotomous categories of analysis. I
do this through working with literature, concepts, and theories mostly written by women, inter, trans
and non-binary people who are situated within marginalized groups or/ and non-dominant
countries. I use the term of *dominant* and *non-dominant/ dependent* countries\(^1\) in accordance with Franz Fanon to show how the effect of colonialism, imperialism and Neo-liberalism has manifested itself (2004). He argues that the so-called *centers* and *peripheries* (Wallerstein, 1974) are created by power imbalances between different countries and are based on the *dominant* countries who have been exploiting and making the other/ *non-dominant* countries dependent on them, for example, financially. This imbalance leads to a dominant position regarding knowledge, power of definition, world views, etc. and is reinforced through the continuum of power relations. Fanon also emphasizes that without the non-dominating countries the dominating countries could not exist. According to Fanon’s opinion, this holds a revolutionary potential to break with the given structures. This idea of dependency was further expanded by some scholars including Amina Mama (1995) and Judith Butler (2006) who focus not only on the interdependence between countries but also on people, their movements, lives and everything that they produce. This understanding of the world as interconnected with interwoven power relations is also a fundamental part of the epistemology I use and will be further examined in the section on *attentiveness to relationships*.

Another point regarding power within the research design is to critically examine the process of the research and ask: who does it serve, and who has designed it (Pink, 2013, 175)? Hence, I asked transnational feminist groups before the start of my research what challenges they face, what topics they are interested in and if they thought my research question could be useful for them. Through interacting with feminist activists from the beginning on, I wanted to include them and their ideas in the process and counteract a hierarchical research and knowledge model.

The decolonial perspective also puts importance on accountability (Smith, 1999, 12). Through engaging with the feminist, transnational groups I feel responsible to them, myself, my supervisor and also to the academic community, especially to the people who researched in this area before and whose theories, knowledge, and concepts I am able to work with.

**Attentiveness to boundaries of inclusion and exclusion**

Following Ackerly and True, the core of a feminist research ethic is to focus awareness on the way humanly-constructed boundaries can lead to marginalization, exclusion and silencing in the research process. “It reminds us that boundaries are an inevitable part of knowledge-creation but that, as feminist-informed scholars, we need to be conscious of and take responsibility for their intended and unintended effects” (Ackerly & True, 2010, 31).

By committing to an intersectional perspective, I carefully chose the sample and tried to include different identity markers such as gender, race, sex, religion, ages and cultural backgrounds including class. Despite this, I was confronted with boundaries as I used my position as a gatekeeper to the feminist movement in Vienna to get into contact with different groups. I mostly

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\(^1\) The concept of *dominating/dominated* as Fanon writes to explain the power dynamic can also be applied to continents, classes, societies, etc.
established contact with groups and people within a radical left feminist scene, which is quite specific. To widen the range, I contacted different groups via social media or e-mail. This held the expectation that the groups would have a public social media representation, which requires resources, especially time, and therefore excludes certain groups.

Another very evident limit of the research is the small number of interviews I did (8). It therefore does not represent the entire movement or even the interviewed groups particularly well, as I mostly only interviewed one to two people per group. In addition, I asked myself how I can represent the interview participants as justly as possible. Through, my own status as simultaneously both an insider – as a feminist activist in Austria and an outsider – due to geography, culture, engagement, etc., I was often torn about it. I will expand on this later in the section on the use of an Ethnographical diary.

To break down the boundary between myself as the researcher and the participants, I tried to include them and other feminist activists in the research by reflecting on it together. The participants proofread the transcripts and pointed out certain absences or silences within my research. This meant engaging the subjects of the research as participants in the project, rather than as the objects of an experiment (Pink, 2013, 60). In challenging myself to write “‘with’ rather than ‘about’” (Sultana, 2007, 2) I tried to establish a participative/collaborative research process to decrease problems with regard to marginalization, essentialism, etc.. This was not always easy and sometimes even difficult, especially when I was confronted with other views, experiences and theoretical approaches. Reflecting on it now, I am glad that the participants felt safe enough in the interaction with me to address and share these differences. Closely connected, is my relation(ships) to and with the participants, which will be further examined in the following.

Attentiveness to relationships

As described above, I wanted to emphasize non-hierarchical interactions, understanding, and mutual learning with the participants and therefore close attention needed to be paid to how the research questions and methods of data collection could be embedded in unequal power relations between the researcher and research participants (Jones in Ackerly & True, 2010, 32). Accordingly, I used the term research/interview participants and not interview/research subject as they are humans who are part of my research but had and have their own life, struggles, work, etc. outside the small amount of time of the interview and the case study they decided to participate in. I wanted to avoid objectifying them, which is as a process of dehumanization and imperialism (Smith, 1999, 41). Additionally, I understand the participants as experts in their fields of activism.

By asking in advance and at the beginning of the interview what they needed to feel well as participants, I wanted to be attentive towards the impact my research might have on them. Especially, as some of them belong to marginalized groups, which have been research objects within numerous types of research before. One important aspect, for example, was security due to
the political repression some might be confronted with because of their activism. Therefore, I chose a video tool which would directly save all the data on my computer and not online. I also anonymized all the data and asked them and their groups if it is okay to use their group names and how they would like to be described.

Furthermore, it is significant to me to mention the collaborations, connections, and feeling of solidarity that I experienced during my research process, which lots of scholars are sadly not commenting on (Sultana, 2007, 8). Even though I initiated the contact and organized the interviews, it felt like a mutual learning process and the participants spoke positively about the possibility to reflect on their work and to be able to share it. Without the shared knowledge and ideas of the participants the research would not have been possible, and the established relationships were essential for that. Through actively engaging the participants by giving them the opportunity to proofread the transcripts, share ideas about the zine or other forms of knowledge sharing, I tried to lift up their voices as good as possible within this quiet narrow form of a master thesis. I was careful not to raise any hopes of future collaborations such as actions, campaigns, etc. and was instead clear about my position as a researcher for my master thesis.

Researching about people, and in this case their political views towards solidarity and their activism, always runs the risk of being invasive, as researchers ask private and personal questions. Hence, I tried to be sensitive and offered to stop the interview and the recording at any given time and give them the possibility to proofread the transcripts and if needed clarify or make changes so that they are in charge of their own words and to prevent any kind of misunderstanding. Some conversation became quite intimate for example when one participant talked about the femicide of a good friend and how she needed to take care of her daughter. I recognized that it is not always possible to maintain an ethical level of detachment from personal ties in the research context (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 84). This was a reason why I chose to interview transnational, feminist groups in Vienna and not in Graz, as I would have been too emotionally and personally engaged with the participants there. I also only selected participants who I did not have a personal relationship to or who I just knew a little so that I would not be in the position to (un-)consciously use the background data about them that I previously gained as a comrade or a friend.

Another relationship which affected my research was the one with my two supervisors (Ackerly & True, 2010, 36). I was thrilled to have them as supervisors as they are both accustomed to the research field and topic. When I asked for guidance or help I always got a quick answer and support. This especially helped me in the beginning to frame and clarify my research question. Also, their critique and reflections concerning ethics in my research approach helped me to be a lot more sensitive and thoughtful towards it.
Attentiveness to sharing knowledge

This section is based on Linda Smith's (1999: 16) and Sarah Pink's (2013, 176) ideas regarding the importance of disseminating knowledge, reporting back and the principle of reciprocity. From the beginning of the research, this was a major question for me as I didn’t want to just absorb the knowledge of the groups, convert it into a master thesis and then let it gather dust in a library. Realistically, I am the person who benefits the most of my research as I will receive my master’s degree due to it. But I nonetheless wanted to use the data and give it back to the interviewed groups in a way that was more accessible than an academic text. In the political left-wing tradition, I decided to produce a zine which explains the outcome of my research in a more approachable language, to be distributed for free. Additionally, I also asked the interview participants at the end of the conversations if they wanted to receive these zines, contribute to them or if they have any other ideas on how to share the outcome. Some asked if they could get the finished thesis and if they could contact me regarding it later if something came up I agreed to both, as sharing knowledge is a long-term commitment for me and does not end with the end of my research. Additionally, I strongly believe that research should not be patented like medical innovations but should be open, approachable, and accessible to everybody who wants to engage in it. Knowledge is power and through sharing it, it contributes to breaking the binaries and hierarchies regarding power structures within movements, academia and in society.

Commitment to self-reflection regarding my relationship with the generated data

My choice of research topic came about as a result of my preexisting networks and contacts. My position is very much that of an insider, as I am part of the feminist activist community in Austria. This position meant that it was sometimes hard during the interviews to separate my political activism from my research. Therefore, introspection became an important part of my work, reflecting on the apparent tension between the roles of the classical “detached and objective observer” (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 83) and the engaged participant. As outlined above, I was neither detached from nor objective towards the topic due to my own experience and positioning, but finding the balance between insider and outsider was more challenging than I anticipated. At the beginning of the fieldwork/ interviews, I tried to keep some distance from the participants. I only revealed necessary information about myself and nothing more. But during the interview process, I began to feel that I should not eliminate this advantage of being an insider and gatekeeper to the feminist activist community, but use it for a holistic approach towards the research whilst reflecting on it. Using my holistic self in the research was not only a rewarding social experience but, is increasingly acknowledged among social researchers as a legitimate scholarly approach (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 92). Thus, sometimes it was necessary to disclose some information about myself and my own activism to break the ice with the interview participants.
In the first contact with the groups and later in the interviews I introduced myself as a MA student who is writing their thesis about solidarity within transnational feminist groups. At the same time I also mentioned that I am a feminist activist myself and used my gate-keeping position to get in contact with the participants in the first place. The participants also reported that this often made it easier for them to talk to me. The insider status was not only recognized from an academic point of view but more importantly it was also recognized by the community itself (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 87). My insider status was primarily based on networks, contacts, shared political views and to a certain extent a quite specific understanding of feminist and political left subculture, wording, etc.. My age and gender also fitted with an insider status in all groups, as well as my educational background as most of the participants had completed a sort of higher education. But the eight different groups that I interviewed were not homogenous. Three quarters of the participants had a non-Austrian or German background and were often quite engaged in their communities based on their cultural background, which often also played an important role in their way of practicing and living their activism. In this case I felt like and am an outsider due to my German background and could only try to understand. I also had an outsider perspective, as I do not live in Vienna and only partiality knew what was going on in the feminist scene there. Furthermore, I was not part of any of the different groups and thus only had an insight through what they chose to share with me. Despite these differences, I did not encounter a sense of emotional distance. Those who allowed me to interview them seemed happy to share their stories and experiences and often thanked me afterwards for listening and asking reflexive questions.

I generally embraced the role of half researcher/ activist but at times I wondered if I was mis-using this position or even being manipulative, as they trusted me with more details and more private stories than they probably would have with a complete outsider-researcher. I tried to be as transparent as possible about my position, but later while transcribing the interviews, I noticed that there were occasions when the interviews were more intimate and emotional than I remembered experiencing them. A key example is one situation when I was addressing the issue of power relations within groups, with a participant that I knew was previously in a group where there had been enormous problems around this topic, which led a part of the group to split off and write a comunicado to openly address the situation. The participant started to cry and described in detail what happened (which they later deleted whilst proofreading the interview) and what they learnt from it. I was overwhelmed and questioned whether I was in the position to comfort her (as a comrade) or to just be there and listen (as an observer). As a social being and a trained social worker and counselor, I decided to comfort and hold space for her emotions in the given circumstances. It is slippery ground showing empathy towards participants without becoming too emotionally attached.

Furthermore, it can be difficult to both not extrapolate my own experience too liberally, nor accept the biases that I share with the participants as objective truth. As Abu-Lughod observes, the
problem with being a *native anthropologist* can be one of gaining sufficient distance (in Colic-Peisker, 2004, 90). The *native anthropologist* must be able to resolve, in their own way, “the messy tangle of contradictions and uncertainties surrounding the interrelations of personal experience, personal narrative, scientism, and professionalism in ethnographic writing” (Pratt in Colic-Peisker, 2004, 91).

The question of when and in what sense am I an *insider* or *outsider* towards the participants of my research varies in different circumstances and situations. Kerin Narayan argues “that because a culture is not homogenous, a society is differentiated, and a professional identity that involves problematizing lived reality inevitably creates a distance” (1993, 671) and concludes that the extent to which anyone is an *authentic insider* is questionable. Keeping that in mind and as argued above I believe that I am an *insider* and *outsider* in different situations within my research.

Samantha Punch notes that, “while it is important to reflect on our role as social researchers, we also need to be wary of the dangers of extreme self-consciousness” and further proposes “a kind of self-awareness that recognizes the subtle but important difference between constantly reflecting on one’s limitations and responsibility, and being paralyzed by them” (2012, 91). Following the above, my status as both an *insider* and *outsider* — part of the researched group and simultaneously distanced from it — was a specific source of awkwardness at times for me. Throughout my research I felt that I had to be extra aware of my positionality and cautious about my methods, especially as my own autobiography is quite similar to two of the participants. However, in accordance with Clifford, I nonetheless argue for a self-aware partiality. In spite of the limited power held by a master thesis, I believe that by listening and sharing the gathered knowledge and output, I can reciprocate something to the feminist activist community, even as I objectified it through, or subjected it to my form of social analysis. I also believe that, as an insider and outsider, I was better suited to do the job than a complete stranger would have been (Colic-Peisker, 2004, 94). Thus transparent and continual reflection on my position is key.

### 2.3. Ethnographical diary

Before, and during my field work I was confronted with two problems regarding the situation and circumstances around the fieldwork. One is that research is socially constructed and never objective. The idea that (ethnographic) research is by nature subjective and requires the researcher to reflect on their own role in the production of knowledge is by now a widely accepted paradigm (Pink, 2013, 55). Knowledge is generated in a particular place at a specific point in time, which in my case was mostly in online settings during the interviews (Punch, 2012, 87). I did not have the possibility to meet the people in their environment, in their political groups or on a demonstration, etc.. Therefore, it was an artificial setting. As a result the gathered knowledge is only partial and specifically situated which I want to be transparent about.
The second problem was, that the researchers’ emotions and socialization affects the process of fieldwork and knowledge production, as it is impossible for the researcher to “tuck away the personal behind the professional, because fieldwork is personal” (Rose in Punch, 2012, 86). This was sometimes especially hard for me as I was an insider, as a feminist activist myself, but on the other hand was also not part of that specific group and only there to observe. Due to these challenges and the idea to somehow incorporate these feelings, emotions, and struggles that emerge before, during and after the fieldwork, I decided to write an ethnographical diary. Field diaries are a great tool to enhance the process of reflexivity, positionality and the place of emotions in fieldwork (Punch, 2012, 88). Whilst conducting the fieldwork it is hard to recognize the level of emotional and personal engagement, and writing a field diary encouraged me to systematically and critically reflect on these topics. As participants are open up and become vulnerable when researchers ask them to reveal their emotions and insights, it is only fair to do the same as a researcher. Parr and Letherby illustrate that by unveiling their own vulnerability as researchers, valuable insights can be gained (Punch, 2012, 91). After completing the interviews, I coded my field diaries into three categories: insecurity, emotions and process, so that I was able to later include the recordings in the process of analyzing of the generated data. Reflecting on my own challenges on the topic of solidarity and feminist activism encouraged me to ask about the challenges of my participants and to ask questions which I had not originally considered, but that came into my mind during or after the interviews. A couple of times, I wrote that I was unsure if I had asked the right question, if I had navigated the interview well or if the generated data would help me with my research question. I felt not only a personal but also an academic pressure and often thought about what my supervisor would be thinking about it. Due to the fact that I intended to create a zine from the outcome of my thesis, which all the participants articulated that they were looking forward to, I also started to feel pressure to do them justice and to be careful and sensible with their information. Another concern that I had from the beginning was: what do the people who I interviewed get out of my research? I had the feeling I owe them so much, and I was so grateful about their trust in me and the time they took. I tried to frame the questionnaire so that it could be a reflection on their own activism for themselves, as well as a platform to share their ideas, struggles, and activism through the zine, which might also be useful for them, their groups and the movement as a whole. I believe that these relationships were built on mutual trust and reciprocity, but I always asked myself if I had done enough or if there was anything more I could do? Keeping a field diary was a useful way for me to document “the unexpected and unanticipated, the difficult and awkward, the messy and complex” (Punch, 2012, 90) and to understand that they are an integral part of the fieldwork process.
It was important for me to take a fair amount of time to think about my ethics regarding my thesis and also my epistemology and how I could put it into practice in the research design. The leading questions of Linda Smith and True and Ackerly were enormously helpful, as were discussions with my supervisors and peers, as it was the first time that I have needed to be that aware of my ethics and approaches in my research. The field diary was a great tool for me for constant reflection during the research and whilst writing the thesis. As described above I am aware of my limitations, but I do believe that I did as much as possible within my research design, to be attentive to power relations, my own positioning, limitations and exclusions and disseminating the results. In particular, I believe that my status as both an insider and an outsider at the same time created the possibility for me to have an in-depth understanding of, and gain contact to, the transnational feminist groups.

Having presented the research design and its feminist ethic, in the following chapter I will introduce the framework and discussion in which transnational feminist solidarity is embedded. It also contains a variety of different conceptualizations of the notion of solidarity.
3. Transnational feminist solidarity – a theoretical approach

This chapter focuses on the theoretical conceptualization of transnational feminist solidarity. The first part presents the framework in which transnational feminist solidarity is discussed and the associated problems. It involves the idea of cosmopolitanism, the role of empathy, and responsibility as well as protests as political areas. The second part of the chapter is centered around the notion of solidarity and introduces four different approaches including the previously discussed challenges of defining transnational feminist solidarity.

3.1. Frame of transnational feminist solidarity

Powerful actors, organizations, and nation states are increasingly expected to be ethically responsible for vulnerable sectors of the world population within the growing context of global interdependence. At first glance, the demand on transnational elites to act beyond a narrow, territorially-based understanding of self-interest to protect victims of injustice and to be in solidarity with them seems persuasive. However, given the West's long and violent history of colonial intervention, current attempts to act on behalf of distant others often invoke suspicion and distrust. This reinforces euro-centric supremacism and paternalism (Dhawan, 2020, 1).

With regard to feminist movements, there is a need to move beyond previous ideas of global sisterhood and evolve a more transnational and intersectional focus. To accomplish this, transnational feminist solidarity needs to be placed in an adequate framework. Through both the interview process and reading around the topic, I identified four major recurrent concepts. The first, was the idea of responsibility, which has a long historical component and is closely connected to (neo-)colonial power relations. The second concept was cosmopolitanism, which is frequently used by scholars as a starting point for discussions about transnationalism. Nevertheless, the key limitation of the concept is that it bares the assumption that everybody is (already) equal within in society and neglects fundamental global hierarchies. The role of empathy was the third concept that I encountered recurrently. Discussions about empathy focused on how people approach and think about others and their solidarity work. A key limitation of empathy without appropriate reflection within the context of solidarity work, is that it can lead to a paternalistic view. Lastly, it also became important to look at where transnational feminist solidarity is shown. In the context of this research, because of my decision to interview activist groups, it is located in protests, and it is therefore necessary to critically analyze protests as political areas. These four different aspects will be discussed in the following to develop a framework in which transnational feminist solidarity can be understood.
3.1.1. The role of cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism describes the idea that everybody is equally part of the global world and has the ability to engage in it as a global citizen in a united and universal world. There are a number of problems with this concept.

Firstly, there is a concern with the word itself. The original meaning and usage of the word is from German, anti-semitic discourse. The rootless Jew was seen as a cosmopolitan citizen from nowhere. In the 1930s, Lenin led an anti-cosmopolitan campaign specifically aimed against Jews as rootless cosmopolitans or cosmopolitans without a homeland. This implied that cosmopolitanism was necessarily anti-patriotic. This is by no means a historic problem, just last year UK politician Theresa May stated: if you think you are citizen of the world then you are a citizen of nowhere, demonstrating a much more current disdain for cosmopolitanism (Dhawan, 2012).

