

**FRAMING THE FEMINIST PROTESTS IN MEXICO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
POLARIZED DISCURSIVE DYNAMICS AND GENDER POWER RELATIONS  
ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

**ARTURO TEJEDA TORRES**  
Master of Arts, University of Guanajuato, 2018

A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in

**CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Department of Sociology  
University of Lethbridge  
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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ARTURO TEJEDA TORRES

Date of Defence: November 12, 2024

Dr. Kimberly Mair Supervisor	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
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Dr. Caroline Hodes Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
---	---------------------	-------

Dr. William Ramp Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
---	---------------------	-------

Dr. Kaitlynn Mendes External Examiner University of Western Ontario London, Ontario	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
--	---------------------	-------

Dr. Athena Elafros Chair, Thesis Examination Committee	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
---	---------------------	-------

## **DEDICATION**

To Claudia, whose love and smile give me the strength to walk life's uncertainties, and with whom I have found a home no matter where we go. To my parents and sisters, who instilled in me the trust and affection that sustain me. To Gülden Özcan, whose words have been a source of inspiration and courage, even though she can no longer read mine. To my friends, who have been there for me with their listening and wisdom. And to little Lele, who waited for me by the door every night.

## ABSTRACT

This portfolio-style thesis presents central components in the development and consolidation of my doctoral research project. Through four different pieces—a teaching dossier, two academic articles, and an Op-Ed— this portfolio aims to contribute to contemporary debates in the fields of social theory, poststructuralist studies and digital communication by engaging with themes around polarization, discourse, ideology and power dynamics in the context of social media. The research presented in this portfolio examines the polarized discursive dynamics surrounding the feminist protests in Mexico on March 8th and 9th, 2020, which emerged in response to increasing femicides in the country. Through an analysis of social media interactions, it explores how dominant narratives—those aligned with the Mexican government's "Fourth Transformation" and its conservative opposition—shape public discourse and reproduce gender-based power relations. This portfolio format intends to bridge theoretical insights and analyses on a concrete scenario while facilitating communication with both academic and non-academic audiences, demonstrating the broader relevance and applicability of the research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this thesis and made this work possible. My special thanks go to Dr. Caroline Hodes, Dr. Kimberly Mair, and the late Dr. Gülden Özcan, each of whom served as my supervisor at different stages of this journey. Their invaluable guidance, feedback, and support through long and meaningful conversations were central to the development of this project.

I am also sincerely grateful to Dr. William Ramp and Dr. Simten Cosar, who consistently offered tremendous support as members of my supervisory committee. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Athena Elafros, Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee, and Dr. Kaitlynn Mendes, who served as External Examiner, for their roles in this process.

Additionally, I would like to recognize Silas Strom, whose thoughtful and critical questions made him an invaluable support in my teaching and in refining key editorial aspects of this document. I have no doubt that a path full of academic achievements and success lies ahead for him. I am also grateful to my other students, whose curiosity and engagement enriched my research in countless ways. Our discussions on the topics explored here deepened my understanding and continually inspired me to approach my work from fresh perspectives.

This portfolio-style thesis is, without a doubt, the product of a collective effort in which I am but one of many voices.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CTDA	Critical Technocultural Discourse Approach
FPDA	Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis
Morena	Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (The National Regeneration Movement)
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

## INTRODUCTION

This portfolio-style thesis reflects the key stages in the development and consolidation of my doctoral research through four components: a teaching dossier, two academic articles and an open editorial. Each product represented a necessary step toward the next, contributing to the overall progression of the project. While these pieces may appear to follow a chronological order, their creation involved continuous revisiting, reviewing, and rewriting, allowing earlier work to be reshaped by later reflections and discussions. Thus, this document can be understood in two ways: first, as a map, where each piece leads naturally to the next, building on distinct aspects of the research; and second, as a constellation, where each piece stands independently, yet together forms a coherent whole. In this way, each section in this portfolio contributes to the clarification of my research as a unified project while emphasizing different aspects that are examined in varying depth throughout. This introduction will establish the central theme that connects the entire body of work while outlining the specific elements explored in each section.

This research project can be placed within the broader fields of social theory, poststructuralist studies, and digital communication. By engaging with contemporary debates around polarization, discourse, ideology and power dynamics, in the context of digital platforms, this work aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about how narratives shape social and political phenomena, particularly regarding gender violence and feminist activism.

The object of this research is to analyze the polarized discursive dynamics that surrounded the feminist protests in Mexico on March 8th and 9th of 2020 that responded to the rising number of femicides in the country. The study examines how exchanges found on Facebook comments under selected news articles related to the protests are organized and shaped by two dominant narratives: one aligned with the political project of President López Obrador, “the Fourth

Transformation,” and the other, a conservative-inflected counter-narrative challenging the former. The analysis of this research draws upon a theoretical synthesis of key concepts from the work of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Finally, this work aims to respond to a central question: How did the persistent, opposing narratives of the Fourth Transformation and its rejection influence and shape the contested meanings of the feminist protests on March 8th and 9th regarding femicides?

Due to the nature of the pieces presented in this portfolio, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature is already included in several of them. For instance, the teaching component provides an extensive list of works analyzing social media platforms from a discursive perspective. Similarly, the second academic article, which examines the feminist protests in Mexico, includes a section titled "Polarization and Digital Platforms: A Discursive and Relational Approach," where studies related to polarization and its connection to social media in various contexts, including Mexico, are discussed. To ensure clarity for the reader, the relevant literature is included within the respective sections of the portfolio rather than in this introduction, allowing for a direct connection to the ideas presented.

This portfolio-style thesis is structured into four sections, along with the introduction and conclusion. The first section presents a teaching dossier, showcasing evidence of my teaching experiences from two courses I taught as a sessional instructor at the University of Lethbridge during Fall 2022 and Spring 2023: Digital Culture and Society [SOCI 3740] and Digital Narratives and Social Polarization [SOCI 3850]. The content of these courses emerged from reflections, analyses, and readings conducted throughout my doctoral research. They also represent the practical component of my study, as I translated complex theoretical themes into coursework designed for undergraduate students. Some of the central aspects of these courses connected to my

research included exploring digital technologies from a discursive perspective and analyzing the concept of polarization in relation to digital platforms. The dossier includes an account of my teaching journey and my teaching philosophy, an overview of the courses and their connection to my research, samples of activities implemented in the class, and a summary of teaching evaluations.

The second section features an academic article where the core theoretical principles of the research are developed. This paper explores ideology beyond its traditional interpretation as a false representation of social reality, linking it to the concept of discourse. Drawing upon the conceptual work of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, the article frames ideology as both a narrative and a discursive mechanism that serves to justify, sustain, and organize practices, meanings, and power relations embedded in discourses. The reflections presented in this paper seek to offer an alternative lens for analyzing contemporary social and political events by providing a framework that helps identify, question, and challenge the apparently fixed nature of certain narratives and the relations of truth and power that arise from them.

The third section presents an academic article that synthesizes key elements from the previous sections to describe the central aspects of the doctoral research project. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the polarized discursive relationships between two dominant narratives—the federal government's "Fourth Transformation" and its conservative opposition—shaping digital communications on social media during the feminist protests of March 8th and 9th, 2020, in Mexico. Building on the previously discussed theoretical framework, the paper conceptualizes narratives as discursive mechanisms and introduces the concept of sites of discursive encounters to explain how meanings and events, within specific contexts, can be contested and reorganized in relation to dominant narratives. Through this analysis, polarization is

explored as a fluid, relational dynamic in which opposing positions redefine themselves in response to one another, challenging the seemingly fixed nature of narratives. This section also contains a description of the inductive thematic analysis conducted to arrive at the sample of Facebook user comments that were used in the study. It outlines the methodological approach taken for identification of sources, the selection criteria, as well the processes of coding, classifying, and thematic identification using NVivo 14 software. The findings underscore how gender-based power relations are reproduced within these polarized dynamics, influencing the broader aims of the feminist protests against femicides.

Lastly, the fourth section features an Op-Ed that summarizes the key aspects of the overall research project. It outlines the Mexican context of feminist protests and femicides, along with the impact of polarization on these demonstrations. Written for a general audience, this article presents the main ideas in a concise and accessible manner, avoiding technical language.

In conclusion, this portfolio-style thesis brings together a comprehensive examination of the central themes explored throughout the research project. By articulating theoretical insights with the analysis of a concrete case, it seeks to offer a deeper understanding of how particular narratives involved in polarized dynamics reflecting relations of power shape public discourse while impacting contemporary social movements. This way, each section aims to contribute to a broader conversation on the complexities of the discursive landscape on which the feminist protests unfold and to highlight the relevance and urgency of discussing these matters in both academic and public spheres.