Besides, the problematic epistemology of the word, cosmopolitanism also connects with other troublesome theories. In his theory of Weltrisikogesellschaft Ulrich Beck considers that the increasingly globally interdependent way of living faces “common threats to ecologies, finances and security, whereby any violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere” (Beck, 2008, 27). He suggests that the risks of globalization unite societies in their equal vulnerability and establishes a cosmopolitan moment. He writes that extreme threats to a global society open up questions of social accountability and responsibility, which cannot be adequately addressed by national politics or current international cooperation. Therefore, the action and engagement of International civil society protagonists is necessary for the implementation of cosmopolitan values to build a more just form of globalization (Beck, 2008, 28). Also promoting the idea of cosmopolitanism is Martha Nussbaum, who proposes the idea of cultivating humanity. She emphasizes the need to cultivate humanity in a complex, interlocking world and to imagine loyalties and solidarity beyond narrow groups and to instead consider the reality of distant lives (Nussbaum, 1997, 10).

Beck and Nussbaum enthusiastically support cosmopolitanism both as a solution against the threats of globalization (past and current) and as a promise to strive for more justice for all in the future. In their view, it is not necessary to question the global elite’s privileges to erase the continuities between neocolonialism, economic globalization and cosmopolitanism. Unfortunately, it is not that easy as this approach of cosmopolitanism ignores the complicity between “liberal cosmopolitan solidarity and the global domination structures it claims to resist” (Dhawan, 2020, 2). Furthermore, it needs to recognize the transnational alliances, which are part of global capitalism and imperialism such as transnational care chains.

Cosmopolitanism also fails to address the historical processes which led to some individuals being better positioned than others to engage in global solidarity and universal benevolence. Even
though Martha Nussbaum focuses on how people’s lives could improve, her framework for that improvement is problematic as it is focused on giving everybody a life as good as ours – a western subjective understanding of a good life (1997, 12). In doing so she neglects the interdependence between the well-off in the dominating societies whose lifestyle can only be because of the unequal relationship to the impoverished in the dominated societies. There also needs to be a development from recognizing the distant lives of others to an attempt to understand and see them as active and acting subjects.

Unlike, Nussbaum who believes in “cosmopolitanism’s self-correctional reflexivity,” Gayatri Spivak analyzes this cosmopolitan demand as a shift of perception from the white man’s burden to the burden of the fittest. This new interpretation of social Darwinism leads to a definition of the unfit as people who are not capable of helping and governing themselves. It hopes for a hierarchical connection between the people who are fit and can give help, aid, and solidarity and those who are only receivers. This highlights the historical continuities of violence and in particular a paternalistic view (Spivak in Shaikh, 2007, 177). Another issue is the expectations and conditions in which solidarity is offered. Politics of solidarity should not be bound to conditions on the person who receives the solidarity. Judgments as to whether they deserve it or whether they are an adequate object of solidarity or whether they react in an appropriate (expected) way towards the solidarity, also reinforce hierarchical relations.

In contrast to Spivak, Beck proposes that common vulnerabilities are bringing the global world together. But as Dhawan formulated: “though we may face the same storm, we are not all in the same boat, and this all the difference” (2020, 3). This sums up why the assumptions surrounding the idea of cosmopolitanism are problematic, especially when it comes to solidarity, transnational movements and activism. It is a dilemma that Robert Young sets out as: “If you participate you are, as it were, an Orientalist, but of course if you don’t, then you’re an Eurocentrist ignoring the problem” (in Dhawan, 2020, 4). Spivak adds, that it is not just participating that makes the person an Orientalist, but that certain forms of participation and engagement can be seen as orientalist. It needs more than a superficial, self-centered interest in the dominated societies and real solidarity means that “you can’t just be a revolutionary tourist and be the savior of the world on your days off” (Spivak, 2000, 110). She highlights the need for continuous reflection and effort for solidarity work and warns against romantic notions of unreflected solidarity.

As a result of the discourse on cosmopolitanism and its dilemmas, Sri Lankan feminist Malathi de Alwis raises the question whether “we are truly capable of empathizing with the pain of others. And if we should even be allowed to witness this pain when witnessing only serves to affirm our humanity and capacity to care” (in Dhawan 2020, 4). The next section will further focus on the emotions which arise before, during and after solidarity relations and motivations and will especially re-question the emotion of empathy.
3.1.2. The role of empathy

Emotions, and their impact, are tricky to define. With regard to solidarity, a variety of emotions can occur, like the urge to support, sympathy, empathy, pity, etc. Some of them can be an impression of solidarity, but it doesn’t mean that they necessarily are a form of solidarity. The desire to help and altruism are often part of the motivation for solidarity but are not constitutive for solidarity (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, 55). So what part do or should emotions play in regard to solidarity? Can a picture alone, for example, inspire us to show solidarity?

Pictures, objects, and encounters always have an affect on us when we encounter them. For example when we see a picture of a beaten up woman, we may feel sad, disturbed and even angry. But we do not only feel sad for the person but also sad about the pain the person is suffering. So we therefore make their feelings the object of our feelings. Such appropriations of emotions create asymmetrical power relations. Furthermore, it makes the subject (the woman in the picture and her feelings) into an object of the discourse in which the feelings and position of the viewer is at the center (Ahmed, 2004, 34).

Clare Hemmings, however, argues that empathy can be used as a bridge to relate to each other and to connect to another. She reasons that empathy can be the keystone for affective solidarity relationships. Through sharing emotions and experiences we can identify with each other and build a solidarity-based feminist movement (Hemmings, 2012). In contrast, Malathi de Alwis asks: can we truly relate to the pain of others and if so should we be allowed to do so? Why do we do it? She argues that through our own experience and positioning we are limited to fully relate with the pain of others. We can only understand and feel it to a certain extent, and it is pretentious and arrogant to believe that we can completely be empathetic towards people who are positioned utterly differently in comparison to us (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003, 220).

As it is possible to show empathy within certain limits, the following question is why we do it? Alwis argues that we might only do it to affirm our own humanity and capacity to care. This would imply that it is a self-centered motivation to be empathetic towards somebody or something and the only reason for doing is to reassure ourselves. By establishing an other across from us, we, as dominating subjects, are elevated by it into a position of power over others. We have the possibility to be empathetic towards the objects and through that we feel a sense of solidarity (in their perspective) for them and might act on it by donating money, for example (Ahmed, 2004, 35). This enables a hegemonic structure and assumes that the dominated objects need the help and support of the dominating subject to overcome their own pain. The so-called solidarity in this context actually is charity. Additionally, these western subjects often search for authentic victims and judge from an outside perspective if people deserve support, which enables a horrible power relation as well (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003, 223). This reinforces the very pattern of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering in the first place. Sara Ahmed concludes that “the
subject, in being moved by the other’s pain, even claims the other’s feeling as its own, a claim which is temporary, and which is passed over [by the idea of support to alleviate] the other’s suffering” (Ahmed, 2004, 36). Empathy not only leads to reassurance of the subject’s own humanity, but also contributes to the reinforcement of the social and exploitative structures of the world which cause the suffering to begin with.

Emotions and especially empathy play a big part when it comes to being affected and moved by something or someone. Empathy has the potential to let people feel interconnected with the world and motivate people to act, but it needs to be carefully reflected on, as it also has the potential to reinforce common power structures. It is always necessary to ask why or from which motivation we are doing certain things. Is it to make ourselves feel better in the face of the suffering in the world and around us? Or is our motivation and empathy based on the idea of breaking with the current matrix of domination, and therefore have we asked ourselves about our own complicity within that system? Closely connected to empathy is the feeling of responsibility, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

3.1.3. The role of responsibility

Both Beck and Nussbaum are referring to a sense of responsibility that they feel they have with regard to the world and the violations which are taking place in it, but the feeling of responsibility is a two-sided sword.

On one hand, it has been long overdue that people from dominating countries are stepping up and truly take responsibility for violations in the past, as well as the present. This awareness is good, but often it is not put into practice (enough) as it is an enormously difficult and a long process to unlearn your privileges (Spivak, 2011). From a feminist perspective, it is fundamental that white, well-positioned women within the feminist movement need to honestly reflect on their complicity “with white men as oppressors in the pretense of sharing power” (Shaikh, 2007, 184). In contrast to BIPOC feminists, white feminists have a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools (Lorde, 2021, 111). To build a transnational feminist movement it is then important to pay attention to, as Hannah Arendt writes, “not only what our enemies did but also what our friends did” (in Central European University, 2018).

On the other hand, responsibility has frequently been established as the basis of the white man’s burden and later, as Spivak writes, the burden of the fittest in the past (Dhawan, 2020, 2). Both approaches view responsibility as a burden that the rich, white, educated person needs to carry. It enables an asymmetric and violent structure between the people who feel responsible and the people they feel responsible for. In addition, it creates a lot of stigmas and stereotypes (they cannot take care of themselves), etc.. In this idea of the responsibility of people of dominating societies, it is often seen as something that they ought to do. And therefore the major factors that frequently
drive them are guilt and pity. Both are emotions which objectify and dehumanize, as well as patronize, the people they refer to (Shaikh, 2007, 175).

This idea of responsibility is embedded in an entire culture of generosity by rich countries. Examples are the support and help during tsunamis, hurricane Katrina, war in Iraq, Palestine, terror regime in Afghanistan, etc. It is a sort of recurrent litany of our responsibility. So the question arises: how can responsibility and the surrounding culture been defined differently? In Bengali, for example responsibility is called al-haq and can be translated so that responsibility is seen as a kind of birthright, rather than a sense of what one ought to do. This is a very different kind of basis for collectivity and a responsible culture (Shaikh, 2007, 179-180).

Charity and benevolence are often mistaken for solidarity and done under the banner of responsibility. In everyday language, benevolence suggests good-intentions and kindness towards others. Looking at it from a decolonial perspective however, the meaning shifts, and a brutal colonial narrative comes to light. Gayatri Spivak describes it as such “the benevolent subject’s desire to do good and to promote the happiness of others involves welcoming those others into his own understanding of the world, so that they too can be liberated and begin to inhabit a world that is the best of all possible worlds” (1990, 9). Thus, whilst benevolence is a desire to do good, it simultaneously imposes (on the recipient) a worldview of what is desirable. This worldview is not neutral but euro-centric and upholds broad historical and geopolitical inequalities across societies. Consequently, the use of the term benevolence embraces the notion of power inequalities. The benevolent person has the power to inflict a worldview and a hierarchical order in which they are superior in multiple and intersecting dimensions (Spivak, 1990, 19).

Shaikh follows this thought and writes that “benevolence is always colonial [because] you cannot fully unlearn your privilege” (2007, 183). It is therefore a continuity of neo-colonial structures and violence. At the same time as it is impossible to completely unlearn privilege, it is also unfair to assume that “the person below, as it were, knows what they should want. […] You don’t oppress people for centuries and then expect that their intelligence somehow remains unscathed.” (Shaikh, 2007, 184). It is also a hard and long process for the people below to unlearn these structures and imposed worldviews and views about themselves.

Keeping the above in mind, it is understandable that the term responsibility, the motivation behind it as well as its usage in the context of solidarity needs to be re-thought. It also makes it clear that charity and benevolence can never be solidarity as they are based on asymmetric and hegemonic relationships. The urge to help and save is problematic and needs to be closely reflected on, as does western complicity with Neo-liberal and patriarchal power relations.
3.1.4. Protests as political areas

In the context of activism and social movements, another valuable critique is made of the assumption that everybody approaches this work with the same positionality, resources and level of access. Lots of young, privileged people who are organizing and leading struggles and protests are empowered by doing so. Additionally, they frequently think it is their duty to save the world and “demonstrate solidarity with marginalized groups, veiling the fact that they are complicit in the very structures they are contesting” (Dhawan, 2020, 5).

At the same time, even though they are promoting horizontal solidarity, it regularly occurs that one group within the struggle is identified as the ones who are vulnerable and which need support. This creates a hierarchical relationship between the hegemonic and subordinated groups within a struggle (Central European University, 2018). Hence, subalternity becomes not merely defined by identity but also by relationality. This is underscored by the uneven access to organized political arenas. An example is the organizing of a demonstration, which in many countries needs to be done officially by a person who has a legal and country-specific citizenship. As a result, spaces of struggles and resistance which are operating in the terms of the state are producing exclusions and complicating the understanding of power, agency, and vulnerability (Dhawan, 2020, 6).

Therefore, the question arises whether these forms of resistance empower disenfranchised communities or simply reinforce the domination between those who act and those for whom these “colorful and lively uprisings and revolts are being staged” (Dhawan, 2020, 7).

Nikita Dhawan concludes that neither cosmopolitanism nor transnational solidarity alone can correct the deep asymmetries of power and wealth. There needs to be a bigger transnational commitment to fundamentally changing the Neo-liberal and capitalist structure, which enables the current power order (Central European University, 2018). The process of desubalternization and deconstructing hegemony is slow. Gayatri Spivak suggests that rather than solely teaching subalterns how to resist through political indoctrination or consciousness-raising, there needs to be focus on the privileged classes unlearning the impulse to monopolize agency in the name of saving the world, besides subalterns unlearning the underclass-related habit of obedience (Spivak, 2009).

Transnational feminist solidarities need to be embedded in an intersectional political framework that is aware of decolonial criticism and aims to overcome colonial impulses by means of strategic alliances, unlearning dominated or dominating positions as well as a continuous and patient process to change the constructed, historically and geopolitically situated power dynamics and hegemony. Therefore, it is essential to permanently re-question our collective understanding of solidarity and the connected motivations underpinning it, as we may effectively be searching “for ‘authentic victims’ who truly deserve our benevolence” (Alwis in Dhawan 2020, 4) or only want to make ourselves feel better. As discussed above this is problematic and should not be the center of solidarity. So what happens with our will to empower the vulnerable, and how can we be in contact
with those who refuse to be seen merely as objects of our solidarity? What can solidarity look like in response to the critique above? In the next chapter different approaches towards a notion of solidarity will be proposed.

### 3.2. The notion of Solidarity

Solidarity is a word that has been used a lot during the corona pandemic, but also before, especially in the transnational feminist movement. Phrases like global sisterhood, *united we stand*, etc. come to mind, but what do we mean by it? Which concepts, ideas and thoughts are connected to it, and what does it look like in practice? In the following I will introduce a couple of different perspectives on solidarity, after a short summary of the origin of the word solidarity and its meanings. All the presented concepts of solidarity are based on the understanding that solidarity is performative and needs to be actively produced and reproduced, as an activist practice as well as involving political will, desire, and agency. Below, I will outline four different ideas of solidarity: *Groundless solidarity* by Diane Elam, *solidarity as Beziehungsweisen (relational solidarity)* by Bini Adamczak, *political solidarity* by bell hooks and *solidarity of differences* by Audre Lorde. All these different approaches highlight different aspects of solidarity. They are all based on the understanding that solidarity is always embedded within power relations and hence can invoke certain political images, whether implicitly or explicitly (Conway et al., 2021, xvi).

### 3.2.1. A short genealogy of solidarity

In most literature, the term solidarity originates in the French Revolution and its slogan: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality, brotherhood). Bini Adamczak translates *fraternité* to *solidarité* (solidarity) which is less gender biased (Adamczak, 2022, 16:10). In the classic approach from Durkheim and others, the word solidarity is divided into four types: human solidarity, civic solidarity, social solidarity, emancipatory solidarity. This understanding of solidarity is closely tied with euro-centric modernity and is therefore quite problematic in terms of who is seen as a citizen or even a human being (Conway et al., 2021, xii). Civic solidarity goes back to the ancient Greeks. It was understood as a relation of reciprocity between citizens, but again here a citizen was defined as a male, Greek and free person. Therefore, women, children, refugees, slaves, etc. were not seen as citizens and hence excluded from any form of civic solidarity. Social solidarity can also be seen as mechanical solidarity based on sameness and produced through complex interdependence such as shared moral orientations. Emancipatory solidarity follows the Marxist view, that solidarity is a specific type of relationship established among workers who share similar conditions of exploitation and alienation. They experience the necessity of building solidarity and are developing a common consciousness of a common situation and shared future vision. Gramsci develops this idea further and writes about political alliances around shared interests and a
common political project which creates a counter-hegemonic block. However, this attempt at describing solidarity is not free from euro-centric thought. It is built on an egalitarian impulse, an understanding of universalism and does not take into account the existence and hegemonic relations within communities. It especially excludes marginalized groups. Likewise, it also fails to address modern European thought and its relation to colonialism, imperialism, etc. and its specific social ontology of race which puts non-white people outside political communities (Ahmed, 2006; Conway et al., 2021, xiii–xv).

All four types of classic interpretations of solidarity are euro-modernist elaborations of solidarity. They presume abstract equality (of humanity, of the citizen) and/or an organic interdependence, similarity (of position, of condition), and/or commonality (of adversary, interests, goals, and struggles). They neglect issues of dissimilarity, marginalization, and power within the political community that (supposedly) fuses in, around, or due to solidarity (Conway et al., 2021, xvi).

As outlined above, the classical European understanding of solidarity has immense difficulties in including everybody and integrating power relations. Therefore, I will introduce four more inclusive and non-eurocentric concepts of solidarity in the following.

3.2.2. Groundless solidarity

The starting point of this approach can already be found in the name. Groundless refers to the theoretical understanding that solidarity is not based on any common experience, belonging, or identities and that there is no necessity for shared political ideas. This is the first condition for groundless solidarity which Diane Elam suggests (2006, 120). She argues that collective solidarity depends on othering. This othering is a highly emotional process and always brings with it the danger that it results in an exclusive, aggressive form of solidarity such as that which black feminists experienced from the white, second wave feminists (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, 29).

Instead, groundless solidarity recognizes powerful differences and creates the impulse to unlearn one's own privileges instead of entangling them with ideas of universalism, individualization, or objectification.

The second condition refers to solidarity not being a barter deal. Solidarity cannot be gifted, only received and cannot involve any sort of power dynamics between the two parties who are involved in the solidarity relationship. It is supposed to be a symmetrical, mutual and reciprocal relationship (Jaeggi 2021, 59). Reciprocity of solidarity relations is not to be understood as a simple exchange or transaction, but an extended reciprocity that is time flexible and not to be confused with equivalent exchange. Moreover, groundless solidarity is endless as well as contingent at the same time (2006, 69).

The third proposed condition is to be empathetic with a sense of urgency. Elam argues that solidarity suspends the opposition between reason and feelings and debates that both are
necessary. Hence, solidarity is not only an instrument but a much more empathetic piece of lived utopia (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, p 9, 24–26). Solidarity always needs to be actively practiced. It is not something that is automatically there, but is permanently worked for and articulated. It needs to be thought of and reactivated over and over again (Elam, 2006, 70). It can only be successful if it develops from solidarity to become something else. Groundless solidarity must transform from solidarity against something to solidarity for a better world. Solidarity is therefore also the creation of networks: a structural and institutionalized consolidation that makes solidarity actions permanently easier and more teachable in the future (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, 47).

Diane Elam points out very important aspects in her definition of groundless solidarity. Nevertheless, there are some critical points to be made. She argues that solidarity relations are symmetrical and mutual, but she does not further explain the unequal starting positions from which solidarity is practiced and which offers many problems. The risk-free and often paternalistic gesture of solidarity from the security of a privileged position seems worthy of criticism. Another point is that the interdependence of human beings is completely missing. Also, the understanding of solidarity as political and specifically as a transformative political relation is not taken into account. The next approach to solidarity will highlight the interdependence and interconnectedness in solidarity relations.

3.2.3. Relational solidarity – solidarische Beziehungsweisen

Bini Adamczak’s idea of solidarity is that it is relational and that the emerging relationships have the capacity to break with the current world order and capitalism itself. They are at the core of its revolutionary potential (Adamczak, 2017, 279).

Along with other Marxist scholars, she argues that society became more and more fragmented due to the atomization caused by capitalism and neoliberalism. In addition, global processes of desolidarization and the social Darwinist-inspired neoliberal concept of the survival of the fittest, lead to a loss of solidarity and promoted the logic of competition (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, 48). Societies have long been divided on the basis of origin, social status, class, gender and other markers. Also, the transnational division of labor – for example transnational care chains – is central to the establishment, consolidation, and maintenance of the current world order (Mohanty, 2003, 141). Nevertheless, this fragmentation can not only be seen in the division within the globalized world and society but also in the disenchantment, starting from the period of enlightenment (Federici, 2019). A consequence of this disenchantment was the creation of strictly separated modes of relation in areas such as monetary commodities, familial love, racial 

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2 Federici draws on the term disenchantment from Max Weber but in a negative connotation. She refers to his theories which envision a world which is more structured, fragmented and completely rational. An example is bureaucracy.
segregation, etc. The loss of interpersonal relations especially contributes to a false understanding of independence and freedom, which reinforces the fragmentation and isolation of society, groups and individuals, and is the counter-process of solidarity.

To overcome these structures Adamczak proposes to strengthen our relations/relationships and recognize our (inter-)dependence with the world in order to build relations based on solidarity. Such relations are not focused on the object of the relationship – as the subject-object dynamic discussed previously – but instead on the in-between of the relationship: on how the relations are structured, lived, etc. (Adamczak, 2022, 4:00). In solidarity-based relationships is where the revolutionary potential of solidarity lies, according to Adamczak, who goes even further and concludes: “it is not worth fighting for the cause, but for satisfying relationships” (Adamczak, 2017, 269). Hence, solidarity is not (only) a theoretical demand or function of the struggle, “but that for which revolutions are made” (Adamczak, 2017, 265). Solidarity, therefore, is both a means to an end and a goal in itself.

Solidarity does not come out of nowhere, but is itself conditioned by relationships which are in turn the channels of communication through which it can be spread. It needs to be politically worked for, and it is about relationships of cooperation instead of relationships of competition and therefore counteractive to neoliberalism (Adamczak, 2017, 258). It emphasizes that we do matter to each other and at the same time it articulates that “solidarity is when you say and mean: you are not alone!” (Pollman in Adamczak, 2017, 266). Solidarity is not about an attitude nor a moral-philosophy but about the question: in what relationship do we want to relate to each other? Solidarity is about weaving relations and interdependence, and at its core is always revolutionary.

As solidarity is missing under neoliberalism/capitalism, as described above, it can be seen as a poison against these structures due to its ability to create new relationships, which are free and equal (Adamczak, 2017, 284). But in what kind of relation are freedom, equity and solidarity then? Bini Adamczak concludes that freedom without equity leads to exploitation and oppression. Freedom without solidarity leads to individualization (liberation of the market). Also, equity without freedom leads to coercive collectivity or homogenization; for example, the corps and loyalty-based brotherhoods which right-wing activists are framing as solidarity. Hence, equity and solidarity alone lead to non-commitment/authoritarianism and solidarity without equity leads to paternalism. Therefore, right-wing politics and relationships can never be understood as solidarity-based or free relationships (Adamczak, 2022, 18:00-19:10).

At the same time, the triad of equity, freedom, and solidarity shows that solidarity also always needs to be considered in the context of time, space and power relations. It is not possible to build true solidarity without acknowledging a (neo-)colonial frame and creating partnerships instead of a white saviorism. This has been a struggle within transnational feminist solidarity work in the last 20-30 years which aims to form free and equal relations across borders. Decolonizing solidarity-based relationships happens when knowledge and its production is decolonized by questioning our own
thinking about it, “[and] wether we can actually imagine partnerships in which we are not the
knowers, in which the people we work with are not just the objects of the work we do or even just
the subjects, but that the relationship is what is significant” (Mohanty in Susemichel & Kastner,
2021, 281).

Solidarity-based relations are revolutionary and necessary for solidarity. They don’t deny the
ongoing dependencies but promote interdependence. Simultaneously, it is important to recognize
their complexity, as well as their potential to resolve conflicts (Adamczak, 2017, 285). It is not only
about the solidarity-based relations themselves but about how we shape them, how we are in
relations(-ships), in line with what Bini Adamczak refers to as solidarische Beziehungsweisen
(relational solidarity).

3.2.4. Political solidarity

Practicing solidarity is difficult. Especially as women are actively taught not to do so, as bell hooks
argues. She states that “we are taught that women are our “natural” enemies [and] that solidarity
will never exist between us because we cannot and should not bond with one another” (hooks,
1986, 127). She emphasizes that it is necessary to break with this stigma and that it is urgent for a
feminist movement to live and work in solidarity, and that this is political (hooks, 1986, 127).
Following this thought, Mohanty reasons that the idea of competition is deeply embedded in our
understanding of power relations. They are commonly structured in terms of a unilateral and
undifferentiated source of power with the goal being to uphold your own power position (Mohanty,
2003, 138). The major problem with such a definition of power is that it locks all struggles into
binary structures: possessing power versus being powerless. Transferring this knowledge to within
a feminist discourse, it opens up two levels which are problematic: division by gender and the
assumption of homogeneous groups.
The first assumption is the binary view of woman as powerless and men as in power, which is
based on a division between sexes and only takes into consideration people who are living within
this binary system. According to this view, women are trying to gain power and invert the power
balance as they are defined in terms of a binary division: groups that dominate and groups that are
dominated (Fanon in Mohanty, 2003, 139). In this case, success would mean a matriarchal power
structure. Silvia Federici argues that in order to not let that happen, women are socialized to not
bond, pointing out that in the past and still in some parts of the world today, women are not allowed
to meet up alone (Federici, 2012, 130). This unilateral and binary view of power relations hugely
limits the understanding of those power relations. Hence, hooks and Mohanty emphasize the need
for a more complex, multilateral, non-binary understanding of power relations, which is necessary
to be able to build reciprocal solidarity-based relationships. Otherwise, solidarity would always be a
form of support, which implies the understanding of a giver and receiver and enforces a paternalistic view.

The second problem with this definition of power relations is the initial assumption of women as a homogeneous group or category – the oppressed – which is a familiar assumption in Western radical and liberal feminisms (Mohanty, 2003, 39). “The 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” (Mohanty 2003, 21). This assumption of homogeneity neglects the intersectional discrimination and differences that can be found within the category, women. In the past this led to white female feminists seeing themselves only as victims, with men as their enemies, whilst completely disregarding their own privileges and dominations. They didn’t and some still don’t confront the enemy within (class, race, etc.) and practice a radical political consciousness (Mohanty, 2003, 128). To suggest one common form of oppression is a false platform by white feminists and prohibits to build solidarity. Mohanty argues that bonding can only occur when these differences and issues are addressed and put into a new frame of power relations. This then requires a new definition, which bell hooks refers to as political solidarity.

hooks and Mohanty believe that solidarity must have a “foundation based on community of interests, shared beliefs [and] political goals around which to unite” (Hooks, 1986, 130). It needs to be based on mutuality (reciprocity) and accountability as the basis for relationships that value differences and diversity. Solidarity is differentiated from support as solidarity requires a sustained, ongoing commitment and does not just happen occasionally: it needs to be build continuously (Mohanty, 2003, 7). In the context of feminist solidarity, it should be based on the commitment to end sexist oppression in its entirety, as opposed to simply seeking equality or a reversal of male domination. Furthermore, practicing this form of solidarity also requires being reflexive about our own position and situation within sexist structures, for example: unlearning sexist and racist socialization, avoiding the danger of tokenism, learning to go into confrontation, working through hostility and internalized racism (hooks, 1986, p 129–132). Additionally, using the tool of decolonizing structures can support the transformation of physical, emotional and social domination as well as providing a unification of interests, struggles and groups, instead of a division by race, gender, class, capitalism, etc. (Fanon in Mohanty 2003, 8).

To summarize, hooks and Mohanty introduce the idea of a political solidarity based on common interests rather than common identity; as a community or collectivity among workers across class, race, and national boundaries, that is based on shared ways of reading the world and fighting for a more just and equal world for all, without neglecting power relations and difference. The following conception of solidarity by Audre Lorde highlights the already mentioned differences and argues that feminists should see difference as a resource instead of cause for division.
3.2.5. Solidarity in differences

Divisions on the basis of our differences are necessary to the functioning of a profit economy. We learn to respond to differences with fear and loathing, and to handle it in three ways: ignoring it if possible, copying it if we think it is dominant, destroying it if we think it is subordinate (Lorde, 2021, 108). These reactions to difference are not only found in the economic world but are also present in our daily lives. Often we are not taught to relate across human differences as equals, but instead these differences are used to segregate, exclude and separate societies. In opposition to this learnt behavior, Audre Lorde suggests a positive connotation of differences (Lorde 2021, 109). By recognizing difference, it makes it possible to address the different problems and pitfalls that women face. It is not the differences themselves that divides feminists/ groups/ society etc. but the issue of not naming them. Lorde argues that instead difference can be a “fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark dialectically”(Lorde, 2021, 113). The focus must also not be only on one difference, because then other differences are forgotten and once again an imbalance of power is created. She also adds that “for as long as any difference between us means one of us must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt” (Lorde 2021, 111). Guilt here is not used in a sense of responsibility but by understanding the gravity and mistake of the above.

Therefore, the focus in feminist struggles should not be centered on the differences between the oppressed, but through relating to each other as equals, neither superior nor inferior. Through this, we can develop relationships of solidarity in our differences. These relationships are the core for social change, as described above in the section on relational solidarity. This new understanding of solidarity, which emphasizes differences and doesn’t neglect them, is a tool against the current matrix of domination and has the ability to break these binaries (Lorde 2021, 118).

The idea of solidarity in differences is based on the idea that by getting into contact/ relation with somebody else, we are touched by them and this moves us (Ahmed, 2000, 40). It creates an understanding for the other and allows an intimacy on which a community can be built (Anzaldua, 2009, 246). These relationships hold the space for personal and collective reflections, for common differences, sharing experiences and linking struggles, based on the understanding that differences can also be resources (Leinius, 2021, 102-107). These shared experiences need to be relatable but not colonizing or universalizing (Spivak, 2000, 105). The transformation of subjectiveness into subjects capable of ethically relating to each other across difference, of perceiving themselves as subjects and of imagining a different future, is slow work and needs patience (Spivak, 2009, 35).

Nevertheless, to move beyond difference it is essential to understand the interdependence and to actively listen and be curious. “Curiosity is a trait that strengthens all our efforts to meet across differences; shared laughter helps create the context for feelings of mutuality to emerge in
partnerships” (hooks, 2013, 148). Mutuality challenges us to respect each other. It is normal to grave differences between people, but the important part is that difference does not need to lead to domination and for us to focus on the vision to learn from each other and move beyond difference (hooks, 2013, p 149). Therefore, Audre Lorde argues that solidarity is a “problem of relation rather than a problem of knowledge” (Lorde 2021, 120).

As feminists, we should drive for a politics of solidarity based in our differences, and not our similarities, as they are often breaking-points that lead to conflicts. We need to overcome the fear of being with people unlike ourselves, as well as the fear of conflict. It might seem quite Utopian but hooks re-questions that: “None of us imagines that in our love relationships (family, kin) we will never have moments of conflict. We believe that if conflict arises in these relationships we will be able to handle it, why not in political solidarity as well?” (hooks, 2013, 145).

The above understandings of solidarity have different and sometimes parallel ideas. Every definition highlights another important aspect of solidarity. Thus, I have identified four key elements as the base for my understanding of solidarity. One is the notion of reciprocity, which is highlighted in groundless solidarity. That it is not a bargain or an exchange but a mutual relationship which is not limited by time and space. The second significant aspect is, understanding ourselves as interdependent and that our relationships are revolutionary and hold the power for social change, as well as breaking with capitalism and the structure of the social order. Feminists need to focus on and develop these relationships despite or rather with our differences, and learn from each other and the tensions between us. To drive for social change, feminists also need to change their mindsets and unlearn our colonial, Neo-liberal, racist socialization and reflect on our position within global and local power relations. The fourth point is that feminism is always political: fighting against sexism and other discriminations is a political struggle, which can unite us in common interests and vision. Hence, solidarity needs to be political, as the goal is to change the power dynamics themselves completely.

Keeping these theoretical approaches, challenges, and problems in mind, the next chapter will analyze the eight interviews with transnational, feminist groups in Vienna.

The gathered tools and structures for being attentive towards the challenges and limitations of transnational feminist solidarity are a starting point to create more just and equal relationships. Nevertheless, it is always a learning process and mistakes will be made. These mistakes should not be neglected or dismissed but rather analyzed and learnt from. Also, all the interview participants highlighted the need to act instead of just getting caught up in discussions or being paralyzed by fear of doing something wrong. Only analyzing, discussing and theorizing is not enough to practice transnational feminist solidarity, or in the words of Şehid Sara Dorşin (Almuth Sarah Handelmann): "A theory without practice is always incomplete. We lack a seriousness that
does not despair, but believes in itself." Believing in the possibility of change and having a feeling of effectiveness is crucial for building a strong transnational feminist solidarity, which pushes for the vision of a more just and feminist future, as Mohanty envisioned in the introduction.
4. Case Study: transnational feminist groups in Vienna

The empirical part is divided into three sections. Each section is based on one of the three main categories of the research: Situating transnational feminist solidarity work, the challenges and limitations of transnational solidarity work and the tools required to be attentive. The first section includes discussion of: the groups’ approaches to transnational feminism, approaches to solidarity, locations of transnational solidarity work and the motivation which leads to engagement. The second section centers around the limitations and challenges that transnational feminist solidarity faces. This includes the (re-)production of power relations and stereotypes. It is followed by a collection of tools and structures needed to be attentive to these dynamics, as suggested and practiced by the interviewed groups. Finally, all the generated data and findings are brought together and on this basis, an answer to the research question is formulated.

4.1. Situating transnational feminist solidarity

The first main category holds approximately half of all codes. After introducing ourselves and getting to know each other a little more following the preceding chats, emails and phone calls, the different participants elaborated on their activism, their idea of transnational feminism, their idea of solidarity, and the importance of it for them. I noticed and expected that the groups have quite different focuses as well as forms to express their activism. Nevertheless, they all understood their activism in the frame of transnational feminism and pointed out that the connection, networks, and collaboration between the groups in Vienna, as well as groups globally, is the key element of transnational feminism. They also added that there cannot be transnational feminism without solidarity and no feminist solidarity without transnational feminism. Despite having different group forms and approaches towards transnational feminist solidarity, they were quite clear about the importance and link between these two concepts.

4.1.1. Transnational feminism

I contacted the group ciocia wienia via email. They were really quick in answering as, I learnt later, they have a rotating email shift schedule because their activism is often quiet time sensitive, and therefore they need to be able to answer and act quickly. The group ciocia wienia focuses on providing safe abortion in Austria for people who are living in countries where they do not have access to it, for example Poland. They understand their activism as transnational firstly in a practical sense, as they are working across borders to support people from other countries coming to Aus-
tria to get an abortion. Especially during the peak of the corona pandemic, this was a big challenge as the people needed special permission slips to cross the borders, and corona tests, etc. which meant higher costs. Ciocia Wienia finance themselves through fundraising and donations to cover all the costs, from train tickets and accommodation to the procedure itself. Most of the donations are from Austrian people, producing a hegemonic relationship, which is problematic in itself and will be discussed later on.

The second reason that they understand their activism as transnational feminism, is that they do not see their activism through a national perspective but instead, a supranational one. By not focusing on small, national areas but widening the horizon in which they want and can act, they put their activism within a global frame. While talking about it, the participant’s eyes started to glow while she was sitting across from me at a table in a small café, and she got really excited about it. She previously studied Gender Studies and is currently working as a data analyst. She mentioned that what is important for her in her activism, is that it is not only her group which is doing this work. They are in contact with a wider network, Abortion Without Borders, as well other Ciocia groups. They also see themselves and their work in a lineage of pro-choice activism. Their name Ciocia Wienia explains this quite well: Ciocia means aunt in Polish and Wienia is a quite common name. “Would not everybody like to have an aunt in the situation of unwilling pregnancy who is supportive, there for you and helps you to get an abortion?” With this idea, they wanted to follow the lineage of the Jane Collective in Chicago and other similar collectives. The Jane Collective operated in the 1960s/70s in Chicago before abortion became legal there. They offered and performed abortions for people who did not want to have child. A couple of years later, there were more Jane collectives, not only in the US but also in places like Kenya as the Auntie Kenya collective and so on. After the legalization of abortion in a lot of countries, which was a big win for the pro-choice activists, these collectives reoriented their activism. Now with the change towards a more conservative anti-choice trend in politics and various laws that are illegalizing abortions again, these collectives started to work again and provide safe abortions. As the interview participants emphasized, Ciocia Wienia is proud to stand in this lineage and continue this important transnational fight for women's* freedom, bodily autonomy and reproductive justice.

During the online interview with the second participant from Ciocia Wienia, who is researching in the area of Eastern feminist movements herself, she expressed the following:

“Transnational feminism for me is grounded in the different positionalities and differences of knowledge that emerged from specific settings by feminists in different countries. It aims to bring together the struggles of feminists in different countries by sharing knowledge and sharing resources, whilst also being aware of global power relations and the inequalities and relations of privilege and discriminations amongst the women and FLINTA people themselves”.

- Ciocia Wienia 2,August 2022

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For her, it is significant to express that there are different positionalities in the world and that these differences should not be neglected, but valued and brought together with other fights and struggles to build a broader transnational, feminist movement. She underlined the need to situate these feminist fights within current power relations. This idea of transnational feminism is quite close to Audre Lorde’s and Mohanty’s idea of feminism within our differences: that differences do not need to weaken movements but can strengthen them if we emphasize on learning from each other and working together instead of against each other.

Another group who also emphasized the principle of learning from each other as one of the key factors of transnational feminism is Kollektiv lauter. Kollektiv lauter is a feminist group that began as a feminist reading circle formed by a few friends who then decided to put the theories and ideas that they were reading about into action. Since then, they have been organizing different events, demonstrations, etc. As their name lauter, which translate to louder already implies, they believe that through working together and supporting each others’ fights it is possible to be louder together than they could be alone. While talking about transnational feminism my interview partner, who is working in the area of violence protection and prevention (mostly for children and women), argued that some (feminist) struggles are universal, such as fighting for a life free from violence. She acknowledged that not all fights are exactly the same. They differ from country to country or community to community but the goals and the underlying themes are the same. And due to that it is fundamental to think outside of regional or national borders, and to have a transnational approach towards the causes, as they are also interdependent.

Another point she pointed out was responsibility. As a white, academic and middle-class feminist, activist group she believes that Kollektiv Lauter, and other groups like them, have a historically developed responsibility. She is not referring to what Spivak calls the burden of the fittest or the white men’s burden, but she reasons that white, euro-centric feminism has done a lot of damage in the past. These feminist movements ignored and misused their situation of power with a (neo-)colonial, patriarchal and racist system. She sees it as the responsibility of the current feminist movement to be more aware of these structures and their involvement, and to help to deconstruct them so that they can contribute to a transnational feminist movement, which is built on equity and consideration for the different positionalities. In order to do that, she expressed that listening, learning from each other and being in contact with differently situated feminist groups is key. This follows Sara Ahmed’s idea, that being in contact with others moves us and opens up new perspectives, as well as Spivak’s concept of learning and unlearning.