## SECTION 1: TEACHING DOSSIER

### Introduction

The courses presented in this portfolio, “SOVI 3740 – Digital Culture and Society” and “SOVI 3850 – Digital Narratives and Social Polarization”, resulted from a series of discussions, reflections, analyses, and readings conducted during the course of my doctoral project. They serve as the practical component of my research work, translating central themes into programs tailored for broader and non-specialized audiences, particularly undergraduate students. These courses were offered by the Sociology Department at the University of Lethbridge during the Fall term of 2022 and the Summer term of 2023. As a Sessional Instructor, I took responsibility for designing, planning, and delivering the course content, implementing pedagogical strategies, and devising evaluation methods. While Digital Culture and Society was a pre-existing course, Digital Narratives and Social Polarization was a newly proposed course introduced for the first time to third-year students.

The classes were delivered during the progression of my research, reflecting not only key concepts and approaches explored in my work but also becoming central in the formulation of new questions and responses that guided my analyses. Their primary objective was to introduce and discuss some of the limitations, scopes, and ideas advanced while going through the project, rather than focusing on the final results and conclusions. Through this perspective, I approached my teaching as an ongoing space for dialogue and reflection, where all participants were active contributors, bringing valuable ideas, experiences, and insights that collectively played a part in the construction of knowledge.

Both courses mainly draw upon my comprehensive examination papers, in which I examined diverse methodological approaches and my theoretical framework. Although the

lectures focused mainly on my analyses, they were also meant to encompass a wide array of sociological perspectives that an undergraduate student in formation is expected to know. Moreover, the content related to my research had to be adapted and presented in an accessible manner, catering to students who are still in the process of constructing a strong foundation in sociology.

The objective of this component is to provide a set of evidence of the coursework and its relation to my doctoral project. The elements included here are the following: my teaching journey and philosophy, a general description of the courses, the connection between the courses and the research work and my experience teaching them, samples of activities implemented in the class and a summary of teaching evaluations. Additionally, samples of slides, activities and quizzes, the full teaching evaluations, and the syllabus for both courses can be found in Appendix 1.

### **My Teaching Journey**

Over the past few years, my focus has been on developing a solid teaching program that incorporates critical and multidisciplinary approaches, aligning with my research interests and academic background. To provide a clear understanding of this approach, it is important to briefly describe my teaching experience and the results of it.

While my formal academic training covered various fields, education was not among them. My incursion into teaching began unexpectedly, as is often the case with most valuable things, through a series of fortunate coincidences and circumstances. In 2017, during a research stay in Mendoza, Argentina, as part of my Philosophy Master's studies, I was invited by Dr. Paula Ripamonti to deliver a couple of guest lectures at the National University of Cuyo. This opportunity placed me in front of a small group of third-year philosophy students, armed with nothing more than a few notes and an old and wrinkled book. After a few sessions, we ended up

engaging in profound and rich discussions about the political role of philosophy and history. It was during this experience that I discovered a new way of engaging with academia—a way that involved fostering spirited and vibrant conversations that contrasted the sometimes weighty and long readings, while also providing guidance and introducing fresh perspectives. This transformative experience redirected my career path and instilled in me the desire to cultivate specific teaching skills.

By the end of my Master's program, I had already been hired by an educational consulting program under the direction of the City of Guanajuato in Mexico. This opportunity allowed me to gain valuable insights into designing courses and workshops focused on humanities and social sciences, which I subsequently delivered to public high school teachers. However, my formal teaching journey did not commence until a few months later when I joined a local private institute in Queretaro, Mexico, as a high school teacher. Simultaneously, I assumed a Sessional Instructor position at Anahuac University, teaching in both the Humanities Department and the Communication and Media Department. Balancing these roles meant meticulously preparing material for a minimum of five courses each term, covering diverse disciplines and catering to groups of different sizes and with varying educational levels and needs. It quickly became evident that I needed additional pedagogical tools to effectively foster the engagement of students. Motivated by this realization, I decided to enroll in the Tecnológico de Monterrey University, where I pursued a diploma in Competency-Based Education with a concentration on applied contemporary academic contexts. This program equipped me with practical tools and resources to identify and develop effective techniques, curricula, and methodologies that could be applied in my own teaching practice. It is also important to acknowledge that some of the most valuable insights I gained emerged from the collective experiences shared by fellow professors in this space.

From them, I developed a deep conviction that the role of an educator is an ever-evolving journey, constantly transforming and adapting to address the challenges and opportunities that arise from the multiple contexts happening within and outside the classroom.

These paths converged in my experience as a doctoral student Teaching Assistant and as a Sessional Instructor of undergraduate sociology courses at the University of Lethbridge. While my previous experience provided me with enough resources to address diverse learning scenarios, the new challenges that I faced here have come from the need to re-understand the political, historical and cultural shifts that shape the relations between the instructor and the students as well as between the educational institutions and society. For instance, this has implied a constant process of recognizing how colonial practices embedded in the Canadian context, that erase the voices and faces of certain students, can be, unknowingly, reproduced and reinforced in class. Teaching as an immigrant here has also meant questioning my own place, my own accent and the stories I carry to understand the role these aspects can play for my students, for a graduate program, for a Sociology department, for a public university, and ultimately, for the set of relations and structures at play in our society. As an immigrant Sessional Instructor, I recognize the critical nature of my position within academia, as mine is part of the many voices that challenge and engage with prevailing power dynamics that influence the academic discourse. In this sense, my commitment is to contribute to the creation of spaces within the university, where historically marginalized groups can be heard and valued.

My teaching journey is still unfolding, finding and building new possibilities and acknowledging what it lacks while working to improve it. In this process, through different countries, institutions, disciplines and academic levels, I have had the opportunity to build a solid approach to teaching that includes concrete objectives, strategies and programs that are grounded

in both experiential and formal knowledge. Those spirited and vibrant conversations that occurred years ago have now turned into a clear pedagogical and political project. To describe my role as a professor under these terms implies recognizing it as an activity in constant response to the current social structures and events that reflect different relations of inequality and power. Following Hannah Arendt's (1998) definition of political action, it also refers to the possibility of creating new beginnings that are collectively significant through a process of continuous dialogue that consolidates -again and again- our shared reality.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

My approach to teaching is based on creating a learning environment that values students' diverse interests, knowledge and backgrounds and aims to develop critical thinking to engage with today's social challenges. I consider that effective teaching requires contextualizing any educational efforts while recognizing the unique experiences and needs that each student brings to the classroom. To accomplish this, I design culturally responsive lesson plans and connect course material to current social issues, using different teaching strategies that help the students to engage and understand the content.

One example of this approach is the implementation of group discussions to create a dialogic space where students can exchange perspectives and ideas, helping them gain a deeper comprehension of the course material and how it can be critically applied to their contexts. I also incorporate real-world examples and case studies to reflect on the relevance of the course discussions and their connections to various disciplines and fields of study.

Additionally, I include the use of technology in my classes to facilitate student engagement and learning through different means. For instance, I have incorporated VoIP platforms such as Discord, as part of the participation and discussion dynamics, allowing students to share, respond

and reply to content uploaded by any member of the class. Enabling spaces like these, where students can use multimedia resources, aims to address the different learning styles that can be found in a classroom.

Ultimately, my main goal as a professor is to provide students with the necessary tools and support to achieve their academic objectives while gaining a critical perspective on the processes involved in the construction of their knowledge and the social structures where these practices occur. I believe it is important to recognize that not every student registered in my classes will end up building a career in sociology. For that reason, it is central for me to foster a clear understanding of the multiple theories and explanations that allow students to translate the content into practical components that can be applied in different fields. Finally, as part of my teaching journey, I am committed to ongoing learning and professional development, continuously seeking new pedagogical strategies to improve students' learning experiences.

## **Description of Courses**

### ***SOCI 3740 - Digital Culture and Society***

Course Description: This course will analyze diverse themes related to digital culture, such as participatory culture, digital surveillance, social media platforms, memes, '*slacktivism*', the role of algorithms, etc. Digital culture will be addressed as a discursive field where social practices and meanings are produced and enacted rather than as a set of neutral technological mediums to create and deliver digital content. The students will have the opportunity to engage with critical perspectives to examine questions, assumptions and implications about the dynamics embedded in digital practices. The course will also examine different sociological theories and concepts to think about and problematize digital culture from its beginnings to these days.

Objectives:

- Understand the main concepts and practices related to digital culture, analyzed from a sociological perspective.
- Be able to distinguish the social implications of the diverse practices and content that have emerged from Web 2.0.
- Apply critical and informed thinking to assess their impact and role in fields such as media, politics, economics, activism, and entertainment.