In contrast to the earlier groups, Alerta Feminista is a Spanish-speaking group, which aims to bring visibility to topics and actions that are (mostly) happening in Latin America. At the same time as they are replicating these voices from dominated countries, they are also uplifting their own migrant voices and issues in Austria and Vienna. The person I was able to interview online was really inter-
ested, open, and enthusiastic about her group. Previously, she had made a couple of difficult experiences in terms of power relations with another feminist group in Vienna, which will be elaborated on later. I could feel, and she also expressed, how happy she was with the new group, and she mentioned that the group was embedded in different transnational networks, group chats and alliances. Most of them developed following the first big women/feminist strikes around the world in 2017. Especially, as the majority of the group’s members come from different Spanish-speaking countries, these transnational networks and transnational approach to feminism is key for them. I asked her to describe her understanding of transnational feminism:

“We don’t want to universalize our feminist experiences and practices. We recognize the diversity and the differences. It’s not because we think we all want to be homogenized or that there is only one feminism for the whole world, but these transnational networks just want to strengthen each other and support each other.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

Her explanation focused on the plurality of feminism and that there can be different types of feminisms, as the people who are involved in it differ from each other due to race, class, origin, gender, sexuality, etc. As Nikita Dhawan emphasizes: we are facing the same challenges, but we are not sitting in the same boat. But instead of being split up into lots of different feminist groups Dhawan emphasizes that there are connections between the different groups and that a transnational network is important to bring together powers, knowledge and support. In the interview she remarked that it is not only significant to build these transnational networks across borders but also across class and subgroups within cities and countries. She remembered that in the beginning when she moved to Vienna and wanted to become active in the feminist movement, she only encountered white, euro-centric feminist groups, which upset her, but the newer feminist groups who became active in the last 5-10 years are emphasizing the transnational character of their feminism. They include and mention struggles all over the world. They are eager to learn from other feminist groups and are re-questioning their own positioning more. I could feel how joyful she was about this development while she was telling me about it. She also expressed that she was now more hopeful for an intersectional, transnational feminism, which could unite more struggles and people around the world.

Similar to Alerta Feminista is the group Chile Desperto (Chile woke up). It is a group which was founded 2019 when major protests started in Chile against the current regime. Worldwide small groups formed under the name Chile Desperto; mostly Chileans who are living in exile or first or second generation migrants. In a small amount of time they were able to build transnational networks, mostly by using social media. Their aim is to support and raise awareness for the struggles in Chile, including those with a feminist agenda. My interview partner migrated to Austria with her parents when she was child and was previously active with Amnesty International and similar
groups. She shared her experience with transnational feminism and expressed that in the beginning she was excited by all the networks, the amount of people and their ideas:

“You sit in a European country, and you have the opportunity to meet with groups, with activists from all over the world who bring their view from there, their view from here to there and their view from there to here and their experiences and their knowledge and their systems to deal with it and their mechanisms. That's so great that that exists!”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

For her, transnational feminism is not only theoretical but also practical. It is necessary to discuss certain issues, the similarities as well as the differences, but it is not only about discussing. It is also about creating and choosing posters, slogans, etc., so-called activism de la calle (street activism). Coming from a working class background she was glad to see that the feminist movement is not as theoretical and academic as the one she grew up with, and she now feels more that she belongs. She highlighted the necessity for transnational feminism to work to share knowledge and resources as well as the importance of lots of networking around the world.

Another group who also understands networking as a fundamental part of transnational feminism is the group FEM AG. It is part of a bigger collective, which is called platform radical-left in Vienna. This subgroup focuses in particular on the feminist strike. Inspired by the feminist strike movements in Latin America, Poland, and Spain, they wanted to bring the feminist strike to Austria. Like Alerta Feminista they believe in a variety of feminist approaches and see the strength of the feminist strike in bringing these different approaches and people together:

“In Latin America, the feminist movement was about femicides and patriarchal violence, but the precariousness of life was also somehow brought in and different feminist struggles were connected in this way. And we always had the feeling that this feminist strike is something that brings different feminisms together again or can be a common denominator. And that is somehow also the strength of it, because different struggles can stand side by side in there, but still relate to each other in solidarity.”

- FEM AG 1, July 2022

My interview partner, who is working as a social worker and has been politically active for a long time in Vienna, told me that in the beginning they tried to learn how the feminist movements in Latin America organized themselves, but quickly understood that it is not possible to transfer some concepts, such as femicide, directly into the Austrian context. To do so would also be a form of appropriation, which reproduces neo-colonial power relations, one of the other participants told me. This participant is also a social worker, and has been in the group since the start. She also mentioned: that one of the group’s core values was to reflect on their own position and situation within the capitalist system in relation to their activism. She described the reversed learning process (dominating
countries learning form dominated ones) within the transnational feminist movement and how it is key to break with colonial, capitalist and nation-focused logic. This idea can also be found in the work of Mohanty, Spivak and similar decolonial scholars, who emphasize reversed learning relationships, which decolonize knowledge as well as power relations.

Both of the interviewees referenced the importance of transnational networks and exchange between differently situated groups, but they also argued that to network on a local level is just as important for a transnational feminist movement:

“For me transnational feminism doesn’t necessarily mean linking up with feminist groups somewhere else in the world, de facto, and making plans with them, but perhaps rather reciprocating each other and being connected on a local level where we are. To develop a practice that includes all of this. But at the end it should be about, where we live, where we fight our struggles and what the contexts of our lives are, and not to lose ourselves in the expressions of solidarity that we send across the world.”

- FEM AG 2, August 2022

The participant was clear that a feminist movement nowadays needs to be transnational in the sense of networks, engagement and strengthening each other’s fights on a local and global level. Only when the feminist movement is transnational, can it overcome challenges like nationalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. As the world is so intertwined and interconnected, a broad and transnational approach is needed in order to understand and fight the current problems, and for that it is important to relate to each other’s struggles.

The last two groups I interviewed also underlined the significance of transnational feminism, or in their case international or internationalist feminism. Both groups are made up of young people with a Kurdish background who have been engaged in the Kurdish movement for a long time. One participant was from the group Jinêni Ciwanên Tekoşer (Tekojin) which can be translated as the young Kurdish women’s movement and Tevgera Ciwanên Şoresger which translates as the Kurdish youth movement. For both, a feminist perspective was essential for the Kurdish movement, as the movement aims to liberate society, firstly by liberating women from the patriarchal system, and considers this the baseline for all future struggles to come. The participant from Tekojin told me that internationalism has always been part of the Kurdish movement because Kurds are living all over the world and since the 90s, different political groups have shown solidarity with their cause. She also shared that the idea of Tekojin started a couple of years ago, when they decided to hold an international, online symposium. It was there that they decided to form a new international, feminist, Kurdish group: Tekojin. There is a transnational network with different local Tekojin groups who are in close contact with each other, as well to the Kurdish youth movement.
Similarly to FEM AG and all of the other interviewed groups, they argue for the necessity of an international feminist agenda to address the hegemonic power relations in the world and break with a capitalist, racist and misogynistic worldview. An important part of their activism is to analyze the current political situations for example in Rojava and reflect on their own involvement in it and what they can do about it. When I asked them what international/ transnational feminism means for them, they gave me the following answer:

“When we talk to comrades about international feminism and in particular about really wanting to put it into practice, then lots of people say go to Rojava, for example, or they go to Chiapas. But as a rule, most of the internationalists we know go to Rojava. But that’s just the European perspective, that you say we’re going there. But from a Kurdish perspective, it is also an anti-colonial perspective that we have, which means that our claim must be to understand as anti-colonial, as an anti-colonial movement fighting against colonialism in the homeland.”

- Tekojin, August 2022

Internationalism for them does not always mean to go places to support the struggles the people are fighting there. Moreover, it means to organize yourself in your local contexts, network with other groups and therefore break with the concept of colonialism and appropriation, which Alerta Feminista also mentioned. Similarly to all other groups, Tekojin highlights the necessity for a global, transnational movement with a feminist perspective. One of the participants said, that internationalism is at the core of the Kurdish movement and that there have always been internationalists fighting with them and supporting their struggle. They cannot imagine it any other way.

Looking at the approaches towards and understandings of transnational feminism by the eight interviewed groups, it is possible to detect a lot of similarities. All the groups stated the great significance that transnationalism has for their feminist perspective, which articulates itself in networking on a global as well as local level and relating to different struggles and groups. In particular, the feminist groups in which most members have a migrant background mentioned how important the transnational networks and exchange is for them. Despite the differences and challenges that transnational feminist networks are facing due to different people’s positioning, it is critical to not neglect these differences or to homogenize them, but instead to value them as resources and learn from each other. This, as Audre Lorde writes, can strengthen the movement. Learning from each other and reversing and decolonizing power structures and hegemonic knowledge production is a key element for all the groups and can be found in Spivak’s call to not talk about but talk with people and listen to them. Even though the positionalities are different, in the end the groups all noticed that they are fighting the same fight against the current patriarchal system and believe that it is necessary to unite and fight alongside each other to overcome it.

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Before analyzing in-depth the importance of networks and collaborations within transnational feminism, the following subchapter will focus on the groups’ understandings of solidarity within the context of transnational feminism.

4.1.2. Solidarity (work)

The second part of the interview was centered on the question of solidarity within the context of transnational feminism. How would the interviewee describe solidarity? What did it mean for their work? What kind of solidarity work do they do? As their activist practices vary a lot, their solidarity work did as well. Nevertheless, their ideas of solidarity and the need for it in transnational feminism were often cohesive. In the interviews three different notions of solidarity crystallized, which can be linked to the concepts of political solidarity by hooks, relational solidarity by Adamczak and an attentiveness to power relations within solidarity following Mohanty.

A member of Ciocia Wienia described solidarity as the act of:

“sharing privileges, so just looking at other people with empathy and also support. Um, but you also have to do something. So this should not remain identity-related that you say: oh I am in solidarity with xyz. Instead, if it is possible, of course, then you should also do something so that people in less privileged situations get good access. In the case of Ciocia Wienia to have safe and cheap abortion’

- Ciocia Wienia 1, July 2022

And her comrade from Ciocia Wienia added:

“our whole activism is about showing solidarity because we believe that if we have the resources and there are people in need for these we should make use of those resources. We should share them with those people. But it’s not about charity work, but it’s the activism and participation in the struggle. So the one thing is that through our everyday activities, we make those oppressive laws at least a bit obsolete. Um, but another thing is that we want to push for the social change.”

- Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

Both descriptions sum up the essence of solidarity for their activism and that it is – as bell hooks also implies – a political solidarity. It does not want to create change on an individual basis but on a structural and social level. For that they use their privileges and resources, for example financial ones, and share it with the people without. Their core belief is that everybody should have the same free and easy access to abortion. Their understanding of solidarity underlines the importance of not only helping or supporting but also focussing on the political dimension of solidarity. This is an essential part of feminist struggles.
Furthermore, the interview participant from Tekojin added that solidarity is a political weapon or as Audre Lorde’s describes it: solidarity is a tool, which can dismantle the master’s house as it is not part of the master’s tools (Lorde, 2021). Solidarity is seen by Lorde and Tekojin as an instrument with which structural discrimination, capitalism, racism, etc. can be fought against and possibly overcome. A participant from the group FEM AG put it in her own words:

“I think solidarity is something that unites people and somehow for me, it's the only way out of this shit. What is cool about solidarity is that solidarity can do so many cool things on so many levels. For example on a small scale in a shared flat it makes life better. Then in your own feminist scene, it makes you stronger, and you don't feel as alone and powerless when you look at the problems in the world. I think solidarity is really important.’

- FEM AG 2, August 2022

She also mentions that solidarity should not only be on a transnational level, or between groups but should also be a cornerstone within groups and relationships in general. It is just as essential to support each other, fight alongside each other, make the fights of your comrades into your fights and be stronger together. Solidarity connects and especially supports people and groups that are having a tough time. Through solidarity, they can know that they are not alone and can feel that they belong to a bigger transnational feminist movement.

The other interviews with the group FEM AG as well as Kollektiv lauter also confirm that argument. They point out that relationships are one of the most significant parts of solidarity, which partially follows Bini Adamczak’s understanding of relationships as having revolutionary potential. They extend the understanding of relationships and add the dimension of collectivism to it, which can often be found in Latin American and Indigenous understandings of solidarity: that everything is interconnected and that political activism must always be collective. In the interviews the group FEM AG as well as Kollektiv lauter mentioned that this understanding of community and collectivity in the context of solidarity was something they learnt about from being in contact with the Latin American groups.

Both groups also expressed that being in solidarity-based relationships also means being open to learning and being part of the process, or as Sara Ahmed writes, being open to being moved and affected by the encounter (Ahmed, 2004). In the interview with Alerta Feminista, the participant described their understanding of solidarity in a different, but content-wise similar way:

“That not only does what speaks to you directly and touches you motivate you because it impacts us directly, but that empathy and solidarity also move us. Solidarity is when it is simply more generous and goes beyond one’s own ego when somehow everything is perceived as part of a community and one acts accordingly. That’s what I find very important in feminism, and in the feminist movements, for all these struggles and net-
works. That we are also active in the various struggles and not only for those that perhaps affect us more personally, but also beyond that."

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022,

Another mentioned aspect of solidarity was to be attentive to power relations and to understand that solidarity-based relations are still embedded within the current hegemonies. All groups mentioned that solidarity should be based on mutual understanding, reciprocity and respect. *Ciocia Wienia* mentioned the concept of helpers and receivers of solidarity and that they avoid thinking about it in these terms, because they do not see their work as charity. Further, in the context of safe abortions they still think of themselves as the people who might want to get the support of the community and therefore see it as reciprocal. They are, however, aware that it is them who have the resources in this situation. Another participant from *FEM AG* was quite clear in differentiating between the words: solidarity, support, and help. He stated that help and support can be parts of solidarity (expressions) but help and support by themselves always imply a paternalistic view as well as a subject-object relationship. He also referred to the emotion of empathy, which will be elaborated on in the section about motivation. Hence, in his understanding, solidarity is focused on creating equal relationships. His comrade added that an expression of solidarity can also be when somebody explains something to you or criticizes your behavior or action as the person is taking the time to do that which is often a valuable resource. This is called *Tekmil* in the kurdish movement and will be explained later on more in detail. One participant from Ciocia Wienia extended this thought and stated that even being in the position to be able to show solidarity already puts the person in a privileged position as they have the resources to think about it.

All the groups agreed that solidarity is a tricky and slippery path and a constant process but a necessary and essential one. Some even argued that solidarity in itself is a political claim to eradicate imbalance and hierarchies in their activism. One participant from *Kollektiv Lauter* summarized it as follows:

"True solidarity is always exhausting and is maybe not even completely possible in a world were there are so many power imbalances, but it is necessary to practice it. I think it's just important to always be aware of this question and problems. To always let yourself be unsettled again and again in your position by the solidarity-based relationship you have and try to keep learning."

- Kollektiv Lauter, August 2022

### 4.1.3. Places of transnational feminist solidarity

After understanding what the different groups understand by transnational feminist solidarity, I asked them what the places are where they do, see and experience transnational feminist solidar-
ity in action. By analyzing the interviews I found three major examples. The first one was centered on organizing and showing up for protests, which fits with the idea of protests as political areas as outlined in the theoretical chapter. The second example is claim the space and bloco de(s)colonial as a form of asambleas. The third is transnational networks as transfronterizes, e.g. abortion without borders and the mesa direj. All of these three aspects were striking on the heat map and had, in comparison to other categories, a high number of codes. This leads to the conclusion that the practical application of transnational feminist solidarity is important to the interview groups. These aspects will be further discussed in the following.

Protests
All groups mentioned that planning, organizing and holding demonstrations and rallies are a vital part of their solidarity work. It can be for major events like the 8th of March or the International Day for Safe Abortions, but can also be for small ones. For example Chile Desperto organized a rally in solidarity with Chileans who experienced intense violence or were murdered by the Chilean military and police during the social uprising in Chile. The interview participant from Chile Desperto remembered:

“We wanted to try to show them a little respect, to give them a voice. We then made a rally with candles. We sang songs together. There were certainly about 200 people and that was also very nice as a community, just to remember these people and to talk again and to find a sense of community again after so many years of dictatorship, where the community had dissolved.” - Chile Desperto, August 2022

At the same time, the rally was not only a protest but also a space for all the grief the Chilean community suffered/ suffers and a space to connect to each other. Creating space were people can come together is essential and will be further discussed in the section on asambleas. Another example is the demonstrations that were organized by FEM AG in cooperation with IG 24 – a network of 24 hour care-workers in Austria. Through the demonstration they wanted to raise awareness of the miserable working conditions of 24 hour care-workers and give them a platform to amplify their voices. Raising awareness, creating platforms and amplifying voices are significant parts of solidarity work, alongside being aware of who has access and who is heard, as explained in the theoretical chapter.

“For me, practical solidarity means: making things visible, giving space, giving these people space, lots of space and opportunities, and listening to them and hearing what they have to say. And yes, especially space, whether it's at demos, that they have speaking time or whether you invited them. So it starts with little things, but I think this

3 The meaning will explained later on
appreciation at eye level is what makes the difference.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

And a participant of the FEM AG added,

“we know that the 24 hour care-workers do not have a lot of time and resources. Therefore, we made signs and banners for them which they could carry and did all the organizing so that they could only come and demonstrate without needing to worry about all the organizational things.”

- FEM AG 1, July 2022

Another participant said that it is key for her understanding of solidarity to show up for others actions, demonstrations, and events.

Asambleas

The interview participants from Alerta Feminista and Chile Desperto stated that they use the term asamblea as an act of solidarity. Asamblea is a Spanish word for coming together, meeting and creating a space to discuss. Individuals, groups, or collectives come together to discuss political and personal issues and create a safe and collective space. This creates the possibility of hearing and listening to each other as well as learning about the issues and challenges that others are facing. At the same time it is also a space for reassurance, support, and sharing knowledge and resources. Through discussing issues, a process of organizing can start, and actions can be planned and taken together. These asambleas can be held for a specific reason like the 8th of March or can be a recurring platform.

Claim the space can be understood as a form of asamblea in Vienna. When FEM AG first started Claim the space the aim was to get to know different feminist groups in Vienna, bring them together despite differences in theoretical, cultural or political backgrounds and create a space for encounter. Traditionally, there are two different 8th of March demonstrations in Vienna. One is autonomous and revolutionary and the other is led by parties and the FrauenundLesbenZentrum, who are quite transphobic. The idea was to end these two separate demonstrations together at the same place: the feministischer Streikplatz, translated as Feminist Strike Place or Square. This first encounter led to regular asambleas in Vienna, where different feminist groups come together in exchanging their ideas, asking and giving support, and participating in the events of one another. These asambleas were the starting point for a lot of networks, collaboration and alliances. They not only deal with local issues but also with transnational and non-Austrian issues, which the interview participant from Chile Desperto mentioned enthusiastically. Together they also developed a strategy to raise awareness on the topic of femicides and developed a sense of collective solidarity.
Another feminist asamblea taking place in Vienna, is the Feminist Bloco Descolonial, which is similar to Claim the Space. The interview participant from Alerta Feminista described it as follows:

“Similar to Claim the Space is the Feminist* Bloco Descolonial. This is a larger grouping or an alliance where several groups exchange information, and we do… or we coordinate ourselves especially in relation to the 8th of March and the demos and actions that take place here in Vienna. We do this as a block and there are also groups that have Brazilian as their mother tongue. In this group the communication is even more difficult, we talk to each other in three languages, because there are Portuguese, Brazilians, and also people from other Latin American countries who have Spanish as their mother tongue. So it’s especially funny when we meet. But for the majority of those who are part of the Bloco, Spanish is more our common language.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

In contrast to Claim the Space, Feminist* Bloco Descolonial is a space specifically for marginalized groups with a Hispanic background. These asambleas are not only for political organizing but also offer a safe space to talk about the discriminations and difficulties that they are facing in their daily life, and in which they experience support, help, and solidarity from each other. Additionally, they also organize expressions and events in solidarity with other groups, especially with struggles in their countries of origin or the countries that they feel they belong to. Consequently, asambleas are a great tool to practice solidarity on different levels.