### ***SOCI 3850 - Digital Narratives and Social Polarization***

Course Description: This course will provide an introduction to the study of social, affective and political polarization and its relation with the emergence and reproduction of diverse narratives as part of our current digital practices. The course will examine different phenomena and technological advances that play a significant role in building digital narratives and their deployment under binary models usually reflected through the “us versus them” figure. From a sociological perspective, the course will address issues such as the appearance and relevance of echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, the function of automated systems like algorithms and bots, and the relation between social media platforms and our social structures to examine different processes of polarization. In addition, we will contrast some of these discussions with a poststructuralist approach that will allow us to dig into concepts such as discourse, power, ideology and truth, to better understand the dynamics and implications of these practices.

Objectives:

- Recognize the central concepts and practices related to the processes of polarization in digital settings, as well as their relation to non-digital contexts.
- Identify the social implications of the diverse communicative dynamics, structures and narratives shaped by polarization mechanisms.

- Apply critical and informed thinking to assess such implications' impact on political, cultural and social discourses.
- Familiarize with basic tenets of the poststructuralist approach in order to problematize some of the assumptions and ideas surrounding the study of polarization.

## **Course Experience and Connection to Research Project**

### ***SOCI 3740 – Digital Culture & Society***

This course was offered during the Fall term of 2022 by the Sociology Department at the University of Lethbridge. The students' prerequisites for this course were a 2000-level course in Sociology or one of Sociology-1000 / Sociology-0520 and third-year standing. According to the courses catalogue found on the Bridge platform of the university, this course has been offered since the Spring of 2011. Previous to that, a similar version of it was offered under the name of "Sociology of Cyberspace." The course was delivered in person to an audience of 45 registered students.

It is important to recognize the different events and circumstances that framed the teaching of this course. First, in the Spring term of 2022, the University of Lethbridge had intended to resume in-person classes following over a year of online courses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this plan was delayed due to the beginning of a strike organized by the University of Lethbridge Faculty Association in February, which persisted until the end of March. Consequently, students returned to in-person classes until the subsequent Fall term. Based on comments made by students during the term, attending face-to-face lectures still presented diverse challenges and discomfort for many of them. These difficulties were particularly evident at the beginning of the course, with students showing limited participation in class and a lack of engagement in group discussions.

A second aspect that shaped the delivery of this course was my position as a sessional instructor teaching for the first time in this institution and in a second language. Although I had previous experience as a university professor in Mexico and as a teaching assistant here in Canada, this was the first time I had to encounter the cultural differences emerging in an educational setting while ensuring that my teaching strategies and content delivery were effective.

Finally, this course was initially going to be delivered by the late Dr. Gulden Ozcan. However, due to her health condition, she couldn't do it. In response, I was offered to teach this class as I had previously designed a course for the practical component of my comprehensive examination titled "Discursive Approaches to Social Media Research," which shared similarities with this course content. The design and teaching of my classes unfolded under these various circumstances.

The course content primarily drew upon the methodological paper and the course syllabus I developed during my comprehensive examination. The methodological paper delved into the limitations and possibilities of various approaches, particularly those rooted in poststructuralist and feminist perspectives, to analyze social media discourses. Similarly, the syllabus aimed to provide graduate students with a comprehensive theoretical framework for conducting qualitative research involving social media platforms. Both components shared a common focus on examining social media and digital practices from a discursive standpoint.

This emphasis on the discursive perspective translated into several key themes, including the emergence of digital platforms within the context of Web 2.0, the intricate relationship between technology, language, and new media, the profound impact of social media on the political landscape, and the analysis of power dynamics embedded in digital spaces. Consequently, these themes served as the foundational pillars for the course Digital Culture and Society, shaping its

content and direction. However, considering that this course was tailored for third-year undergraduate students, it became necessary to select course materials that aligned with their level of knowledge while preserving the core elements of the central themes.

The course was structured into eight modules, each designed to explore and connect with the preceding topics while examining their relevance in contemporary digital practices. While all modules contributed significantly to the understanding of digital culture, three modules stood out as pivotal in fostering a discursive approach: modules 1, 3, and 4.

Module 1 delved into Mark Deuze's (2006) perspective on digital culture to conceptualize it as a set of values, practices, and expectations intertwined with our computerized and networked society<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, such practices are marked by three principal components: participation, remediation, and bricolage. Through this lens, emerging digital practices were emphasized as intricately connected to non-digital realms, rather than isolated from them. As a result, digital culture was addressed not only as a mere continuation of previous non-digital practices but as an outcome deeply embedded within them.

Continuing in a similar direction, Module 3 introduced the concept of discourse as elucidated by Sara Mills (2004) in her discussion about Michel Foucault's work. This served as the basis for exploring a discourse-centered approach to new media, advanced by Aslihan Akkaya (2014), and delving into a critical technocultural approach proposed by André Brock (2018)<sup>2</sup>. Based on Akkaya's (2014) article titled "Language, Discourse, and New Media: A Linguistic Anthropological Perspective," we examined language in the context of new media from a user-centered perspective, in contrast to a medium-determined viewpoint. This perspective allowed us to address all online communicative practices as socioculturally situated and embedded in existing social practices while blurring the conventional boundaries separating the online and offline

realms. Moreover, her approach provided us with a dialogic, heteroglossic, and polyphonic take on discourse, challenging any rigid, bounded, and monolithic interpretation of it. Similarly, Brock's (2018) work opened the discussion about the relationship between technology and the diverse cultural discourses in our society. This relationship, presented under the term technoculture, was addressed as the matrix of beliefs that shape the design and use of technology, focusing particularly on the discourses of progress, religion, the future, modernity, masculinity and Whiteness. Akkaya and Brock's frameworks presented key theoretical aspects of digital culture from a discourse-based position by emphasizing that both digital practices and the technologies where they are performed are shaped by their sociocultural context. That is, technocultural discourses must be framed from the cultural perspectives of the user and of the designer.

Finally, Module 4, as another central component of the course, offered an examination of the complex interplay between social media platforms and the mechanisms that enable online sociality. The entire module was based mainly on Van Dijck's (2013) analyses of digital platforms as distinct microsystems that together form an ecosystem of connective media<sup>3</sup>. Through this perspective, platforms were explored under a multi-layered model that included the techno-cultural components and the socio-economic and political elements involved. By incorporating elements from other frameworks, such as Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Manuel Castell's approach, Van Dijck's work provided us with central traits of social media platforms. This way, platforms were characterized as sociotechnical ensembles and performative structures and as a set of relations that are both material and symbolic. Additionally, we discussed the way platforms and digital networks reflect power relations, such as the one between those who own them and those who produce their content.

The objective of these core modules was to emphasize, from different angles, the complex set of relations and elements that are involved in the performance of digital practices. Moreover, these perspectives aimed to address some of the fundamental aspects of digital culture understood as a discursive field, even if their main tenets were not explicitly coming from the same theoretical coordinates. For instance, all of these approaches positioned themselves against the idea of technological determinism, where technology unilaterally shapes social discourses as an external and impartial force. Instead, they view technological developments as a series of practices arising within, and because of, the existing discourses in society. This distinction already redefines the boundaries between the virtual and non-virtual spheres, situating them in a dynamic and interrelated relationship rather than as isolated and separate entities. Consequently, digital culture is portrayed as a digital manifestation, continuation, or outcome of the pre-existing culture, rather than as an entirely new phenomenon. Moreover, the perspectives embraced in these modules also shed light on power dynamics embedded in the various elements of these practices, including the structure of digital platforms, the mechanisms they employ, and the content they generate.

The remaining sections of the course were dedicated to articulating these principles with specific digital practices and contexts. For instance, in Module 2, we delved into the concept of prosumption to analyze how digital platforms portray the interplay between production, consumption, and exploitation, all within the framework of existing capitalist dynamics (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Within the same module, we also examined practices related to surveillance, sousveillance, and coveillance, exploring their impact on recent social movements, including the Black Lives Matter protests (Gratch & Gratch, 2021). Module 5 initiated a conversation about the discursive power of memes, investigating how meanings propagate and evolve in digital environments (Wiggins, 2019). Similarly, in Module 7, we tackled the implications of users

incorporating hashtags into their digital content as a facet of digital activism (Mishra, 2021). Module 6 was designed to address the concept of identity as an ongoing social process shaped through communicative performances in virtual spaces (Gratch & Gratch, 2021). Lastly, Module 8 unfolded the discussion about automated predictive systems, including the algorithms employed by social media platforms. We explored how these systems can either perpetuate or challenge discourses of oppression by determining what content is visible or suppressed concerning specific communities (Noble, 2018; Rauchberg, 2022)<sup>4</sup>.

My experience as an instructor for this course was positive. Although initially, students appeared disengaged from the material, there was a noticeable shift in their attitude over the course of the sessions. This transformation was particularly evident in their participation in various activities of the modules. For example, during Module 5, students were asked to create and bring their own memes related to the content and dynamics of the class<sup>5</sup>. This resulted in high levels of participation and engagement towards key aspects of the concepts addressed. Such an engagement was also reflected in the final projects, where groups of 7 or 8 students had to analyze situations from their own digital experiences using the concepts and approaches previously discussed and present their ideas to the rest of the class<sup>6</sup>. Notably, one of these projects was later adapted into a paper by one of the students and presented at the Canadian Sociological Association Conference 2023.

The effectiveness of the teaching strategies I employed in this course is also evident in the quantitative and qualitative evaluations gathered by the University. For example, when asked about "the instructor's encouragement of student questions, discussions, and critical thinking," 78% of students who completed the evaluation rated it as "excellent," while the remaining 22% found it "good." Similarly, regarding the statement "The instructor overall was...", 74% of students

responded with "excellent," and 26% with "good." In a comparable aspect, when assessing "The course overall was...", 52% of students deemed it "excellent," and 48% considered it "good." Additionally, many of the comments provided by students in the evaluation highlighted in a positive way the delivery of the course content and the flexibility in accommodating and considering their suggestions throughout the course<sup>7</sup>.

Taking into account these aspects, I conclude that the course's overall outcome was positive, as determined by students' engagement and learning. It's also essential to emphasize that numerous suggestions and comments from students have been taken seriously to improve my teaching style and strategies for future courses.

### ***SOCI 3850 – Digital Narratives and Social Polarization***

This course was offered during the first part of the Summer term of 2023 by the Sociology Department at the University of Lethbridge. The students' prerequisite for this class was a Sociology 1000 course. The classes were delivered online and synchronously to an audience of 47 registered students. To my knowledge, this department has not previously offered a course similar to this one, with the exception of SOCI 3740 - Digital Culture and Society.

The course context was influenced by two primary circumstances. Firstly, as the Summer term is divided into two shorter terms, courses are condensed to just six weeks, including the evaluation period, as opposed to the usual twelve weeks. Consequently, each class session is extended from 1 hour and 30 minutes, which is the regular time during Fall and Spring terms, to 2 hours and 45 minutes, resulting in a total of 5 hours and 30 minutes of class time spread over two days each week. These conditions posed a significant challenge in terms of course design and delivery, as it required organizing the course content in a manner that avoided overwhelming students while keeping them engaged with the material. Additionally, the format of the course

introduced another set of challenges, which involved the task of creating optimal learning conditions within extended online sessions delivered in real-time. To tackle these circumstances, each week was structured into two distinct session types: A and B. Session A primarily consisted of lectures with a 15-minute break halfway through and was conducted on Mondays. Conversely, Session B encompassed three key elements: a concise lecture recap, a group discussion activity, and a brief quiz that could be completed either in groups or individually. Session B was delivered on Wednesdays. Employing these strategies enabled me to balance and structure the course's conditions and limitations.

Several key components of the course content were mainly drawn from the theoretical paper presented for my comprehensive examination, titled “What can a Post-structuralist say about Hannah Arendt’s notion of Ideology?”<sup>8</sup> In this paper, I explored the connection between the concepts of ideology and discourse based on the approaches of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. First, following Arendt’s analyses of twentieth-century totalitarianism, ideology was framed as a narrative that provides a logical unfolding and explanation of historical events across past, present and future. Next, by addressing Foucault’s discussion about the distinction between discourse and ideology, I relocated the latter as a discursive mechanism rather than as an opposite category that stands against anything that resembles a fixed truth. This way, ideology was described as a narrative and discursive mechanism that justifies and sustains the practices, meanings and relations of power embedded in discourses. Finally, approaching Derrida’s deconstruction through the concepts of structurality, freeplay and *différance*, I analyzed the inner dynamics of such narratives and their interplay between opposite narratives.

It is important to note that, although the paper’s central theme was not about polarization, it contributed to developing a theoretical apparatus that acknowledges and explains the

interconnectedness of polarized narratives. Through this framework, it was recognized that the meanings found in these narratives are not inherent to fixed structures but rather emerge from their relational nature. Moreover, this approach provided a strong foundation for analyzing the constant discursive shifts between opposing poles and the moving power relations that result from these dynamics. From this perspective, polarization was addressed as a reflection of various discursive movements rather than a result of disputes based on the veracity of information. The polarized interaction between narratives was presented as a display of their mutual dependence and shared field of signification, which means that they are constantly constructed, transformed and unfolded in relation to their counterparts.

The previous discussions translated into the following themes covered in class: i) the concept of discourse, ii) the relation/distinction between discourse and ideology, iii) the Arendtian notion of ideology as a narrative, and iv) the polarized interaction between narratives. Aware of the complexity and difficulty of some of these topics, they were introduced during the last two modules, while the first modules aimed to address basic notions related to digital culture, digital practices involved in polarized interactions, and different approaches to polarization on social media.

Following this, the central connection between the course material and the research project can be observed through the readings and discussions held during Module 4, “Discourse: the construction of our (social & digital) reality,” and Module 5, “Ideology: the stories we are told.” For instance, during Module 4, we worked on Sara Mill’s (2004) book “Discourse” to explore the definition of discourse and its implications on truth, power and knowledge<sup>9</sup>. This reading allowed us to understand how our social practices are constantly performed and reconstructed. Given that the course contextualized these conversations in the digital realm, we also reviewed Bouvier’s

(2015) article “What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields?” Through this reading, we identified connections between digital platforms and transformations in society involving language, culture, theories and political events. The module’s objective was to provide a solid grasp of the concept of discourse and its relevance within the digital context.

Module 5, on the other hand, delved into various aspects of the concept of ideology. Initially, we revisited Mill's (2004) work to establish the traditional distinction and apparent incompatibility between discourse and ideology, drawing from Foucault's approach. Subsequently, we explored an alternative perspective on this concept by examining Arendt's (1953) work, particularly regarding its narrative structure, as outlined in her article "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government." Lastly, I introduced a brief explanation of how narratives interact with one another, elucidating the formation of polarized dynamics<sup>10</sup>. Considering that this was an undergraduate course with some students who had only completed a 1000-level sociology course previously, I made the decision not to explicitly include Derrida in the course materials to address these dynamics. Instead, I approached the topic from a literary perspective by incorporating Thomas King's (2003) lecture, "The Truth About Stories." This allowed us to examine the interplay between the two narratives he presents, the Native and the Christian. The aim of this module was to provide students with a broad introduction to key aspects of ideology while framing it as a narrative and using it to expand their comprehension of polarized interactions.

As previously mentioned, the initial three modules focused on establishing the foundational elements of digital culture and various digital practices commonly associated with polarized communication on social media platforms<sup>11</sup>. In Module 1, we delved into key aspects from Deuze's (2006) perspective, previously addressed in the course Digital Culture and Society, to establish the

ground for a general understanding of the digital landscape. However, this time, I also included a reading by Piras (2021) to explore the connection between social media platforms as a modern public square and the practices that perpetuate epistemic injustice, discrimination, and violence.

Module 2 was dedicated to the examination of specific practices carried out on social media that contribute to shaping digital narratives. We utilized Agudelo and Olbrych's (2022) article to tackle online hate speech and analyze instances of "ambient digital racism" observed in the responses to the Black Lives Matter protest on Twitter. Additionally, we explored various studies, as presented by Barbera (2020), regarding the effects of echo chambers on social media and their potential impact on social and political polarization. We also engaged in discussions about the article written by Giusti and Piras (2021), which delved into the implications of disinformation and fake news within the context of what they called a "post-truth era" in politics.

Lastly, Module 3 revolved around the question, "Who should we blame for today's polarization?" To address this, we addressed the perspective of Kreiss and McGregor (2023), as presented in their article, "A review and provocation: On polarization and platforms." From this perspective, polarized interactions were not attributed solely to digital platforms but rather viewed as outcomes of struggles for justice deeply rooted in the structural inequalities embedded in our society.

The student evaluations showed that 56% of respondents considered my role as an instructor as excellent, with 44% rating it as good. Similarly, 44% believed that the overall quality of the course was excellent, while 56% deemed it good. However, it is noteworthy that one student expressed that the delivery and explanation of ideas and concepts were not satisfactory. Considering that only 19% of students completed the evaluation, it is important to acknowledge that more students may have encountered the same challenges with the complexity of certain

concepts and topics covered in the course. As an instructor, this feedback also reflects the difficulty I faced in simplifying certain aspects of the approaches derived from my research project and making them accessible to a non-specialized audience. In addition to the quantitative evaluations, I received three comments from students. Two of these comments emphasized positive aspects related to the course material and the class delivery. However, one comment expressed that the course did not captivate them, and suggested that the final project should have been undertaken individually rather than in groups.