Transnational networks

Another place were the interviewed activist groups experienced transnational feminist solidarity was in transnational networks. Some of these networks as transfronterizes are thematically broad and others such as abortion without borders are quite specific. Both interview participants of Ciocia Wienia mentioned that the Ciocia-network with Ciocia Basia in Berlin and Ciocia Czesia in the Czech Republic as well as the Abortion Without Borders network is essential for their work. They are not only collaborating in campaigns, and sharing legal knowledge on abortion in different countries, but also have workshops together and use these networks to forward people who need abortions to one another. This is necessary as the time span within which an abortion is legally allowed to be performed differs from country to country. They are also in touch with larger umbrella organizations of abortion activists such as Women Help Women or the group Kobiety Wsieci, which can be translated to Women in the Net. They also send abortion pills to people in need of them. All of these networks are fundamental for their work in supporting people with unwanted pregnancies, which they understand entirely as an act of solidarity. Without this transnational network of abortion

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4 The name of the group can be translated as transnational and cross/trans-borders.
activists a lot of the information and the possibilities to have abortions would not be accessible to people in countries where abortion is illegal.

Another example of a feminist transnational network is *transfronterizes*. It is an initiative which started between Chilean feminist groups and the Italian branch of *Ni Una Menos* which is called *Non Una Di Meno*. Its aim is to bring the different feminist movements around the globe together including *Huelga Feministas* in Spain, *Movimento 8M* in Latin America as well as *Ni Una Menos and Coordinadora Feminista* and others. This initiative expanded drastically during the corona pandemic, which strengthened the digitization of communication and organizing in activism. An interviewed participant from *Chile Desperto* remembered the process in the group vividly:

"In the very beginning we spelled it with A, but now it's with E: Transfronterizes. In the beginning, we talked more in the feminine form in Spanish, so with A at the end of the words, but later came all these new terms like FLINTA persons, trans-feminism, and so on. So we wanted to make diversity visible as well. [...] These trans-feminists now all use the suffix E in Spanish, and that's why this group is now called Transfronterizes. We are a lot of people from many countries who try to network all over the world. As Transfronterizes we also have a chat group, and we meet online all the time and coordinate common actions, like for March 8th. Everything is organized collectively online, and it's quite complicated with translations into several languages because there are Italian, French, and other ones which I can't tell you in what language they're talking in the zooms with some live translations. That is quite impressive."

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

These kinds of transnational networks make it possible to organize collaboratively and to address global struggles together as well as raise awareness for other feminists struggles and plan events in solidarity with them. Transnational feminist networks are creating a platform for these encounters and collective processes to take place.

Another example is the *Mesa Direj*, which can be translated as long march, which Tekojin and the Kurdish revolutionary youth movement mentioned. It happens every year and people from around the world are coming to participate and show their solidarity with the Kurdish movement and in particular with the demand to free Abdullah Öcalan from Turkish prison. The interview participant of the Kurdish Youth movement was excited and enthusiastic when he started to share his experience from last year's *Mesa Direj*:

"We had comrades from the United States there. We had comrades from South America, Asia, Africa, South Africa. It is a great possibility to go there. There you are for a week with people from the movement directly together. But you are also together with internationalists from all over the world. For one week and… and it's just a crazy dy-
He pointed out that these kinds of transnational networks and meeting points are not only important for networking on a political level. They are also a good opportunity to get to know other comrades, people who are fighting the same fight, to revive your own motivation for the struggle and to feel part of a collective struggle.

Another interesting point is the following. One of the participants of FEM AG also mentioned the network E.A.S.T. Eastern Autonomous Struggles Transnational, but did not further elaborate on it or mentioned any involvement or connection to it. This could be due to their focus on the practice of transnational feminism as a feminist strike, which mostly developed in Latin America. Nevertheless, it would be compelling to research more about the relations and networks to eastern feminism.

This section analyzed the groups’ discussion of transnational feminism and solidarity as well as the places in which transnational feminist solidarity is and can be practiced. The next subchapter will focus on the variety of motivations that the activist groups, as well as the individuals within them, have.

4.1.4. Motivation for transnational feminist solidarity

Finding out the motivation for their activism in transnational feminist solidarity work is not only essential to understand a group’s background, but also their goals and visions for their activism. It helps to analyze the mindset activist groups have, which is the basis for their approach towards their actions and events. Referring to the theoretical framework, I was especially conscious about identifying the feeling of responsibility and empathy as factors of their motivation, as they could lead to problematic behaviors and relationships towards solidarity. By studying the interviews I found six different codes of motivation, which are closely linked to each other: a sense of fairness, empathy, ideology and values, personal experience, feeling of collectivity, sense of empowerment. All these different reasons lead to the wish to act and practice solidarity.

Sense of fairness
I encountered this motivation mostly in the conversations with FEM AG and Kollektiv lauter. Both groups have a majority of people with white, non-migrant and academic backgrounds. They described how unfairly they experienced certain issues in the world and how they have the impulse to do something to support the groups or individuals who are marginalized. Referring to the 24-hour-care-workers, one participant described it as follows:
“Experiencing all this: a concrete oppression, situation or in a capitalist patriarchal sense, a quite strong exploitation situation, which is coupled to this dependence. And to see that people are struggling massively and want to fight to improve their situation and can’t do that because of racist legislation or their whole economic dependencies. This is an unbelievable injustice that makes me angry.’ - FEM AG 1, August 2022

He explains that it is hard for him to see these injustices and not do something. Another participant from Kollektiv lauter added that she feels a strong urge to “make the world or the injustice a little better.” This raises the fundamental question that Spivak and de Alwis are asking: Is it okay to be moved by the pain of others and to use it as a motivation to do something? De Alwis also adds, that we only do something to reassure our own humanity and Spivak extends the question: Do we feel responsible to help these people? I asked both participants during the interview and both were really clear on it. Firstly, they do not believe that the people are not able to fight for themselves or that they have the feeling they need to help them. The dynamic does have similarities with what Spivak refers to as the burden of the fittest, but instead the participants see that the people are hindered to fight for themselves by the system, as the FEM AG participant explained in the excerpt.

He sees his own position and complicity within this system and due to that, he feels responsible to fight to change it. That is where he believes his and others’ responsibility lies: to dismantle the system which favors them and discriminates against others. The participant from Kollektiv Lauter added an important bit after taking a small break to think:

“Being politically active in general is natural for me. Like such a natural reaction to the world we live in. So I realize that if I weren’t politically active or if I just didn’t show solidarity with political struggles. I get depressed, or I just notice that my mental health really suffers. That is a selfish reason, simply because the injustices in the world are so insane.” - Kollektiv Lauter, July 2022

This statement partially supports De Alwis remark on reassuring your own humanity by showing solidarity towards others. Furthermore, it seems to agree with Sara Ahmed’s idea of people practing solidarity only to make themselves feel better and as a result making themselves the subject of the discourse. Even though, she admits that being politically active supports her own well-being, she is also quite reflective about it and is capable of differentiating her reasons for showing solidarity. During the interview she clearly stated that she is aware of the pain that others suffer and the injustices in the world that affect her but that her solidarity is not about herself but the people who are experiencing this. In contrast to Sara Ahmed’s presumption of making others into objects to feel superior and better, she explained that she understands them as subjects themselves and asks them: what do they need?
Both of the before mentioned participants agreed that it is a narrow path to balance and even though we might think we only do it out of altruism, some reasons will always be egocentric as well; for example, making it easier to deal with injustices in the world. These reasons are also closely linked to the feeling of empathy, which will explored in the following.

Empathy
As explained in the theoretical chapter empathy can be quite tricky. On one hand it is a strong emotion that allows people to connect to struggles and to understand the circumstances of other people. On the other hand it can easily tip over into pity and open up a hierarchical relationship. In the interviews, all participants emphasized the necessity of empathy for political activism: that it helps them to enlarge their view and be less focused on their own ego but to engage with others and get interested in their struggles and practice solidarity as a result. Empathy allows us to get to know different forms of living and realities which we don’t know from our own experience and makes it possible to relate to them.

Another participant from Ciocia Wienia described empathy as an imaginative power through which we can imagine the lives of others without experiencing it ourselves. Therefore, empathy is a political feeling for her. This includes that we shouldn’t judge on who gets our empathy and who doesn’t, or as Spivak and Mohanty write: look for authentic victims, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter. Instead, every person should receive empathy regardless of their background, political affiliations and so on. As a result, empathy needs to be inclusive as most people are facing some sort of discrimination or marginalization. She strongly argues for more empathy in general and that it should not stop at the feeling of empathy but that it is the starting point for action. Another interview participant of Chile Desperto added, that it is essential to be able to empathize so that we are also able to understand our own positionality and privileges within global hegemonies. Moreover, it is important to understand that we are not islands but part of a bigger patriarchal and capitalist system.

After their first responses I asked if pity (in german Mitleid) is the same as empathy for them and all of them quite strongly disagreed. The participant from FEM AG argued that pity implies a (paternalistic) hierarchy between the different subjects. It even objectifies the other and reduces it to an object who cannot help themselves and is powerless, which Mohanty also describes. An activist from Chile Desperto shared her experience with pity:

“Ah, you come from a Third World country or something. They homogenized us and made me feel helpless. I know that from growing up in Vienna, too. But empathy needs to be connected to respect and always at eye level.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022
The feeling of pity instead of empathy for somebody often leads to homogenizing them into one category, which enables the objectification even more. Therefore, the participant from Kollektiv lauter suggested that

“we need to create spaces in which there is enough self-reflection and emotional empathy that people feel heard and safe to be, share and to get active and involved. And to encounter every person as an individual with their own experience.”

- Kollektiv Lauter, July 2022

Ideology and values

In most of the interviews the participants referred to their values, ideology or (feminist) principles. The participants from Tekojin and Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger were particularly motivated by this. They described that the idea of liberating the women is fundamental and the keystone to liberating society. They expressed that there should be no question or doubt about the importance of transnational feminist solidarity. There is even an entire science about women called Jineology.

The idea of a more just and equal society based on democratic con-federalism is at core of the Kurdish movement. This mentality and attitude against the patriarchy is summed up in the slogan Jin Jiyan Azadi, which translates as Woman Life Freedom.

They further explained that they are a marginalized community and have always been discriminated against, especially by the Turkish state and have therefore also always shown resistance. Remembering past fighters and Şehids – martyrs or people who died for the struggle and their beliefs – is essential for their motivation. They also feel a sense of responsibility towards them to continue their fights, as they should not have died for nothing. The member of Tekojin illustrated it with the following example:

“The Kurdish Freedom Movement originated in the mountains and partially still is there. The comrades sometimes starve (to death) and fight for us, so we can live our lives here. Therefore, we actually have no right to be unmotivated and not do anything for them. We organize demos and stuff. But this is actually a very small part what we do in comparison. Actually, we still have to do a lot more for the movement.”

- Tekojin, August 2022

She also added that the motivation of the comrades has always been extremely high even if they were in prison or tortured. There are a lot of stories and writings on these Şehids like Sakine (Sara) Cansız, which they grew up with and continue to be inspired by. The motivation and enthusiasm they expressed during the interview can be clearly seen in the following excerpt from the participant from Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger: “We need to understand that we are fighting a
glorious struggle. It is a struggle for humanity. [...] And it breaks with the hopelessness that capitalism enforces on us.”

Following the point of needing to break with the hopelessness, individualization, and singularization capitalism that imposes on us, the two participants from the Kurdish movement highlighted the interdependencies in which we are living. Partially laughing and partially being very serious the one from the Kurdish youth movement said:

“I believe, or I have the desire and the hope to live someday in a society where solidarity is the basic principle. In order to get there, I think it’s necessary that even now, somewhere in the here and now to live it. Trying the best we can, without of course being able to anticipate what that will look like in a post-revolutionary society.”

- FEM AG 1, July 2022

Personal experience

The values and principles that the interview participants often referred to, as described above, are also grounded in their own experience, education, and imagined future of a just and fair world. For the two participants of Ciocia Wienia, growing up and being indoctrinated by the idea of abortion as murder and the use of protection or birth control as unacceptable, they understand the pressure, the powerlessness over your own body and the narrow frame in which you are allowed to think and feel. After being introduced to feminism and slowly changing her own assumptions on the topic, the first interviewee started to understand that the option to abort and have control over your own body is a fundamental, feminist right that everybody should have access to. This value and the wish that young WLINTA⁵ should not grow up with such a hateful, misogynist and narrow mindset, is what motivates her to engage in solidarity. In the case of Ciocia Wienia, that means providing safe and legal abortions. Her comrade also added:

“I spent most of my life in Poland and the abortion ban was already there since 1993. So I was kind of affected by it. We were living in this fear of unwanted pregnancy. And I just imagine that I myself could end up in this position and I would like to have that support as well, but I also believe everybody should have that support like a supportive aunt. That is why we choose the name Ciocia Wienia (Aunt Wienia). “

– Ciocia Wienia, August 2022

The interviewee from Chile Desperto also expressed that her upbringing in an extremely macho and violent family motivated her from a young age to fight against it, to call it out and to define herself as a feminist. She also believes that her motivation to fight for a more just and equal world, especially in Chile, is connected to her roots and the migration history of her parents from Chile to Austria. Due to the unstable and difficult political situation caused by the dictatorship in Chile her

⁵ Term for Women*, Lesbians, trans*, intersex, a-gender and non-binary people
parents fled to Austria. This forced migration and the state violence experienced in Chile left trans-generational wounds, which she still feels and wants to help to heal: for her, her parents, her children, and Chileans in general. Another point which she is enormously motivated by, is knowing that:

“I could be one of the person who are sitting in prison in Chili due to my political activism or being shot at a demonstration. Or I could have been pregnant at fifteen because there is no access to contraceptives and sexual education. I want to share the privileges and rights I have here in Austria like being able to walk home safely at night or not being murdered due my political beliefs.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

These personal experiences can be a big part of the motivation to engage in transnational feminist solidarity, especially for marginalized communities or people who are affiliated with these groups. These lived experiences and stories, when shared or heard about, are what enables empathy. It is what moves and affects people who are differently positioned as I explained in the section on empathy as a motivation.

Feeling of collectivity
Analyzing the heat map on the subcategory of motivation, it was interesting to see that the interviews of Alerta Feminista, Chile Desperto, and FEM AG 2 had a higher number of codes than the other groups. This suggests that the feeling of collectivity is especially important to them.

The participants mentioned that being collectively active makes it easier for them to organize events, endure political and personal situations and to not feel alone. One participant from Ciocia Wienia described participating in the community they established around their activism as amazing. In particular, being surrounded by people who share some of the values that are significant to her, motivates her a lot. Another participant from Alerta Feminista also expressed that coming back to the feeling of collectivity and establishing a community again was essential for her activism because the singularization that people experienced during the dictatorship in Chili. She concluded that creating a physical space and bringing the people together is a step towards healing from old, colonial and trans-generational wounds. The interview participant from Alerta Feminist put the feeling of collectivity into words brilliantly:

“The feeling that arises when I am together with the others, such a strong energy is shared being fully in the moment. In the process we heal each other and make certain things visible together and yes that is simply the motivation for me: that I can do something collectively with others and enjoy and be a bit more connected with the earth and other people.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022
Another aspect of collectivity was noted by the participant from Tekojin. She explained that their struggle and movement has always involved a lot of people standing in solidarity with them, which motivated them to continue the fight. At the same time it also provides the feeling of being a part of a bigger, transnational struggle. This feeling of collectivity creates the idea and vision that together it is possible to win these fights and to start a global, social transformation.

Also, the feeling of collectivity shouldn’t be underestimated as a challenge to singularization and the feeling of loneliness. When people are persecuted or imprisoned the feeling of collectivity can help to uphold their spirits. In addition, collectivity is shown in acts of solidarity, reminding the imprisoned person that they are not alone and that people are fighting for their release and freedom. Furthermore, a sense of collectivity can help to overcome our own individualization and create a better connection to the self. One participant shared their personal experience about that:

“I studied in the beginning, and it was just about writing my thesis and focusing on learning. My own goals. And I was a bit, how shall I say, disconnected from my own feelings. You then turn into a stone. Puh, hard to describe, but afterwards through the work with the other compañeras and all the feminist actions, I felt like my body was feeling things again, that my feelings were kind of back. That before I was completely separated into my individualized world completely from reality, from the world, from my body. Since then certain things have somehow awakened, through becoming political and collective active.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

A further essential aspect of collectivity is relationships, and how they are approached and lived. All groups stated that they have learnt to put more attention on the relationships within their own groups as well as in their work; explaining that it is essential for them to look after each other in their activism, to check in with everybody on a regular basis, and to even put personal problems before their activism. One example was, holding a collective space in which they can discuss their own experiences of violence such as racist encounters. The participant from Alerta Feminista refers to it as la vida en el centro – to put the life in the center. This implies a loving, respectful, supportive and mutual protective way of interacting with each other and to emphasize the care aspect of relationships in political contexts as well. These relationships were the starting point of their activism and remain at the core, a participant from Kollektiv Lauter said. Their group developed out of a friendship circle who wanted to get politically active and still today they are committed to being attentive to these relationships as Kollektiv Lauter is not only a place of political activism but also of tight personal relationships.

Another interview participant from FEM AG added that the relationships, which developed due to their activism and networking, enhanced her life and her political understanding enormously. She mentioned that these relationships established a collective atmosphere which seems to make their activism more sustainable. Relationships are also open to certain issues and moments of learning
from each other. As discussed in the section on notions of solidarity, Bini Adamczak highlights the revolutionary potential of relationships and relational solidarity. These relationships in activism are essential for motivation, a feeling of collectivity, and personal and political transformation. It is important to be open to these relationships and the potential to be changed and moved by them as affective encounters (Sara Ahmed). Subsequently, it is also necessary to understand that even if everybody tries their best, they are never free from any kind of power relations or emotional violations as one of the participant of FEM AG reflected.

**Sense of empowerment**

Most interview participants mentioned that the political situations around the world and locally make them feel powerless. Watching and experiencing human rights violations and discriminations, such as reading about the extremely high number of femicides each month in Mexico, leads to a feeling of helplessness, powerlessness, and vulnerability, one interview participant from Kollektiv Lauter admitted. Another participant referred to the feeling of powerlessness she experienced in the following situation: She was walking through the streets with her mother in Vienna while talking to each other in Spanish. A group of people came up to them and harassed them because of the language they were communicating in.

By engaging politically the interviewed groups stated that they have a sense of reclaiming their power and narratives, and giving a voice to their struggles. As a result of organizing events, etc. they feel empowered, which is motivates them to continue. One example is the performance “Un Violador en tu Camino” (A Rapist In Your Path) by Las Tesis. The interview participant from Alerta Feminista described it as follows:

“It is of course also a very, very strong feeling when, for example, the Las Tesis performance was done here in Vienna. You know that this week it was also repeated in many other countries, and you see it in the media, and you also participate where you are. At the same time you feel part of a worldwide action. It is unbelievable. It was insane when we did it here in Vienna. It was another ball of motivation. The performance is full of empowerment by using your voice, your body and the great words.”

- Alerta Feminista, August 2022

Another example of how political activism can be empowering, was shared by the interview participant from Chile Desperto. None of their group were professional activists – trained as such and most of them did not have a lot of experience in organizing and planning political events like demonstrations, or talking to the press or being interviewed. After a demonstration, which she helped to organize and where she held a speech, a couple of shy elderly women came up to her. They were impressed by her and how confident she seemed and admitted that they would not dare
to do it themselves. And at that moment she noticed how much she had learnt while being political active and how empowering that process was and is for her.

Similarly, a participant from Ciocia Wienia explained that raising their voices and creating a narrative about what is important to them, is empowering for them as well. Feeling of being heard and to be the subjects of the discourse and not to be talked about, objectified or othered, as Linda Smith writes, empowers people enormously. Not letting narratives about femicide be dominated by the radical-right and racist motives was a strong motivation for the FEM AG to start holding femicide demonstrations.