My overall experience in this course was positive. It provided me with an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with the students, allowing me to connect different aspects of my research work with various contexts and examples to make them more appealing and clearer. Nevertheless, there were certain aspects that had an impact on my teaching experience.

As previously mentioned, the class format presented a series of challenges throughout the course delivery. Additionally, an important consideration was deciding which elements from my research project to incorporate and how best to present them. Since this was an entirely new course, and many of the readings were being introduced for the first time, I was not certain how they would be received and comprehended by the students. Since then, I have gained a better understanding of which articles to keep, how to structure them, and which examples and approaches would be most effective in explaining them. Furthermore, once the course commenced, it became notorious that the central topic of polarization would awaken strong reactions regarding how students perceived and encountered it in their daily lives. They frequently brought up ideas related to cases that reinforced common biases around the division of “ignorant vs. educated” opinions as a primary cause of polarized interactions. Moreover, I observed that it was challenging for them to embrace perspectives that did not solely focus on a direct link between polarized interactions and

digital platforms. Instead, I encouraged them to consider the social structures that underlie and perpetuate these dynamics. All these factors have provided me with valuable insights into how to approach these topics and what to anticipate under the specific conditions in which the course was conducted.

## **Sample of Activities and Assignments**

### ***Activity #1 – “Meme-fing the class”***

Course: SOCI 3740 - Digital Culture and Society

Instructions given in class: Students must create three memes related to any aspect of the course (content-related or inner dynamics-related). The assignment can be done in groups (no more than three students) or alone.

Objectives:

- Recognize memes as a collection of digital performances of adaptation that reproduce, revise and re-mix pre-existing content.
- Identify the discursive role memes play in allowing certain conversations to happen, creating new meanings and reflecting different relations and hierarchies of social structures.

This activity was implemented as part of Module #5 “The Meme and Us”, which was delivered in two sessions. By the end of the first session, students were given the instructions for the activity and asked to upload their memes before the next class. Once the memes created were uploaded, I included some of them in the slides for the following session. Students were previously let know about this, in case they didn’t want their memes to be shown in class.

After going through the main concepts of the module, we started looking at the memes made by them to use them as examples while making connections with the notions that we had

just reviewed. Some of the themes that appeared in their memes involved: shared student experiences related to the course, concepts from previous modules, funny moments that happened in class, and examples used in previous sessions<sup>12</sup>. The activity gave us the opportunity to discuss important points from the class, such as the way memes reflect: the reproduction and remixing of ideas, the possibility of creating new conversations and adding new meanings to the discursive field, the relation between cultural products and the context where they are situated, and the questioning of certain hierarchical relations established in society<sup>13</sup>.

The objectives initially established for this activity were successfully achieved by allowing students to have a closer approach to the content through examples that were significant and relevant to them. It also fostered more engagement from students as it developed a stronger feeling of belonging to the course through the new jokes and ideas found in the memes. Of course, this was also a great moment for students who got to laugh while addressing the class material.

### ***Activity #2 – “Analyzing our digital experiences”***

Course: SOCI 3740 – Digital Culture and Society

Instructions: Students will have to work in groups to analyze and present two different ‘cases’ that reflect one or more aspects of digital culture using the concepts and perspectives discussed in class. A ‘case’ can be described as a “screenshot” of a moment from your daily digital practices or experiences that draws your attention. Some examples of cases could include the reaction of users to a political event on social media, the sharing of a viral video or a meme, the way a concrete case of activism is impacted by digital practices, ‘new’ forms of production, entertainment, or socialization, etc. The analysis of the cases will have to reflect the next questions while addressing the material reviewed in class: What aspects of digital culture can be identified in the cases selected? What social implications or effects can be observed? How is your analysis

informed by a sociological perspective? In addition to these questions, the students will have to present at least two specific questions related to the cases they decided to address. Students will have the option to select the format for their analyses (e.g. a paper, a video, a podcast, a performance, etc.).

Objectives:

- Identify fundamental approaches and concepts explored in class to understand digital culture.
- Articulate the course material with “real-life” scenarios from their daily digital experiences.
- Create connections between individual and collective digital practices by approaching them from a sociological lens.
- Assess critically the diverse social impacts of diverse digital practices based on the cases analyzed.

This project served as the final project for the course, contributing 40% to the students' overall grade, accounting for both the analyses and the in-class presentation. Given the complexity and importance of this project, students were provided with the opportunity to work on it in a staged manner. The first phase of this process involved drafting a proposal outlining the cases they intended to analyze and the concepts and readings they believed would be most beneficial. To facilitate this, students were given an entire session before the reading week, during which they could work on their drafts in class while receiving guidance from me. Following the submission of their drafts, each group had the chance to both receive and provide feedback to other groups. The primary goal of this stage was to foster a collaborative environment that would help everyone in determining the most effective approach to their cases and the presentation of their analyses.

Subsequently, one week prior to the presentation deadline, students were provided with two additional in-class sessions to advance their projects under my supervision. This approach allowed me to work closely with each group, contributing with suggestions and addressing any questions they had. Finally, the presentations occurred during two sessions, where each group had 15 minutes to present their cases and analyses in their preferred format. Following their presentation, they were given an additional 5 minutes to respond to questions from students and me.

After all the projects were presented, I was greatly satisfied with the results. It was clear that all the students had put a lot of effort into establishing connections between the course material and their selected cases, as well as explaining the concepts and approaches discussed in class. Most of the groups opted to present their ideas through a video they edited. However, there were also groups that decided to write a paper or record a podcast session. The flexibility to choose whatever product they considered ideal motivated them to create engaging and entertaining content for everyone in the class. It is also relevant to acknowledge that there were two aspects that should be considered for the future. Firstly, it is necessary to incorporate evaluation mechanisms enabling students to assess the level of participation and engagement within their teams. Additionally, there should be more criteria included in the rubric to evaluate the quality of the presented product, such as the clarity of audio and visual elements of a video. Nevertheless, overall, the main objectives established for this activity were reached in a satisfactory way.

### ***Activity #3 – Online group discussions***

Course: SOCI 3850 – Digital Narratives and Social Polarization

Instructions: Students will present and lead a break-out room discussion in a small group once during the term. Students will have to select two concepts or ideas from the previous class to

explain them to their group while using at least two examples that reflect such notions. Presenters are required to submit a 1-page outline before class with the ideas and examples that will be presented. Students are expected to bring videos, images, audio or any other material that could support their presentation. Each group will have two students presenting. Once both students have presented, they will turn the floor over to two different students in charge of bringing discussion questions.

Objectives:

- Encourage all students to actively engage in the group discussion, expressing their thoughts, opinions, and perspectives on the topic of that week.
- Reinforce key concepts, theories, or ideas covered in that week by encouraging students to find and create connections with concrete examples.
- Foster a sense of connection and engagement among students, promoting active participation and reducing the sense of isolation that can occur in online learning environments.

This activity constituted a portion of the students' overall grade, with a weekly occurrence focusing on a distinct module each time. The activity provided students with a dedicated space to engage in discussions and exchange ideas, enriching their understanding through the incorporation of real-life examples and personal experiences within the discussion groups. Considering the online nature of the course, these regular dialogues became crucial in fostering a level of participation that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise. Students demonstrated considerable effort not only in contributing relevant examples but also in presenting supporting materials, such as videos, articles, and images, to support their arguments. Throughout the discussion groups, I actively monitored and facilitated conversations by moving between various

breakout rooms, ensuring that discussions were occurring and that the students in charge of presenting were actively participating. It is important to state that I received valuable assistance from two non-registered students who volunteered to support me in delivering the class.

#### ***Activity #4 – Online collective quizzes***

Course: SOCI 3850 – Digital Narratives and Social Polarization

Instructions: By the end of every module, students will have to complete a short quiz in class. Once the quiz is open, the students will have only 15 min. to complete it before it closes. The use of class notes and readings is encouraged during the completion of the quizzes. Students will have to complete the quiz in groups that will be established by the professor and put into different breakout rooms.

Objectives:

- Consolidate the students' understanding of key concepts, theories and approaches reviewed during the module by encouraging active and collaborative participation.
- Foster a dialogic approach to the course content by compelling students to discuss, compare and analyze different possible answers based on their notes and knowledge.
- Facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange within the groups, enabling students to benefit from each other's strengths and perspectives.

Upon reflecting on my experiences with the evaluation process in previous courses, I decided to introduce collective quizzes as an alternative to individual ones. I observed that students exhibited higher engagement levels with the course content and developed a deeper understanding when given the opportunity to build their responses collaboratively. The quizzes comprised a combination of multiple-choice, true-false, and open-ended questions<sup>14</sup>. It is important to emphasize that these quizzes, within this approach, served as pedagogical strategies intended to

enhance the learning process rather than mere mechanisms to reward or penalize students' comprehension. In addition to monitoring student participation, I offer guidance and insights whenever necessary to assist students in constructing or selecting the correct answers.

### Summary Of Teaching Evaluation

#### *SOCI 3740 - Digital Culture and Society*

23 out of 45 students completed the evaluation of the instructor. Some of the most relevant aspects evaluated have been included here. The full evaluation form can be found in the Appendix under section K.

*Table 1. Quantitative Evaluations<sup>15</sup>*

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Poor</b>
The course planning and organization was...	65%	35%	0%	0%
The textbooks and other learning material were...	57%	39%	4%	0%
The instructor's explanation of grading criteria was...	52%	43%	0%	4%
The instructor's delivery and explanation of ideas and concepts were...	52%	48%	0%	0%
The instructor's encouragement of student's questions, discussions, and critical thinking was...	78%	22%	0%	0%
The fairness of the assessments (exams and/or assignments) of material covered was...	70%	26%	4%	0%
The instructor's effort to make the course as interesting as possible was...	74%	22%	4%	0%

The instructor's effort to make the course as challenging as possible was...	61%	39%	0%	0%
The instructor's treatment of students with respect and without prejudice was...	96%	4%	0%	0%
This instructor overall was...	74%	26%	0%	0%
This course overall was...	52%	48%	0%	0%

*Student Comments*

- “This course introduces the field (digital culture) I want to know but never had the opportunity to so this is great, very interesting class format, the workload is stretched out and not very stressful.”
- “The quizzes were understandable and assignments were clear.”
- “Arturo was a great instructor for this course! He knew what he was talking about and provided current examples relating to course content. He provided efficient and effective feedback on assignments! Also, Arturo was very flexible in deadlines when needed and is always willing to help students out by extending quiz times. All around I appreciated have a professor as understanding as Arturo and will be recommending courses he instructs to others! Arturo by far has exceeded my expectations of this course and as a professor.”
- “I am so glad this course was offered as it is different than most of the other sociology classes I have taken and I enjoyed learning about and creating memes! I appreciated that there was no textbook because of all the other readings that were assigned for each module. Arturo was very accommodating and you can tell he really cares about his students. Can't wait to take another one of his classes!”

- “The instructor shows good effort in trying to get students to participate and have good knowledge about the topic he teaches.”
- “Fantastic teaching method, very flexible in teaching style and forthcoming to concerns and issues throughout the course, that made this class very enjoyable.”
- “Good overall! Arturo is very passionate about this topic and that made it exciting to learn about.”
- “Arturo is an awesome instructor, especially for a PhD student. He has an incredible breadth of knowledge and made this course engaging and interesting with use of Discord as a form of weekly assignments. I do however wish he would have allowed us to work on our group projects earlier into the semester, perhaps submitting the proposals before reading week instead of after. I think there needs to be more guidance around the discord modules and perhaps a discussion question suggested by Arturo to the students. The class was organized very well, the readings and videos extremely interesting and thought provoking. He is a very accommodating instructor, allowing me to rewrite a quiz past the initial due date, as well as offering reasonable extensions. He took suggestions for what he could improve on really well and immediately changed the format of the quizzes when numerous students were concerned about the difficulty of the quizzes. He always gets back to us as soon as possible for feedback and in emails.”

***SOCI 3850 - Digital Narratives and Social Polarization***

9 out of 47 students completed the evaluation of the instructor. Some of the most relevant aspects evaluated have been included here. The full evaluation form can be found in the Appendix under section K.

Table 2. Quantitative Evaluations

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Poor</b>
The course planning and organization was...	56%	44%	0%	0%
The textbooks and other learning material were...	44%	44%	11%	0%
The instructor's explanation of grading criteria was...	44%	56%	0%	0%
The instructor's delivery and explanation of ideas and concepts were...	56%	33%	0%	11%
The instructor's encouragement of students' questions, discussions, and critical thinking was...	78%	22%	0%	0%
The fairness of the assessments (exams and/or assignments) of material covered was...	44%	56%	0%	0%
The instructor's effort to make the course as interesting as possible was...	67%	22%	11%	0%
The instructor's effort to make the course as challenging as possible was...	56%	44%	0%	0%
The instructor's treatment of students with respect and without prejudice was...	78%	22%	0%	0%
This instructor overall was...	56%	44%	0%	0%
This course overall was...	44%	56%	0%	0%

### *Student Comments*

- “The podcast was a nice break from the articles. Maybe, you can add more when appropriate to the material.”
- “The instructor seems to be quite knowledgeable about the course topics and main concepts. I thoroughly enjoyed his classes as they were interactive and interesting. The instructor seemed to be passionate about the course in general and it was infectious making one listen to his ideas.”
- “The course was okay but I found that the professor teaching did not keep me captivated. Also they strayed off the course and it was difficult to follow along sometimes. I also was not a fan of having to write an essay with another student and it could have been an individual assignment.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Section “A” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>2</sup> See Section “B” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>3</sup> See Section “C” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>4</sup> See Section “D” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>5</sup> See Activity #1 in the subsection Sample of Activities and Assignments.

<sup>6</sup> See Activity #2 in the subsection Sample of Activities and Assignments.

<sup>7</sup> See the subsection Summary of Teaching Evaluations.

<sup>8</sup> This paper was an early version of the academic article included here in Section 2.

<sup>9</sup> See Section “E” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>10</sup> See Section “F” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>11</sup> See Section “G” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>12</sup> See section “H” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>13</sup> See section “I” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>14</sup> See section “J” in the Appendix: Teaching Dossier.

<sup>15</sup> The responses reflect the percentage of students who selected that option. These are the results of the institutional evaluation conducted by the university.

**SECTION 2: THE CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES AS IDEOLOGICAL  
AND DISCURSIVE MECHANISMS: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ARENDT,  
FOUCAULT AND DERRIDA (ABOUT TRUTH AND CONSISTENCY)**

**Abstract**

In the context of post-truth conditions marked by polarized communications, this paper reevaluates the force of the concept of ideology, extending it beyond its common usage that denotes an illusionary or distorted presentation of social reality to emphasize its form over its content, which facilitates a theoretical synthesis between ideology and discourse - two concepts that have been often treated as incompatible. To achieve this, the paper draws upon the work of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. This work is organized into three distinct moments. First, it frames ideology as a narrative form that explains historical events across past, present, and future, based on Arendt's analysis of twentieth-century totalitarianism. Second, it relocates ideology as a discursive mechanism rather than an opposite category to truth, based on Foucault's delimitation of the discursive field. Here, ideology emerges as a way of justifying and sustaining the practices, meanings, and relations of power embedded in discourses. Finally, Derrida's deconstructionism assists in revealing the inner dynamics of narratives and their interplay,

This framework claims that the description of diverse ideological and discursive dynamics gains relevance when used to identify, question and disrupt the apparently fixed nature of certain narratives and the relations of truth and power established within and between them. Ultimately, these reflections aim to set the ground for an alternative perspective for examining contemporary

social and political events by reevaluating the role of narratives as ideological, discursive and relational constructs.

Keywords: ideology, discourse, narratives, truth, consistency, poststructuralism

## **Introduction**

It has become taken for granted that we are in a post-truth era in which facts are under constant dispute. In this context, how might a synthesizing reevaluation of the concepts of ideology and discourse, often held apart from each other due to past theoretical tensions, help us to understand better how truths are constructed and presented? Daily interactions on social media and new communication practices have made increasingly clear the difficulties in distinguishing between what is true and what is not. For instance, during the recent pandemic and in response to the surge of what has been called fake news, fact-check mechanisms were implemented on social media platforms to counter and prevent the spread of misinformation (Hazelton, 2021). Similarly, digital platforms have played an important role in how narratives sustaining social and political movements are built and legitimized within historical, social and political contexts, making starker stances and broader political divisions more visible (Bhatia, 2019). In this sense, increasing numbers of studies about polarization and social media have emerged to identify the role of those digital environments and practices in how users determine the veracity of information and employ it in their interactions with others (Banks et al., 2021; Barbera, 2020; Grover, 2022; Jones-Jang & Chung, 2022; Kreiss & McGregor, 2023). The conditions of our post-truth era, in which the acceptance of arguments supposedly relies more heavily on beliefs than on facts, have given heightened urgency to the imperative to distinguish truthful from political and ideological content. According to authors such as Giusty and Piras (2021), this distinction is seen as crucial for defending democracy.