Celebrating and sharing wins is also linked to a strong feeling of empowerment. One of the activists from Ciocia Wienia said:

“We tell ourselves the positive moments. Yeah, we really celebrate those moments where the person is done and the persons are so happy. And that's kind of like wow for us, too. Our work makes sense because you see how happy the person is when they have control over their own body again, and I think to myself, yes, that really boosts the motivation. That really makes sense what we do, and it's really important for somebody.”

- Ciocia Wienia 1, July 2022

Celebrating the positive outcomes, the wins and remembering these positive moments is tremendously empowering and motivates them to remain politically engaged and active. It is not only wins that we personally experience that are empowering, but also the wins, processes, and accomplishments of other groups who fight in the same struggle. One activist from FEM AG mentioned that his group was hyped after the first feminist strike movements, which took the place in Latin America or about the mass-mobilization around the right of abortion in Argentina. These moments not only enabled them to learn but also to feel collectively empowered, reassured in their fights and to have hope for the struggles they are in.

All these different reasons establish the motivation to be politically active for the interviewed groups and are centered around the wish to change the current, oppressive and violent forms of hierarchy. Practicing transnational feminist solidarity is one way to do so and always requires the re-questioning of our motivations. It is important to keep in mind that feelings of empathy, fairness, and responsibility are important, but at the same time can be excluding and paternalistic. In the end feminist solidarity is not about establishing an identity, but about doing something, about putting it into practice and, as an interview participant from Ciocia Wienia said, what better place is there to do this than within a transnational feminist movement.
While summarizing the discussion around transnational feminism, solidarity, locations of transnational feminist solidarity and the motivation for it, I highlighted some challenges that need to be considered. Nikita Dhawan’s expression, “we are all facing the same storm, but we are not sitting in the same boat,” is a point which needs to be carefully considered when practicing solidarity. The emerging challenges, problems, and limitations will be discussed in the next chapter, followed by the tools and structures that the different groups used to try to prevent any form of hierarchy, discrimination and power relations.

4.2. Challenges and limitations

The second main category holds a quarter of all codes. As explained above, transnational feminist solidarity is a challenge in itself and has its limitations. By re-listening to and re-reading the interviews I identified the following subsections of the subcategory challenges: empathy and responsibility, objectification, mechanisms of exclusion, positionally, financial resources, resource of time, power of knowledge and language and conflict, harm and abuse. The subsections are closely linked to one another and only together show the hegemonic power relations and diverse challenges that transnational feminist solidarity faces. This will be analyzed in the following, whilst taking into account the framework and challenges set out in the theoretical chapter.

Some interview participants hesitated when I first asked them if they have experienced any sort of power dynamics in their work. By adding that all our relationships are always influenced by power relations, most of them felt more at ease. Also, after the first couple of minutes of careful and often quite abstract answers, they found their way back into the flow of the interview. They admitted that in the end they shared more information than they thought they would at the beginning. I believe this was due to them feeling comfortable in the interview setting as they said they didn’t feel pressured to talk or open up but that they wanted to share. I also made it quite clear during that section that we could stop the interview if they didn’t want to share more information or at any given time. It was important to me to not be too invasive and to accept the limits of the interview participants.

4.2.1. Empathy and responsibility

As already elaborated on above, empathy is a great tool with which to forge solidarity and create a collective feeling, but that on the other hand needs to be treated carefully and constantly reflected on, so that it does not lead to pity, which implies hierarchical relations and objectification, as the interview participant from Kollektiv Lauter mentioned.
Closely connected to empathy, is the feeling of responsibility, which can also be problematic, as previously explained, and is connected to everybody’s own positioning. A participant from FEM AG explained it as such:

“You bring different levels of knowledge, among other things to your activism. Different social situations, which are often very different, and you really have to be careful that you don't fall into a paternalistic role of. Well, we know what’s good for you, or that you don't fall into the role of being responsible to show them how things are done.”

-FEM AG 1, July 2022

He highlights the need to recognize different positioning, which is key for establishing equal relationships and points out how easy it is to fall into the pattern of feeling responsible for others and knowing what would be best for them. Historically, it is typically referred to as the white men’s burden or in a slightly changed form by Spivak as, the burden of the fittest. All groups were clear on their position to always re-question this thinking and to prevent it when they noticed it. Unfortunately, this does not mean that it never happens. The interviewed activist from Chile Desperto mentioned that she had a good experience when criticizing the other groups in Claim the Space. For example, at the first meeting of Claim the Space, FEM AG had already suggested some names for the Asamblea and the strike place (formerly known as Karlsplatz) and just wanted the people to vote. She then told them that they cannot just come to a space, put up their flag and rename it. She highlighted this as a form of colonial behavior. The group was shocked about it, agreed and apologized. This example illustrates how hard it can be to be aware of issues around colonial behavior and the feeling of responsibility.

Closely linked to empathy and responsibility is the code objectification, which will be further explained in the next section.

4.2.2. Objectification

In this code the different positioning of the groups came immensely into play. The groups Alerta Feminista, Tekojin, Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger and Chile Desperto mentioned that they sometimes face objectification in their activism. In contrast, FEM AG and Kollektiv Lauter expressed that they try to not objectify people and groups. Ciocia Wienia had an interesting position in the middle. They were sometimes experiencing objectification themselves, as polish migrants, but at the same time they try to stay aware of it with regard to the women from eastern countries who come to them looking for support in getting an abortion.
One aspect of objectification is degrading others to the role of victims and therefore making their voices and opinions passive, whilst taking over the narrative. Therefore, an activist from Ciocia Wienia strongly argued,

“we should not think about ourselves as somehow more modernized, liberated, emancipated, and the people who are living in the peripheries as victims. But we should see that they are transgressing this victimization by their activism, and they want to be heard.”

- Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

This argument follows the same logic as Mohanty’s: to see the other as acting subjects not as passive objects as it limits their scope of action and makes them seem powerless and not capable of fighting for themselves. The activist also strongly argues that we - white feminists from dominating societies - should not think about ourselves as superior as this also implies a hierarchical and paternalistic power relation. Such a relation completely neglects the center stone of solidarity, which is based on equal and just relationships.

Another example from Ciocia Wienia was when they were contacted by a political party after the abortion ban in Poland. The political party wanted to bring awareness to the topic and therefore do a demonstration, and invited Ciocia Wienia to collaborate and speak. Despite some initial talks to clarify the event, in the end Ciocia Wienia were quite upset about the collaboration. The interview participant was quite emotional while recounting this event:

“So we thought that it sounds all good, but they wanted to organize it differently then, and they did. A silent demonstration, like the minutes of silence to commemorate this tragedy that is happening in Poland. But for me, it was ridiculous. Because we were dealing with a revolutionary moment in the country and there was no time to grieve but to share this revolutionary energy from the protests and to shout out our anger. As Polish migrants, we feel more affected by what is happening in Poland than the group, for example. And they just wanted us to be engaged in totally different affective politics. Yes, so they just wanted to make it passive and to make it about their feelings of sadness. But what we felt that we need to participate in the revolutionary action. And not just freeze of sadness and show our compassion to Polish women victims.”

- Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

In this excerpt, the participant clearly explains how the emotions and wishes of the community that was more impacted by the abortion ban were ignored. The organizers had only their own emotions in mind and wanted to create a space only for them and in doing so effectively high-jacked the platform. They changed the narrative in making everything about themselves and their emotions instead of the actual subjects of the discourse. This is exactly what Sara Ahmed means when she writes that people from dominating societies are using the pain of others to uplift themselves. They
make it about how they feel and about how they can make themselves feel better and the original pain of the others gets put aside. In the example, the organizers created a stigma of the helpless, victimized Polish women through focussing on the feeling of sadness and compassion, which was not a true representation as shown by the big protests all over the country. People stood up for their rights and were fighting and did not need empathy and pity but support and solidarity for their fights. This example also brings attention to who is talking, what is being talked about and whether it is a talking-with or talking-about or even talking-for others. These distinctions are important for analyzing power dynamics within solidarity-based relations, as I explained in detail in the theoretical section.

Another aspect of objectification is homogenization. Mohanty writes about homogenization extensively in her book “Feminism without Borders,” explaining that in both the past and present day, feminist movements have often homogenized women in dominated countries to one category: the third world women. This category is viewed as helpless, powerless, suffering and in need of rescuing. The activist from Alerta Feminista expressed in the interview that this is a recurring problem they and similar groups face:

“Generally speaking, there are certain expectations like that we are all the same or that everyone in Latin America has the same worries or something. For example, I'm not from Latin America. But sometimes we think that they think that all groups, no matter what group, are the same, all Latino groups do the same thing, and that we are all the same. But there are so many groups and people!”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

Furthermore, she told me that often people think they are a part of “Ni Una Menos” as it is often the only known Latin American group. Also, their activism is often seen as only a fight against femicides or the Las Tesis performance, but she strongly explains that these are only some facets of their activism, and that there are lots of different Latin American groups in Vienna who are politically active in the area of transnational feminism in different ways: music, art, podcasters, social media, etc.. To homogenize these different groups, forms, and struggles is to devalue them. Not taking the time or energy to inform or differentiate between them, gives the impression that their struggles are not being taken seriously. This again highlights the objectification of the before mentioned activists.

Another aspect of objectification, which some groups have experienced, is exoticization. The interview participant from Chile Desperto explained that in the beginning they group collaborated with everybody and participated in all forms of events. But after a number of discriminating experiences, they changed their attitude towards collaborations. They now only engage if they have the feeling that they are in an equal relationship and that they are able to participate fully in the event and are not only an act. Furthermore, they must also feel that their voices are being heard and that they
have the possibility to express their political opinions and to prevent any form of exoticization. She recalled:

“This non-exoticizing of Latin American women is important to us. That was also a very big issue. In Claim the Space we experienced a lot of appreciation, but with others it sometimes came to such moments. We always said that we are not here to only dance, to make a cool performance with such colorful feather decorations and to be an exotic event. But it is about content for us. We want to say something and that the dance and clothing and so on are part of our culture. Being straight forward about it often led to a joint learning process.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

Kollektiv Lauter and FEM AG mentioned that they greatly appreciated these comments and the joint learning process. These two groups are differently positioned to the rest of the interviewed groups and shared that they are often unsettled about the topic of appropriation. They discuss within their groups, as well as in the asambleas, collaborations and networks, how they can deal with practicing protest forms that were developed in the frame of decolonial, anticolonial or post-colonial fights, without changing the narrative or making it their own. An activist from FEM AG said that she believes it is essential to always be unsettled about the possibility of appropriation so that they do not relax their attentiveness. In the experience of a participant from Kollektiv Lauter said, “it still happens that we don’t reflect on certain issues enough and talk about the others instead of with them.” She says, that it is a long process of unlearning your privileges as Spivak describes it, and that they are in the middle of it.

4.2.3. Mechanisms of exclusion

The code exclusions revealed the same division within the groups on the basis of their positionality as the code objectification. One activist remembered trying to engage with other feminist groups when she first came to Vienna but felt quite excluded by their very narrowed, Eurocentric agenda and perspectives on feminism:

“When we tried to network with other groups that have been around since the 70s and are more institutionalized [referring to the parties] and these feminist groups they were very Eurocentric and practiced a classical white feminism. And so on. They focused on classic problems of women* here in Austria e.g. the gap in salaries, these classic issues that these feminists are concerned with.”

- Alerta feminista, July 2022
Today she admits, that it is refreshing to see that newer and younger groups like *FEM AG* and *Kollektiv Lauter* are re-questioning their position. They are taking into account other perspectives and widening their view on issues outside of their comfort zone and the things that only concern them. Nonetheless, sometimes they still get caught up in their own internal processes and debates, but then it is possible to tell them that.

Exclusion can also happen due to different class backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Coming from a working class, non-academic background, one participant shared that she often had the feeling of not belonging within white feminist groups as she couldn’t debate about new feminist theories. She felt excluded by not having read books by Simone de Beauvoir or other white feminists and had the feeling that her knowledge of feminism was regarded as less important and wasn’t heard. She developed a sense of fear, and a feeling of not being smart enough or knowing enough to engage. Furthermore, she said that a lot of her Latin American comrades had the same fear.

She gave the example of participating in a feminist gathering to prepare and discuss the performance “Un violador en tu camino.” One person referred to cis-women. She didn’t engage in the discussion because of not knowing what the term means, but one of the feminists got angry with her and the feeling of not belonging emerged. Luckily, she continued, she also had completely opposite experiences. She was relieved after her first meeting in *Claim the Space* as the new feminist groups she encountered there were different to what she expected. They were more open, and interested in her opinions, experiences, and forms of activism. Nevertheless, she expressed that class and cultural background, as well different levels of knowledge, often lead to exclusion and that this is a fear a lot of marginalized groups have when engaging with activists from dominating positions.

An interviewed member from *Ciocia Wienia* also commented on this topic and related it to knowledge production and academia:

“In general transnational feminism might be like the quasi colonial relationships between the activists from the countries of core capitalism and the peripheral countries. It also manifests itself in the academia. There are those who produce narratives and have a voice, and there are others who, for example, perform mundane work or in academia, collecting data or thinking of activism. Then there are the ones who do the unrewarding and invisible activist work: street activism.”

- *Ciocia Wienia*, 2, July 2022

This example demonstrates clearly that power relations also play a role in transnational feminist activism. The reproduction of these hegemonic relationships can not be denied. Furthermore, there is typically a division between street activism and academic activism, which invites the question: who is learning from whom? Are the peripheries learning from the centers or vice versa?
From another position within the topic of exclusion, an interviewed member of FEM AG admitted that there were moments when people needed to approach them and explain that they were excluding others at certain points and events. For example in 2019 they organized a big panel on the topic of the feminist strike with people from different feminist groups, issues, and countries. Shortly before the panel started, a woman came up to him and said that she read about the panel and recognized that it is completely lacking the feminist perspective of sex workers. She said that she would therefore like to participate to give that issue a voice. Only then did he, and later his comrades, recognize that even though they were debating care work a lot, they had never thought about sex work as part of it nor had any contact with organized sex workers.

Another example of being exclusive and needing to be made aware of it, was shared by Kollektiv Lauter:

“At the beginning, we were told by a Latin American group that they would have liked us to approach them as a collective, i.e. the Austrian collectives. And sure. That was an omission, for example, that we can’t just start a femicide practice that was strongly formed in Latin America and then wait for such a group to somehow get involved.”

- Kollektiv Lauter, July 2022

The above experiences are only a couple of examples to illustrate in which situations these mechanisms of exclusions are taking place when feminist groups with different positionalities are interacting.

4.2.4. Positionality

Another challenge for cooperation between the different groups is the difference in resources and access to them. All the groups mentioned that it is not only a topic in their solidarity-based relationships but also within their groups. Most groups said that in the past they did not consider their resources as much and therefore often went overboard with their activism so that a lot of their comrades were exhausted and close to burn-out. Hence, most of them decided to focus more on dividing tasks equally and only doing as much as was realistic. An activist from FEM AG also criticized their previous behavior in collaborations:

“We often thought we need to do this and this and this at the same time and now. And had quite concrete ideas of needs to be done and in what speed. So at asambleas we frequently expected other groups to be able to keep up with our engagement and should do their fair share. For quite a while we noticed that it doesn’t work like that. That it was super narrowed minded of us to assume everybody has the same resources as we do to be political active. It is something we still need to learn a lot about
As we are living in a colonial, patriarchal, racist, white-supremacist society (bell hooks), our activism also takes place in this frame. Therefore, different positionalities provide certain privileges and access for some people and disadvantages for others. Hence, it is important to be attentive about our own positioning and re-question it to not fall into a paternalistic or dominating behavior in our solidarity-based relationships. A member from Kollektiv Lauter also added that it is necessary to think about the power they have in terms of being able to talk and be heard, as this also establishes a hierarchy. It is not always necessary for them to address and position themselves to every issue as a collective. Rather, they should rethink when to speak and recognize that in certain moments it is better to listen and to amplify the voices of directly impacted people and to not talk and take up most of the space themselves. Spivak and other decolonial scholars refer to this as listening to the subalterns instead of speaking for them.

Not loudly drawing attention to yourself or taking action in response to certain issues does not mean not acting at all. An interviewed member of Tekojin said that it is also not enough to just say that you are in solidarity with somebody and maybe share it on your social media accounts. For her, true solidarity means to act, organize and offer your support to the affected communities. Her comrade from the Kurdish youth movement also added that often people are so caught up in discussing political situations, analyzing them and trying to find the best possible solutions, that they never start actually doing something. Sometimes this inaction also comes from a fear of doing something wrong, such as reproducing power relations, but can also simply be because the person is not committed enough to the cause. He, as well as another participant from Ciocia Wienia, strongly argue that this behavior does not help anybody in the end. It is necessary to take a leap of faith and to try things out but to be aware and accepting of critiques made in solidarity. An activist from FEM AG told me the following experience regarding this topic:

“We wanted to raise money to support a marginalized group as they were in need of it. To do that we produced merch to sell it. Then afterwards one of the groups came up to us and pointed out that one picture on the printed merch actually reproduces a colonialist image. It's just something that, because of your social position as a white academic leftist, maybe you don't know or don't notice or think about all the time.”

- FEM AG 1, July 2002

Despite reproducing colonial images, it was important that the group did something and continued to be politically active and engaged. When we are open to critique, these mistakes create chances to learn and it is only through learning together that it is possible to become aware of your own positioning and slowly deconstruct hegemonic relations and privileges.
4.2.5. Financial resources

Resources are mostly unevenly distributed, as is access to or even knowledge about them. For example, an interview participant from Kollektiv Lauter said that raising money for events was not that big of a challenge for them as they applied regularly for funding, organized fundraising parties and collected donations so that they could print posters and flyers. As a member of Ciocia Wienia said, fundraising takes lots of energy and time. Furthermore, it is often quite bureaucratic and therefore needs a high level of German literacy. Also knowing about where to apply for funding involves already having networks and contacts within mostly institutionalized feminist circles, which are typically run by white, middle-aged, Austrian women and as a result are not easily accessible to everybody. But without money some political groups like Ciocia Wienia are not able to work, and therefore she concludes that money and the access to it, is mostly a direct translation of power dynamics. Her comrade also mentioned that this is a problem on a transnational level. A lot of feminist movements in dominated countries are dependent on the donations they get from feminist groups in dominating countries. This dependency can translate into a position of inferiority. In addition, this creates an unequal power relation in which the groups from dominating countries have a say in which political activism is financed and can therefore flourish. Often they only support groups that do things that they believe are worthy or important to support. This is problematic. The interview participant from Chile Desperto shared an experience of encountering this problem:

“We organized a small festival and gathered some donations. We discussed for a while to which organization in Chile we should give it to and to what extent we want to have control over the money because some were afraid that it would be misused. We also discussed if we want to have a receipt, photos, or something. Money is always about the people who donate. And I then said, I don't want that at all. We collect that. We find a group we all agree on and send them the money. And then it's no longer our business. We have to see the others as equals and trust each other. And if it goes wrong, and we find out in three years that they went to Cancun with the money. Then it sucks, but that also didn't happen. It's often the case that they think the money will never arrive.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

This excerpt shows that there is a fine line between being careful about who to support and being controlling about it. As the participant said, in the end we need to trust each other and believe that we are fighting for the same cause. To do that, we need to meet as equals and not approach others with a paternalistic view. This means giving up control, and sharing power, resources and responsibility.
4.2.6. Resource of time

Another essential resource is time and energy. As political activism is mostly done on a voluntary basis, those engaging in it need to have enough free time in their daily life to spare some to be politically involved. Most of the time this already suggests that they are in a more privileged situation, one activist from Ciocia Wienia explained. Especially, when the activism is solidarity work in which the outcome does not affect them directly, it shows that they have time to think about issues outside of their daily life and needs. She continued to explain that, if somebody needs to be so absorbed in their own life and struggle to support themselves and their family, then there is often no time to think about others or to organize politically. Thus the resource of time is also closely linked to the economic background of a person or group. Also, having more time to invest in political engagement means taking on more responsibility, which leads to having more power within a group or collaboration. Therefore the unequal accesses to time and energy for political activism based on different positioning, directly influences the power relations within and between the groups. These power relations replicate same hegemonic relations that exist on a global level.