Furthermore, new theoretical tensions and challenges have emerged in addressing the role of truth while adapting to the current context. For instance, from a poststructuralist perspective, the critique of truth has traditionally aimed to decenter dominant narratives, making room for marginalized voices rooted in lived historical experiences (Baxter, 2008; Castañeda-Peña, 2008). However, in the post-truth era, the need to establish anchors that ground new critical positions complicates poststructuralism's critique of truth and prompts questions about how to advance without reinforcing dominant narratives or dismissing marginalized perspectives. In this context, revisiting and exploring the concept of ideology within different frameworks becomes central to continue seeking a foundation for our political and social actions and decisions.

Synthesizing theoretical concerns presented by Arendt, Foucault, and Derrida, this paper reconsiders the concept of ideology and presents an alternative perspective for examining contemporary social and political events by reevaluating the role of narratives as ideological, discursive and relational constructs. In response to today's discursive scenarios with new social media dynamics and increasing polarized interactions, this paper argues that the concept of ideology, elaborated beyond its predominant usage that has it denote a false state of affairs that distorts reality, can help us understand and challenge how truth claims are built. Moreover, by adopting aspects of a poststructuralist perspective, this work seeks to respond to some of the critiques that have emerged in response to its challenges to the notions of truth, totalities, and universals. While it has been argued that poststructuralism's stance towards truth hinders political action, the critique of specific forms of power, and ultimately, any engagement with reality (Eagleton, 2003; Thwaites, 2015), this paper contends that exploring the relationship and interaction between ideology and discourse enables us to challenge the fixed nature of social and political narratives, as well as the systems of truth and power they deploy.

Following this direction, ideology will not be addressed from the theoretical and political perspective of the Marxist tradition, historically situated under the figures of a *camera obscura*, a *superstructure*, a *false consciousness*, or a *state apparatus* (Triece, 2019), which have been used to reflect a virtual opposition to something like the truth (Mill, 2006). We intend to explore what escapes from the limits of that field to incorporate Hannah Arendt's approach to ideology as a narrative. This paper does not seek to analyze ideology from a historical or comparative perspective. Instead, it focuses on redefining the function of ideology, drawing initially on Arendt's approach rather than adopting the issues, questions, and concerns rooted in the Marxist tradition.

The initial approach to Arendt will not be enough to renegotiate the role of truth. Nonetheless, it will establish the conditions to initiate a conversation with the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, where we will find key elements to revisit ideology, discourse and truth from a poststructuralist perspective. This approach is presented here as a critique of fixed structures of meaning and truth that result in grand narratives grounded in the presumption of a universal subject (Baxter, 2002). Such a critique will be present in the emergence of the discursive approach proposed by Foucault (1995) and the confrontation to a metaphysics of presence led by Derrida (1997).

The structure of this paper consists of three distinct moments. First, following Arendt's analyses of twentieth-century totalitarianism, ideology will be framed as a narrative that logically unfolds and explains historical events across past, present and future. Next, by addressing Foucault's discussion about the distinction between discourse and ideology, we will relocate the latter as a discursive mechanism rather than a set of propositions that stand apart from, or obscure conditions resembling reality. In this way, ideology's role is to justify and sustain the practices, meanings, and relations of power embedded in discourses. Finally, Derrida's deconstruction will

inform the inner dynamics of such narratives and their interplay between opposite narratives. These reflections diverge from being solely Arendtian, Foucauldian, or Derridean as each section will reflect a constant dialogue between critical aspects of their theoretical work.

## **Ideology: Reframing the Totalitarian Narrative**

### ***Defining Ideology***

Hannah Arendt substantively addresses the concept of ideology in only two published articles; in both cases, she does so in her endeavours to examine and explain totalitarianism (Arendt, 1953; 1994a). This limited focus could explain the little attention paid to her reflections on this matter, in contrast to concepts such as *action* or *thinking*. However, Arendt's specific attention to ideology in the context of totalitarianism is one example that illustrates that every concept her work addresses arises from specific political conditions. This was also expressed in her preference to call herself a political thinker rather than a philosopher (Sanchez, 2015). In other words, notions such as ideology constituted an answer rather than a question for Arendt; an answer to the question about the nature of totalitarianism. Therefore, examining Arendt's understanding of ideology requires identifying not only how the concept is embedded in totalitarianism but also how it can be applicable to societies not characterized by totalitarianism.

In her article *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government*, Arendt (1953) defines ideology in an abbreviated but sharp formulation as "the logic of an idea" (p. 316). Locating within the field of formal logic reveals that it is governed and organized by principles that cannot contradict themselves without incurring a fallacy. It is inferred from this that ideology's logical aspect presents a type of rationality related to mathematical thinking, where we know what to expect every time we encounter a specific equation (Arendt, 1968). This rational aspect of ideology can be sustained by the distinction Arendt makes between *common sense* and *logical reasoning*.

While the former “presupposes a common world into which we all fit” and from which all meanings are created, the latter “can claim a reliability altogether independent of the world and the existence of other people.” Logical reasoning allows us to conclude that “ $2 + 2 = 4$  is independent of the human condition, that it is equally valid for God and man” (Arendt, 1994b, p. 318). In the analysis of Adolf Eichmann’s trial<sup>1</sup>, for example, Arendt describes him as someone who cannot be portrayed as irrational despite losing his capacity to think (Arendt, 2006). His banality is the result of a reason guided solely by logical precepts.

A second dimension of ideology emerges from applying formal logic to the field of history. For Arendt (1953), the concept of ideology refers to “the unfolding of a *process* which is in constant change” (p. 316). The movement involved in any logical reasoning—in any deployment of propositions—is, according to Arendt, raised to the level of history, allowing one to deduce, as with a syllogism, the order, meaning and direction of the course of events and effacing the raw experiences of history in doing so. Such a process turns any idea at the center of an ideology into a “law” that functions as a “logical exposition” of itself. The secrets of the past, the complexities of the present, and the uncertainties of the future ostensibly become unveiled under the inherent logic of this ongoing movement.

In her article *On the Nature of Totalitarianism*, Arendt recognizes another aspect of ideologies by framing them as “systems of explanation of life and world that claim to explain everything, past and future, without further concurrence with actual experience” (Arendt, 1994a, pp. 349-350). Understanding ideology as a system should not imply a rigid set of meanings; rather, it’s a constant movement that adapts to every novelty while producing consistency. Contradictory events or statements become nearly impossible within such systems, as contradictions can be reconciled as necessary steps dictated by ideological laws. This maneuver is explained by

introducing a dialectical relation that goes from thesis through antithesis to synthesis and eventually turns into the thesis of the next dialectical movement. This synthesis allows ideology to “explain away factual contradictions as stages of one identical, consistent movement” (Arendt, 1953, p. 317).

Arendt observes that, in the necessity of achieving consistency, ideological systems are constantly translated into lies, where numbers, events, history, and other data can be substituted for versions more suitable to the ideology. However, the main concern for Arendt arises not from the lies themselves but from the disruption of the distinction between truth and falsity that an ideological system produces. It is because of this imposition of “this totalitarian relationship to reality, [that] the very concept of truth has lost its meaning” (Arendt, 1994a, p. 354).<sup>2</sup>

### *Ideology as an Ongoing Narrative*

Now that some of the central aspects of ideology have been described, we can examine its narrative character by addressing the two main cases Arendt analyzes: Nazism and Stalinism. In each political movement, we find a different central idea –the superiority of races and the struggle of classes, respectively– that translates into a law designated by an external entity or force, such as Nature or History. This law unfolds as a process that claims to explain everything as a logical system. For Nazism, the base of their “belief in race laws lies [on] Darwin’s idea of man as a more or less accidental product of natural development –a development which does not necessarily stop with the species of human beings such as we know it.” On the other hand, Stalinism is based in Bolshevik’s belief that class “lies [on] the Marxian notion of men as the product of a gigantic historical process racing toward the end of historical time, that is, a process that tends to abolish itself” (Arendt, 1994a, p. 341). The law of movement is deployed under the guidance of History or Nature, who will make of humanity’s destiny whatever they decide.

Both systems unveil what appears to be a core characteristic of ideologies: they are sustained as a story to be told – a story that has been told and that we can only assume will continue to be told. The narrative character of ideology emerges not from the idea or law itself that guides the course of Nature or History, but in its deployment, in the way that we can look back or forward in the history of humanity and connect each event, as small as it seems, in a necessity, in a solid unity and a thread. For Arendt (1994), racism or anti-Semitism become more than irresponsible opinions the moment they pretend to explain the whole course of history through an eternal race or class struggle secretly led by a specific group. In a sense, we could say that racism or anti-Semitism become protagonists in a story – an ideology.