The resources of time and energy also depend on what care-responsibilities the people have. One participant from Chile Desperto said that she has two kids, a partnership, a full time job and parents who also need her help from time to time. This is a completely different situation to that which a member of FEM AG described:

“In our my group most people have only post-migrant or non-migrant experiences. We are mostly an academic group, and therefore we have completely different possibilities to engage politically as others do. All of us also do not have a children or other care responsibilities. Most of us are also in the age where they still not have to care for their parents or other relatives.”

- FEM AG 2, July 2022

Her comrade from the same group also adds, that lots of politically marginalized groups are also busy with care work within their community. For example, supporting each other in experiences of discrimination, applying for residence permits and other bureaucracy. It also takes time to keep in contact with their families and friends in other countries, as well as worrying about them when something happens and updating, commenting and informing others about what is going on in their home countries.

All these different aspects should not be neglected when talking about the possibilities and limitations of getting involved in transnational feminist solidarity. The following section will analyze in more detail how power dynamics play out due to differences in language and knowledge.
4.2.7. The power of knowledge and language

All the groups at some point mentioned that differences in knowledge is a key element that creates imbalances. In the theoretical chapter, I already explained that knowledge production itself is based on inequity and colonial power structures. Knowledge production also plays an important part in activism; for example, in creating new forms and highlighting specific themes. An activist from *Ciocia Wienia* shared one concern about it:

“It’s also an issue more generally [in transnational feminist solidarity], they’re waiting for us to learn from the Western comrades, who are supposed to be more experienced and so on. But when it comes to and what I am familiar with are the East-West relationships to reproduce themselves also in the activism. These inequalities. So for example, Polish activists adapt their strategies to the ones which came from Germany or from France. And it doesn’t work the other way. That Western comrades are so inspired by what we invent and how we work.’

-Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

She finds it difficult that the mostly one-sided power relation, which is part of the knowledge production, is almost never re-questioned or inverted. She argues that activists from dominating countries are always expecting everybody else to adapt to their strategies instead of taking their agendas into account and learning from them. This is especially based on her experience regarding the east-west dynamics.

In contrast, the interviewed activist from *Alerta Feminista* said that for her, it seems like the tables are turning. Forms like the *Las Tesis* performance, which went viral globally and the increasing discourse and exchange with Latin American based groups makes her hopeful to change the learning power relation from north-south to a more mutual learning relationship. Nevertheless, examining the discourse, whilst there are south-south and south-north learning relations, there are only a few east-west learning dynamics. This pattern is underlined by the statements of the interviewed “west feminist groups,” who explained that they decided to follow the approaches of the feminist strike movements in Latin America. Also, almost no links and networks where mentioned in connection to eastern (European) feminist movements and the topics that they are concerned with, with the exception of Poland. It would be interesting to further research the east-west relations within transnational feminism and the implied knowledge and power relations.

As outlined above, it is not only important what is said and how things are discussed but also who says it. Even more essential is who listens and who is heard. Being capable of understanding and communicating in German is essential for the work of *Ciocia Wienia*. Because the people who seek help from them are often not able to speak German, they need to function as translators, which
they find difficult, as it opens up an unequal power dynamic. One interviewed member remembered:

“So the preliminary talk before the abortion with the doctor we always accompany them. I translated everything. And then I also said to myself, shit, okay, this is also a power thing and it is not my specialization to translate. Of course, it works for that purpose. But there is also a bit of pressure, because you have this power over the person, so that they can understand and feel secure or less so.”

- Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

Being the translator in such a situation puts the person in a position of power, as the person who is in need of a translation completely depends on the person translating. They need to trust that they are doing their job correctly. The activist also explained, that doctors sometimes address questions for their patient directly to the activists translating instead of addressing their person who is seeking the abortion. This can be understood as a form of talking about them, as Sara Ahmed defines it, instead of talking with them. In this situation, it is particularly difficult for the translators to not fall into this already constructed power relation. Instead, they need to translate, word for word, the doctor’s questions and the answers of the impacted people, without judging or adding anything.

This example demonstrates that even small things like translation re-enforce power relations with transnational feminist solidarity work. This can be transferred to a lot of different situations. Another small example that often happens is the question of who is asked to give interviews or is in contact with the press around events. Most of the time these are people who are able to communicate in the dominating languages. As a result, these people are typically used by the press, and therefore society, to symbolize or represent certain struggles in the media, which they may not be directly affected by.

4.2.8. Conflict, harm and abuse

Structured abuse, harm and discrimination can always take place when there are power dynamics at play and should be taken seriously. It can play out, as described in the examples above, due to the reproduction of colonial images and stereotypes, by objectifying certain marginalized groups and disempowering them or by offering help with a paternalistic mindset. Moreover, there can also be emotional violence in solidarity-based relationships, either within or between groups. An interviewed person from Alerta Feminista shared her experience in another group, where one controlling-person was dominating the group and their activism, and how that almost destroyed the group:

“Some left the group because it was so uncomfortable, the mood or the energy, so negative or however you could describe what happened. They were actually frustrated...”
and would have liked to continue contributing. But the situation, unfortunately, put a lot of us off. We were unsure about if we should talk about it or should we keep quiet. And we didn't want to be unfair because there is a clear person who was actually identified as the origin of the issue. And it is unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that, as sorry as we are, it has gone on for years and there were certain recurring violent behaviors. It's really very difficult to talk about something like that, because it was also a person who had a leadership role in the group And it is somehow difficult for many to question that. Just because you were always there, or you made it possible for the group to exist at all, that doesn't give you the right to treat people that way."

- Alerta Feminista., July 2022

The participant was crying during that part of the interview, as it was very difficult for her to talk about it, but she had the urge to share it. Because it is something that starts slowly and becomes more intense with time, it takes courage and attentiveness to notice these kinds of power dynamics. Putting pressure on people, making them responsible for things and controlling the group and its members does not lead to equal relationships. Instead, it creates the opposite: a group full of insecurity, distrust, frustration, and anger. She also explained that such behavior is mostly not talked about, which is not helpful in working on or overcoming any power dynamics.

All of these examples illustrate the different challenges, limitations, and problems that transnational feminist solidarity faces, and which should not be neglected, but integrated into political activism. An interviewed participant from Kollektiv Lauter put it into her own words:

“I think that in the society in which we live, it is fundamentally not possible to completely dismantle all power structures within relationships. Because I think that would be a bit like when white people say they don't see skin color. That simply produces violence again in the attempt to dismantle them. I think it is simply most important to recognize them and how they exist, how they show themselves and to consider that in one’s own practice.”

- Kollektiv Lauter, July 2022

The following chapter discusses how it is possible to be attentive to these power dynamics and what possibilities, tools, and structures exist to recognize and prevent them, and if necessary to intervene.

4.3. Tools to be attentive

This subchapter summarizes the different structures, tools and experiences that the nine interviewed groups shared with regards to practicing a transnational feminist solidarity that is attentive
to power relations, injustice, and imbalances. Analyzing the heat map for this subcategory, it was especially striking that the groups FEM AG and Kollektiv Lauter highlighted how important it is to them to continuously reflect on their activism and position and to see it as an ongoing learning process, which will never be completed. While reviewing the data, I encountered seven major themes: safe spaces, reflexivity, learning, communication, guiding principles, decision-making and sharing privileges. These will be described in detail in the following.

4.3.1. Safe space

To be able to criticize, reflect and learn, there needs to be a safe environment in which to do so. Safe spaces are now a familiar concept for most left-wing political groups. Unfortunately, that does not mean they are safe for everybody. Safe spaces are physical or digital spaces in which everybody can safely express their opinions, thoughts, critiques, and fears without being judged or corrected by others. It is also a tool with which to conquer power relations within groups or relationships. To establish and hold safe spaces requires a lot of effort from everyone to reflect on their own position and behavior. In the following I will introduce three different positive experiences of holding and using a safe space.

The first example is from Tekojin. They are a female group, but often they have meetings with the Kurdish Youth or Kurdish Student's Movement, which are all-gender groups. Of course, the ideal version would be that the meeting itself would be a safe space, but experience shows that certain patriarchal structures remain in place, like “mansplaining” or women feeling more insecure about expressing their thoughts. To counteract these behaviors, they implemented that the female comrades would meet by themselves at the beginning of the meeting. In this safe space (with regards to gender) they would collect their core concerns, questions and critiques and then delegate a person to bring these issues up in the meeting, so that nobody would later come into a position were they needed to defend their statement or felt too shy or intimidated to speak up. Meeting up beforehand enabled the women to speak up later in the common meeting. They said they feel strengthened and reassured by this structure, and that it made it easier for them to practice critique through the collective voice. Creating safe spaces in the form of pre-meetings for marginalized groups within a larger group, network or collaboration is a tool that can help to empower the structurally discriminated groups and strengthen their collective voice in the open meeting.

The second example is from Ciocia Wienia. As their work is to support pregnant people, mostly from Poland, to get an abortion in Austria, it is essential for them to develop trust and a safe atmosphere. This is particularly important in the encounters with the doctors during the preliminary interview and before the procedure. To do this, they never invasively ask the person anything, especially about the pregnancy or their reason to abort. If the person shares, they engage in the conver-
sation, but they never pressure the person and always respect the personal boundaries and pri-
vacy of the person. Furthermore, when they are translating during the doctor’s appointment, they
are careful to only translate and to not speak or answer for them even if the doctors imply it in their
question. They also continuously tell the people who seek an abortion that is up to them to decide
what they want to do or tell. If they decide at the last minute to not have an abortion, it is also okay.
They permanently reassure them that it is about them and what they want and that they are only
there to support them through the process.

The third example is about safe spaces as spaces of learning. Using the examples from above one
participant from Chile desperto described being in a meeting where they discussed the text and
meaning behind the performance of *Las Tesis*. She did not know certain theories and the wording
that the person referred to and they got angry with her about it. At the same time, others stepped
in, and explained it to her, and criticized the other person for being so unfair and acting superior to-
wards others. Showing allyship, supporting people when they are harassed or intimidated by oth-
ers and intervening can also help to create a safe space and establish accountability. On the other
hand, a safe space should not be a space dominated by a call-out-culture, where mistakes cannot
be made. But rather, it should be a space of common learning and in which to practice making cri-
tiques in solidarity, which will be further explained in the section on reflection.

These examples show how the tool of safe spaces can be used and adapted to create a space in
which people can feel safe, supported, able to share and able to politically engage. Creating a safe
space and continuously reflecting and trying to hold it, is also essential for open and transparent
communication. Without feeling safe enough in a group or solidarity-based relationship, it is hard,
or even impossible for people to bring up issues or problematic structures. Therefore, creating safe
spaces needs to be the corner stone for approaching transnational feminist solidarity work. How re-
flexivity can help to achieve this will be explained in the following section.

### 4.3.2. Reflexivity

All groups claim to be reflexive and attentive in their activism. They are all trying to re-question and
reflect on their hierarchies, the power dynamics they are embedded in, their complicity in structural
discrimination and their own positionally. Nevertheless, it is not possible to completely prevent
such issues without a complete transformation of society. Therefore, the groups argue that it is es-
sential to closely pay attention to these issues in their transnational feminist solidarity work.
Most important is creating a safe space in which reflection is possible and where mistakes as well
as successes can be pointed out. There needs to be an atmosphere of collective learning and
growing. If it is a space full of fear and mistrust, critique will always be seen as a personal aggres-
sion. Further, it is essential to have regular reflection meetings or to integrate reflection into the
regular meetings: to actively hold time for reflection. Reflection can also be written down in a group's guiding principles. The interviewed members of Ciocia Wienia explained that every two weeks they have a supervision held by an outside person to help them to reflect on the different cases they dealt with and on what they want to focus.

Unfortunately, not every activist group has access to supervision. Therefore, a tool which is used in the Kurdish movement can be useful: Tekmil. It can be translated as critique made in solidarity, and it is about criticizing ourselves and each others to formulate critique but also be criticized by others. It is a tool which has been used in the Kurdish movement for a long time and can be found at all different levels of activism and groups. Generally, there is time made at the beginning or end of the meeting to actively practice Tekmil. It allows the movement, individuals, and groups to reflect, grow and learn from their mistakes. It is important that critique is not formulated in order to shame or disgrace somebody but rather to support and help the other person to grow. It is not only about criticizing but also about sharing what the person could do instead. Criticizing each other in this context is seen as an act of kindness and respect for each other. And everybody is allowed to make critiques of everybody regardless of their social or political status. This point also reminds everybody that nobody is inferior and that everybody makes mistakes and still has potential to learn and grow.

Likewise, self-critique shows that the person is not driven by their ego and only trying to hold on to their position, but that the person is capable of learning, admitting to mistakes and putting effort into changing. These are values that are essential and that will earn the person respect within the movement in contrast to just pretending to be reflective, which is considered fraud and lying. Continuous learning and re-questioning is necessary for the vision of a free and equal society.

Reflecting on past and present events and actions is one key part of reflexivity. The interviewed activist from Alerta Feminista also mentioned that reflexivity can bring healing to individuals, groups, and networks. After she and some of her comrades left a similar group, they started a collective, reflection process, which she shared with me.

"That then took months, the whole process. It was really healing for us, because we were very hurt. I didn't know it myself, it put an extreme strain on me at times. But I wasn't aware of it at the beginning and by talking about it, this process of healing and writing texts to bring thoughts to the point, etc.. It was possible to recognize how and why the situations arose. And it gave us closure and the possibility to move beyond it."

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

Reflexivity can bring understanding, clarity, healing, and the possibility to consequently change problematic circumstances and patterns, or to move on and engage in something new. The other important part of reflexivity is applying it to your own or the group’s positionality. This involves being aware of your own privileges and the groups positioning. It is necessary to again and
again feel insecure about your actions and the effect of your positionality, and to re-question everything. These moments of insecurity show that solidarity is not free of contradictions but is always a clash of different positionalities. It is a continuous process of reflecting and learning, which requires the “readiness and understanding that when you want to change this world, that you then also have to change yourself and to abolish your own privileged position” (FEM AG 2). In the example of FEM AG’s solidarity work with the 24 hour care workers, IG 24, the activist remembered that their position was always clear in that relationship. They were not the ones who decided on the content, the actions, or decision-making or who pushed the topic. Instead, they were clear in their position of supporting the IG 24 and doing things like painting banners, registering demonstrations and handing out flyers.

Moreover, it is also essential to not only focus on your own privileges, as a member of Ciocia Wienia argued:

“It is critical to be aware of them. And it should be discussed. But we shouldn’t make everything about ourselves. If you know what I mean? So, to show this empathy and have an interest in what’s happening and how it is interpreted and to be interested in their struggles that are happening in the peripheries. And sometimes to just step back and not make everything about ourselves.”

-Ciocia Wienia 2, July 2022

Sometimes it is more useful to consider how to use your own privileges in supporting and being in solidarity with other groups, as well as learning from other groups. Both will be further expanded on in the upcoming sections.

4.3.3. Learning

Understanding that learning is an ever-ongoing process is essential for an attentive mindset towards practicing transnational feminist solidarity. An interviewed member from Kollektiv Lauter described it in her own words: “It’s not about results, it’s about processes. And I think that was really such a critical moment for us. When we understood that. It's going to go on forever and that's a good thing.” Learning can happen in different places, in different forms and contexts, and it is an essential part of political activism and shouldn’t be underestimated. Gathering information, knowledge and discussing what is going on in the world is the starting point for becoming political active. Passive learning through conversation and the explanations of other people is important and enriching. But it is crucial to understand that nobody has the right to be educated by others, especially not by impacted, marginalized groups. If they do so, it should be appreciated, but it should not be expected. Instead, it is essential to educate yourself through things like reading books, and watching movies and videos. Collective learning is also a great way to learn and discuss global and local political situations, as Tekojin mentioned that they do on a regular basis.
Another collective approach is to organize workshops and share knowledge. Ciocia Wienia explained that they attend workshops, together with other pro-choice groups in Europe, around the topics of trans* people and reproductive rights, internet security and inclusivity. This is also a resource friendly approach, as not every group needs to organize these workshops themselves but can share the tasks and save the energy and time for something else.

Collective learning can also take place in collaborations, networks and any form of asambleas. The important point is to acknowledge the learning relationships as just and equal ones. Everybody can contribute and learn something from another and there is also a necessity to share knowledge and to learn collaboratively. An interview participant from FEM AG referred to an example that he remembered:

“After the first big feminist strikes in Latin America, we tried to find out how they did it. And then we quickly understood that is quite difficult what they did. It just doesn’t work that way that you simply transfer this concept of femicide to Austrian conditions. But when you relate to concepts you also need to relate to those feminisms as well. We were kind of forced to network with the Latin American diaspora (laughing). Anything else would have been quite weird. And I think it has definitely opened up a lot of new relationships. And it has opened up a lot of new encounters and learning relationships.”

-FEM AG 1, July 2022

Learning about each other’s strategies and activism, can also help to unite struggles in using the same forms and expressions. This does not imply neglecting the variety and diversity of forms and expressions as blockading, demonstrations, seminars, etc. or homogenizing them. Networking and coordinating as a bigger group and using the same expression can also be helpful for smaller groups to be able to participate and do something with their more limited resources. Sharing knowledge is a strong advantage and resource that transnational movements have, the activist from Alerta Feminista added. It also widens our horizons about different expressions and approaches to activism. An interviewed participant from FEM AG shared the following memory:

“The Latin American groups which I encountered relate a lot to indigenous knowledge and indigenous struggles. Many of them work in public space with rituals and so on. And I think we were a bit timid at the beginning and didn't quite dare. It just wasn't our style. We simply don't have such a performative approach to practice activism as they do, And then one time we made a collective ritual and that was cool and everyone thought it was really nice. We would have never done that if we hadn't been in contact with these Latin American groups.”

-FEM AG 2, July 2022
These transnational feminist learning relationships are also a way to challenge, re-question and even dismiss the west-east, north-south, dominating-dominated learning and knowledge production hierarchies. “We are following what is happening in the so-called peripheries and yet to read what is written by the people coming from those parts of the world. So yeah, to get familiar with the voices that are produced in the peripheries,” (Ciocia Wienia 2) This kind of mindset breaks with the colonial and hegemonic logic as mentioned above. It reverses the position of who is learning from whom, which is something Spivak, Mohanty and Dhawan strongly argue for. The case of the feminist strike movements in Latin America and the spreading of these practices and forms of activism all over the globe is an especially great example. A member of Kollektiv Lauter highlighted that these excellent analyses of the political situations and structural problems as well as the powerful protest forms that emerged from them influenced their practice enormously and that they learnt a lot from these movements.

The interviewed activist from Chile Desperto also added that, with regard to future problems:

“Eastern Europe and Latin America, for example, have been and are treated as the laboratories for neoliberalism. They have some, extreme oppressive forms of patriarchy and capitalism. For example in Chile you need to pay for your stay in prison. Certain global phenomena are even more visible in the periphery. So we can learn from the resistance of the people who live in these very peripheries how to actually resist those phenomena that we might have to face soon.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

Learning by yourself, in your collective, and in collaborations and networks is key for the social transformation of society. It is not only a process of learning about others’ activism, but it is also a process of reflection about your own activism and also about getting to know yourself, your values and your motivations. To be able to learn from and with each other, good and transparent communication is essential. This will be further explained in the following section.

4.3.4. Communication

All groups agreed that it is essential to be able to address issues in their groups when they see them and to not to dismiss or silence those who identify them. This can be done in different ways depending on the situation. One way could be to directly address the discomfort or problem openly in a meeting, which takes a lot of courage. Another possibility would be to talk to the person directly before or after a meeting. A third option would be talk to somebody you trust within your group and ask them to address the topic in the group or to talk to the person causing distress. Some groups delegated particular people within the group to handle such situations and give sup-
port. The interviewed member of *Alerta Feminista* also said that it is not only important to deal with the person or people who have caused the problem but also to talk to other people who are affected by it so that they do not feel left alone with the issue. At the same time if you think somebody might be affected by a certain behavior, it is essential to first talk to them before addressing the topic in the general group, so that the person doesn’t feel disempowered or talked about. All interview partners were also clear that it should be addressed as soon as possible and have a high priority, including over planning and conducting events or political actions.

Another aspect of good communication is a non-violent approach. This means that everybody assumes that everybody else has good intentions behind their actions. It also prompts everybody to talk from their own position and perspective, and to not assume or explain the behavior and reasoning of others. Everybody focuses on their own emotions and needs. Additionally, it is important to not judge other people and develop personal feelings of hatred or other negative emotions towards them, but instead to focus on a common learning process. Keeping this in mind can enable a group to discuss, slowly and non-violently, complex dilemmas and problems. But it requires a lot of self-control and reflexivity to do so, as two interview participants mentioned. Sometimes, they suggested, it is also good to ask a person from the outside, who is not engaged in the group, for support and to moderate discussions.

A further aspect, which has been noted numerous times above, is to talk *with* people and not talk *for* or *about* them. A participant from Kollektiv Lauter expressed that the best way to prevent talking for people is to listen to those voices who have the lived experiences; to value these voices, to ask questions and share ideas. Spivak and other decolonial scholars refer to it as *reversive listening.* At the same time, it is also important to not make these people representatives for their structural discriminations: they are experts in their own experience, but they cannot and should not be forced to represent and speak for the entire marginalized community. This holds the *danger of a single story,* as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes (2009). Hence, whilst every story should be treated with respect, one story should not be used to homogenize the experience of all the people from a marginalized group. Rather, the diversity and variety of the group should be recognised and the common themes between them analyzed. Also, the speaker should be the subject of the experience and not be degraded to an object.

Transparency and participation are other significant aspects of good communication. Communicating expectations, reasons and possible outcomes or goals clearly from the start, helps the groups and individuals to know what to expect, and does not lead to false hope, assumptions or disappointment. One interviewed activist from *Chile Desperto* added with a smile that this does not equate to being mean or unemotional but the opposite: to be thankful and appreciative when somebody clearly and transparently communicates. She shared the following example:
"One colleague had a lot to do in her private life and things that put a lot of pressure on her, and she said very clearly: "Hello, I'm only here today to say that I won't be here for the next two months." And nobody's mad and saying why. No, it's okay. You told us clearly, and we are grateful for that." - Chile Desperto, July 2022

Another tool for being attentive to power relations in communication, which was suggested by one of the groups, was to track and pay attention to who is talking, how often and for how long. In some groups, the moderator writes this down during the meeting, so that if a lot of people want to talk at the same time, those who did not talk as much can share their opinions first. Tracking who is talking is not meant to shame or expose somebody who is talking a lot or very little, but to pay attention to the dynamics and also to more subjectively reflect on them.

The last aspect, which was frequently commented on in terms of communication, was to be attentive to relationships. It is essential to trust each other and to make sure there is a feeling of political collectivity. This does not mean that everybody needs to be friends but that they need to stand in solidarity with each other and also support a person when they are struggling politically and to some extent personally as well. This can mean engaging with and talking directly to a person, developing personal relationships and holding space for emotions in conversation and discussions. It also means not dismissing differences or problems between people or groups. The group FEM AG in particular mentioned that developing personal relationships through talking and getting to know each other impacted significantly their political perspective and activism. In other words, by talking and being in contact with others, we are moved and affected Sara Ahmed describes which I already mentioned in the theoretical chapter. Or in Bini Adamczak's words: the in-between relationships is where the revolutionary potential lies, which can be engaged in by communicating and talking to each other.

In general the interview participants expressed that it is essential to remind oneself to believe in the good intentions of others. Instead of second guessing each other constantly, it is important to approach communication openly and curiously. The attitude towards political activism in the Zapatista community, is described in its leading phrase: *Caminando preguntamos* – while walking/ moving forward we are questioning (Radio Zapatista, 2021). This highlights the ever-ongoing process of learning, unlearning and relearning, which is essential for their political activism. It makes it possible to have open and attentive conversations with each other, and to engage in a conversation so that everybody can contribute to it. In the case of transnational feminist solidarity, this can mean to ask: Do you need and want our support? What can we do? What do you suggest? And then discuss in the group what is and is not possible, then openly let the people know and ask if that is reasonable and helpful for them or not? A participant from *FEM AG* argued strongly for involving each other in the process of solidarity work and not just thinking of something to do for the impacted
people, but to let them speak for themselves and express what they need and want and then find solutions together.

4.3.5. Guiding principles

Closely linked to communication, are the guiding principles of a group. Through these principles, a collective can communicate to other groups, and also to new members, the essential values and approaches to the group’s political activism. At the same time, the guiding principles can also be a reminder to come back to as one interviewed activist described:

“First it was a collective reflection, or in other words, we just got together and worked on a text together collectively. That’s when we answered the following questions: What do we expect from this group? What are my needs, where do I come from? How do I imagine this? And that was answered together. The people who came together did this for weeks. Every time a new person joined, a new compañera, we read it together. It has become like a ritual. It serves to get to know each other and to clarify expectations and wishes. At the same time, it is a living document that can always be supplemented and changed.”

- Alerta Feminista, July 2022

As the activist described, it is important that the guiding principles are produced in a collective process so that different voices can be embedded in it. At the same time it is useful to treat it as a living document, which can change with time, with the group members and the group’s political direction.

Guiding principle do not need to be only about intentions and abstract goals but can also be practical as the following example from Chile desperto illustrates:

“The demonstrators in Chile have said from the beginning that parties and party politics have no place with them and that they do not want to work with them. We have also taken this seriously for our work and if someone comes, for example, from the SPÖ and would like to do this and that with us. Then we say that is pretty nice, but we don’t do it. We follow the line of the people on the street, and they have said their position quite clearly.”

- Chile Desperto, August 2022

A second example of a guiding principle from Chile Desperto concerns social media:

“The one rule is, you can’t just post away, and we don’t post violent pictures. So, no protesters getting beaten up, no bleeding people and so on. First, we agreed on that in the group. We took a vote and the majority was for that, that’s demeaning to the
people and those violent images. Also, people are already so jaded. And that we want to approach this differently. Write a text with other photos. But just not the person lying on the ground and being beaten up by the coWe always vote on everything.

- Chile Desperto, July 2022

In general, it often takes a lot of time to write and discuss guiding principles as a collective. But in the end, most groups argue that it helps to have it written down as a manifesto or similar text. It can be a cornerstone for navigating through difficult processes and discussions, and helps to clarify up front group’s the limitations and the frame in which they are working. Furthermore, it can prevent disappointments and conflicts.

The question of how to come to such decisions, and what strategies there are to make thoughtful decisions, will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.6. Decision-making

One important aspect of decision-making that all groups agreed on was that the regular plenum or asambleas are the location where decisions are made. The plenum holds the space to come together, discuss openly and at length any issue that can lead to a decision or solution. The interviewed groups all mentioned that they emphasize the need to take enough time to talk, instead of planning one event after another with no time to reflect or to make sure that everybody is on board.

A plenum also gives the possibility to listen to different voices and needs. In a group chat, often the people who have the most time or are the loudest dominate the conversation. The interviewee from Chile Desperto also mentioned that online meetings are good for organizational things, but in-person meetings are more essential, as these encounters also allow a place for personal issues and relationships. The participants from Ciocia Wienia also said that small decision, such as when to post something on social media, can be disgust in the chat with a vote. But in general, and especially when it concerns bigger topics, events, values etc., it always needs to be discussed in a plenum. There they also do not favor voting but instead openly discussing a topic, using atmospheric images to figure out in which direction their decision is heading, and they always try to find a consensus in the end. Consensus is important to all groups as they all understand decision-making as a collective process, and do not want to have a situation where majority versus a minority is against or for a project. This can translate into the amount of effort and energy the minority puts into the project and can divide a group. Also, each discussion depends on the context of the topic and often it helps to also take into account their guiding principles. Finding a collective consensus takes time and might not be as efficient and effective as other forms of decision-making, but the interviewed member of Tekojin argued strongly for it. She added that it is the baseline for the entire democratic confederalism, which is practiced in Rojava, Kobane and other Kurdish parts of the
Middle East. Finding collective consensus is the starting point for the transformation of society and has the goal of creating a society free of hierarchies. A collective decision process also counteracts only one or a few people having the power to make decisions. Hence, collectivizing decision-making strengthens the collective and prevents actions and decisions being made and carried out by a minority in spite of the reservations of the rest of the group.

Some groups referenced that in certain situations they divided their tasks and have specific areas of responsibility. This is done to act more efficiently whilst remaining within the frame of the guiding principles and collective decisions. Often people prefer one part of the work, for example social media, and are therefore more engaged in this work, whilst others have different preferences, such as organizing demonstrations. “We try to delegate the different tasks on the basis of interest and motivation towards them, and we never say you need to do this, and you need to do this. That would be against our understanding as an anti-authoritarian group”, an activist from Ciocia Wienia said. These tasks or areas of responsibility are always fixed to a certain event or time span and are evaluated afterwards. If there are more people within the collective, the tasks can also be even more spread between them. This leads to a more equal division of power within the group and prevents one person from having all the power.

So that these responsibilities do not lead to power relations within the group, network, or collaboration Tekojin mentioned that they not only evaluate these roles in their plena, but also rotate the positions. Thus, everybody knows how to do almost everything, preventing hierarchies from arising due to differences in knowledge. It also makes sense so that when a person leaves the group or gets sick, others also know what to do, and the group is not paralyzed by it. Especially in asambleas or collaborations where different groups are working together, it is indispensable to keep in mind that the dynamics of who is leading the conversation or actions should always be changing. This can happen organically but in some cases it is critical to address it. For example, it can be that every meeting is prepared and moderated by a different group or that the ideas for actions always come from different groups. Groups who did not say or suggest as much as other groups should be prioritized above the others. The degree of involvement depends on the access to resources that the people have, which can differ quite a lot as outlined previously. Therefore, it is important to be especially attentive to the needs and opinions of smaller, more marginalized groups and to not only focus on the groups that are loud, energetic and dominating. It is essential to engage all groups in the decision-making. The interview participant from Tekojin also highlights that involving new members early on holds great potential for involving new perspectives:

“For example, if you want to have a new speaker, you wouldn’t take the person who has been doing it for years. Instead, you would take the person who has been there for a short time and then just put her in this position. Because the new person can actually
Decision-making should be understood as a collective process in which people can grow, relationships are formed and power is divided. Focusing on collective consensus might not always be the most efficient and effective way, which is in itself quite a capitalist view. Instead, consensus holds space for discussions and shows glimpses of what an anti-authoritarian society could look like. Another approach to deconstructing power relations is to share privileges, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

### 4.3.7. Sharing and utilizing privileges

One of the challenges that transnational feminist solidarity faces is the different positionalities of groups and individuals within movements, networks, and groups. As long as the oppressive structures of society do not change, the privileges and discriminations will not disappear. Therefore, the three groups that are positioned within the dominating part of society, ask themselves how they can use their privileges to support, enable and draw attention to the voices of marginalized groups. Different examples will be presented in the following section.

One example is using the privilege of Austrian citizenship to register a demonstration to the authorities on behalf of other groups. You need to be an Austrian citizen to register a demonstration, and some groups do not contain any Austrian citizens. Secondly, in doing so it keeps the group members’ names and identity anonymous, which might be important if they are in the process of seeking asylum for example. The members of *Ciocia Wienia* also argue that they are using their privileged situation of living in Austria to make it possible for others to come there to get an abortion, as they are providing a safe space and accommodation in Vienna.

Another practical examples is physically using your body to practice solidarity. This can be by putting privileged bodies between the police and marginalized people during a demonstration. For example, placing privileged bodies at the sides, at the end or beginning of a demonstration, or around the marginalized bodies during a rally. Often the police will hesitate more and act less violently towards white people without a migration background. Likewise, Judith Butler argues that this can be a useful tool because some lives seem to matter more than others in a patriarchal, white supremacist society (2020). Therefore, taking the privilege of white bodies and putting them into the front line of a protest is an example of utilizing privilege.

Another example from FEM AG explores activists using their privilege of having more time due to their socio-economical position:
"We wanted to be in solidarity with the struggle of the 24-hour caregivers by supporting them in the areas where we have experience. Since most 24-hour caregivers have little time, we have organized in cooperation with them, for example, a demo and made signs and posters for it. The caregivers, some of whom came to the demonstration, were able to carry these signs and posters. We also partly carried the signs for them or held their written speech in their name, because they hardly have time to stand up for themselves due to the poor conditions in which they work."

- FEM AG 1, July 2022

A participant from Chile Desperto added that their group uses their possibility to be able to freely express their political opinion to raise awareness for the fights of comrades in their home countries. They are doing this in form of podcasts, social media, art, performances, posters, and demonstrations. Enabling a discourse around these issues, providing information and sometimes even correcting the official reporting, can raise solidarity and empathy for these struggles. Using your contacts and voice to amplify marginalized voices, and spread their activism, events and initiatives, for example though reposting on social media, can also be an act of solidarity according to the interviewed member of Alerta Feminista.

Another common example is sharing financial resources. Through constantly raising money Ciocia Wienia is able to provide financial support, for the costs of travel and the abortion procedure itself, to the people who are seeking an abortion. They argue that the funding makes abortion more accessible and also more inclusive. Raising donations and sharing knowledge about how to apply for or access funding is also crucial, one interview participant from FEM AG underlined. Nevertheless, it is important to not control for what or how the money is being used, but, as described above, it is essential that the people can decide and use it as they like. Otherwise, it would demonstrate a paternalistic attitude.

Sharing knowledge can also include sharing legal knowledge, language skills, or experiences on how to approach authorities or different groups, as a member of Kollektiv Lauter added. Likewise, sharing knowledge can also take the form of a homepage, Facebook page, Instagram posts, etc. to spread knowledge about political situations, helplines, information about demonstrations, etc. An example is the homepage Abortion in Austria, which was initiated by Ciocia Wienia and other pro-choice groups in Austria. The webpage educates viewers about reproductive rights, possibilities for help, and contacts. It is also available in Ukrainian, Russian, German, Polish and Turkish. Technology and access to the Internet is becoming more significant. Open source software makes computer programs more accessible for everybody. Also projects such as the Add-on snowflake, or creating proxy servers for Signal or other messenger services, are tools to share safe internet access and communication.
The gathered tools and structures for being attentive towards the challenges and limitations of transnational feminist solidarity are a starting point to create more just and equal relationships. Nevertheless, it is always a learning process and mistakes will be made. These mistakes should not be neglected or dismissed but rather analyzed and learnt from. Also, all the interview participants highlighted the need to act instead of just getting caught up in discussions or being paralyzed by fear of doing something wrong. Only analyzing, discussing and theorizing is not enough to practice transnational feminist solidarity, or in the words of Şehid Sara Doğru (Almuth Sarah Handelmann): "A theory without practice is always incomplete. We lack a seriousness that does not despair, but believes in itself." Believing in the possibility of change and having a feeling of effectiveness is crucial for building a strong transnational feminist solidarity, which pushes for the vision of a more just and feminist future, as Mohanty envisioned in the introduction.
5. Conclusion

Whilst acknowledging that the results of the research and gathered knowledge are only partial, specifically situated and based on a small number of cases, it can be concluded that bell hooks’ perception that the transnational feminist movement and its practice of solidarity has, and is, changing in comparison to the movement at the beginning of the 20th century. The concepts, ideas, motivation, and the reflexivity regarding intersectionality and power relations seem to be much more wide spread and central to the transnational feminist understanding.

In consideration of the theoretical approaches and the outcome of the section on situating transnational feminist solidarity, it can be concluded that the interviewed groups have similar approaches and goals. The interviewed groups are aiming for a transnational feminist solidarity that is aware of different positionalities and experiences without trying to homogenize them. Likewise, reciprocity is a key aspect, which was mentioned not only in terms of their mindset and understanding of solidarity, but particularly in the category on learning from each other. The groups that are positioned within the dominating part of society particularly highlighted this, and valued the diversity of different feminisms, approaches and political expressions. Another aspect is the importance of building solidarity-based relationships as they hold a revolutionary potential, as described by Bini Adamczak. All of these formulations lead to a practice of transnational feminist solidarity in the forms of protests, asambleas and transnational networks. It is critical to underline that even though there is a lot of awareness about north-south relationships and what is happening in Hispanic countries, the west-east discourse is quite limited, as well as the networks to Asian and eastern-European feminist groups. It would be interesting and necessary to further investigate this.

It is crucial to consider the challenges and limitations that transnational feminist solidarity faces. These can be due to problematic motivations such as empathy or a feeling of responsibility, and can also be due to the different positionalities, resources, mechanisms of exclusions, objectifications, and power dynamics in general. The interviewed groups also shared their tools and suggestions for how to counteract and be attentive towards these problems by creating safe spaces, processes of reflexivity, transparent and open communication, guiding principles, conscious decision-making, learning from each other, and trying to share privileges. One major point was the approach towards self-critique and critique in general. Changing the central-European understanding of critique as something negative that often results in the urge to justify and defend yourself and your actions, to an understanding of critique as an act of solidarity to support growth and learning, was key. Furthermore, feminists also need to change our mindsets and unlearn our colonial, Neo-liberal, racist socialization and reflect on our position within global and local power relations.
Considering the beginnings of transnational feminist solidarity, which truly was essentially just charity and white saviorism, it is safe to say that the transnational feminist groups in Vienna learnt a lot and differ drastically to the early transnational feminist groups. They are more aware of the difficulties and problems that solidarity work holds. Thus, as one of the interview participants mentioned, it is an ever-ongoing process of learning and unlearning. It is a tough and exhausting process, but it is the only way out of these power relations and to establish relationships that are based on equity and solidarity.

Looking into the future all interviewed participants were quite hopeful as they believe that the feminist struggle holds the possibility to unite lots of different struggles. They also strongly argue for a transnational feminist solidarity and perspective because the dominated and dominating parts of the world are interdependent, and only together is it possible to change the current racist, sexist and discriminating world in which we are living. It is necessary to have a collective voice within which different voices can be heard. The groups also emphasized the urgency to act now. Looking at the feminist struggles in Latin America, Kurdish regions, and Iran, gives hope, and inspiration, and empowers them to keep fighting for a different world. Or as the Zapatista movement always refers to “estamos un ejemplo que un otro mundo es possible (We are an example that another world is possible).” (Radio Zapatista, 2021). This attitude reverses the colonial logic of who is learning from whom and finally, understands other global feminist struggles as not merely a copy of what emerged in the West.

One interviewed activist explained a path from where we are right now to the goal expressed in the vision of a feminist world by Chandra Mohanty at the beginning of the thesis. He did so by concluding his interview with the following words about what motivates him to engage in a transnational feminist movement and to practice solidarity:

“The desire and the hope to live someday in a society where solidarity is the basic principle. In order to get there, I think it’s necessary to live it somehow in the here and now, to anticipate this as best we can, without of course being able to foresee what it will look like in a post-revolutionary society.” - FEM AG 2 , July 2022
Bibliography


**Images**

1. Mind-map of codes (2022), by Hannah Langkafel