Additionally, to frame ideology as a narrative, it is necessary to examine the political role and meaning that stories play for Arendt. Most of her ideas on this matter are in her reflections dedicated to the Danish writer Isak Dinesen<sup>3</sup>. In the article *Truth and Politics*, for instance, Arendt (1968) insists on the importance of narratives before the unpredictability of events:

Who says what is – λέγει τὰ ἐόντα – always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning. It is perfectly true that “all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them,” in the words of Isak Dinesen, who not only was one of the great storytellers of our time but also – and she was almost unique in this respect – knew what she was doing (pp. 261-262).

Arendt recognizes that narratives gain political strength the moment they turn the constant flow of novelty carried by human events into a chain of causes and effects from which we can extract meanings and prepare for the future. It is important to recognize that for her, the political role of stories aligns with factual reality and operates objectively and impartially outside the political sphere. Nonetheless, we can see narratives as carriers of ideologies by elevating their domain to history's level, arranging and guiding events, and transforming all human experiences

into bearable narratives. Ideologies provide the principles for unfolding stories, enabling new storytellers to tell us about what we should have known long ago.

We can summarize the Arendtian approach to ideology by describing it as: i) the logic of an idea; ii) an unfolding process; iii) a law present throughout history; iv) a system of explanation; v) a dialectical movement; vi) a mismatch with experience; and vii) a narrative that provides meaning and order to the constant flow of human events.

As previously mentioned, ideology owes its emergence in Arendt's work to the analyses of totalitarianism, as the necessity to understand was a central task for her (1994b). However, the origin of a concept should not be confused with its essence. After explaining the ideological character of totalitarianism, Arendt (1994a) moves on to break up what seemed to be an intrinsic relationship: "Ideologies by themselves are as little totalitarian and their use as little restricted to totalitarian propaganda as terror by itself is restricted to totalitarian rule" (p. 349). In this sense, ideologies move beyond the political forces that provide them with a particular form of appearance and become part of our common understanding.

### **The Deployment of Ideology as a Discursive Mechanism**

We will now address the relationship between the concepts of ideology, as previously discussed in Arendt's work, and discourse, based on Michel Foucault's approach. As other previous scholars such as Purvis and Hunt (1993) have done, this section aims to explore the compatibility between these notions and examine the implications, dichotomies and concerns that arise from them, to build upon what Arendt established and to examine more closely the relationship between ideology and narrative. In exploring this intersection, it will be argued that ideology functions as a discursive mechanism, which can be understood as the procedures that control, select, organize, and redistribute discourses. Furthermore, by recovering Arendt's

approach in relation to these discussions, ideology, as a narrative, will play a crucial role in reflecting regimes of truth and power.

### ***The History of Discontinuities and the Discursive Field***

Acknowledging the volume of, and different shifts across, Foucault's writings, our reflections will be guided mainly by *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and some of his texts surrounding it, such as *The Order of Discourse* and *What is an Author?* Starting from this point highlights a central critique that sustains some of his previous works –such as *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1965), *Naissance de la Clinique* (Foucault, 1994), and *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 2005)– that confronts histories of continuities, consciousness, linearity, and origins, while foregrounding histories of ruptures, discontinuities, anonymity, and dispersion. In this, Foucault advocates the abandonment of teleologies, totalities, and unities for the embrace of broken histories from which objects are produced (Foucault, 1995), an orientational focus that is maintained in the later genealogical phase of his work (Foucault, 1977). Focusing on the early work of Foucault aims to emphasize how questioning continuities is fundamental for developing the concept of discourses and his subsequent writings.

Foucault's archaeological approach to history and knowledge does not constitute practices of unburying and recovering events assumed to lie underneath history, as the spatialized image of archeology could be imagined to imply. Conversely, archeology works on a descriptive level, on the surface, to elaborate on the specific relations between discourses from which historical and epistemological grounds merge. His approach avoids focusing on the individual consciousnesses, denying that it produces objects or authors the processes that elevate ideas into collective consciousness. Foucault's archeology occurs as a rewriting, "a regulated transformation of what

has already been written. (...) it is the systematic description of a discourse-object” (Foucault, 1995, p. 140).

Built upon this approach and the critique of a history of continuities, Foucault's later work conducts genealogical studies of power/knowledge regimes. This form of examination involves "a holistic and historically relative study of the formation and functioning of incommensurable networks of social practices, focusing on the interrelationship between constraint and discourse" (Fraser, 1981, p. 275). Both approaches, the archaeological and genealogical, emphasize a critical aspect of Foucault's offering: the production of systems of knowledge reflects the existence of a plurality of discursive regimes carrying their own sets of interconnected practices. Moreover, such regimes include their own objects of inquiry, criteria for admitting truth and falsity of statements, procedures for creating and organizing data, and institutional norms and regulations (Fraser, 1981).

In this context, the concept of discourse appears as a response and reconfiguration of the concerns related to how objects emerge, connect and are managed in the realm of things known. Discourse delimits and names the objects around us and enacts the rules that enable them to form as objects to “constitute the conditions of their historical appearance” (Foucault, 1995, p. 48). However, this relation between discourses and objects is not reduced to words and things. Discourses escape from the linguistic and semiotic grid that holds them as ‘groups of signs’ representing something. Instead, they are presented “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1995, p. 49). Furthermore, the delimitation of these practices occurs under *discursive formations* that establish a sense of regularity, “an order, correlations, positions and functionings, [and] transformations” (Foucault, 1995, p. 38) between practices while reflecting a system of dispersion. In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault (1981) identifies, as part of these delimitations, various *discursive mechanisms*, providing consistency to

the inherent ruptures and discontinuities of discursive formations. Each of these could be considered an operation that, to some extent, shapes the boundaries of diverse discursive formations and their relation to others.

Discourses become not only another theoretical unit to explain the construction of our practices in society but also a central concept in the deployment of Foucault's critique of understanding history as a linear and causal phenomenon and knowledge as an individual and intentional production. Only through the introduction of discourses can a history made out of discontinuities be grasped, carrying its systems of practices and objects (Foucault, 1977; 1995). What we have described so far addresses some of the central concerns from which Foucault's work emerges and intends to briefly clarify critical notions of the discursive field and its role. Within this frame, we will now explore the role that ideology and its narrative structure can take, particularly as a mechanism that contributes to the unfolding, sustaining and reproduction of discourses.

### ***The Author as an Ideological Figure***

To elaborate upon the role and functioning of ideology, as treated in Foucault's early work, we will address one of the discursive mechanisms described by Foucault, *the author's function*. Foucault (1981) recognizes the figure of the author as "a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence" (p. 58). Its function is to deploy ways of organizing, constraining, and characterizing the circulation and production of certain discourses (Mills, 2006). For Foucault, the author is taken not as an individual but as a procedure of distributing and controlling ideas in a particular context. Paradoxically, within the deployment of a discourse, the author is always depicted through the figures of the savant, the intellectual or the genius so it can be held up as a model to be reproduced, at least

within a concrete period. Only under the acceptance of such figures referring to individuality and consciousness can the author operate as a mechanism of discursive control. Only when this depiction is denied can the author's function be observed.

Once again, a distinction is made, one between the author as the figure of an individual made of flesh and bones and the author as an articulation of multiple discourses; one between how discourses operate and how they are represented in relation to their functioning; a distinction where the deployment of the aspects distinguished depends on the existence of each other. It is in such a distinction that Foucault (1998) finds a place for ideology:

In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historical real function. When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an ideological production. The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning. (pp. 221-222)

The author, as an inverted figure, is an ideological effect and is presented as inseparable from the author's functioning as a discursive mechanism. However, Foucault later refrained from using the concept of ideology. During an interview given in 1977, Foucault (1980a) explains why he found it difficult to use the notion of ideology in his work: i) "It always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth"; ii) it refers "to something of the order of a subject"; and iii) it "stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant" (p. 118). By characterizing ideology in this way, Foucault reveals that his approach constitutes a direct response to the Marxist perspective (Mills, 2006) and presents it as incompatible with his analyses of discourse. In this way, exploring the role that ideology plays within the discursive field implies disregarding this apparent

irreconcilability and blurring some of the lines that separate it from the rest of Foucault's notions, while maintaining the conceptual force of discursive mechanisms.

### *Relocating Ideology as a Discursive Mechanism*

We can respond to one of Foucault's central concerns about using ideology by observing that his analyses of discourses already share and reproduce, to some extent, ideology's opposition to something that counts as truth. This can be observed through the distinction previously described between the author's function and the representation of the author as an individual genius. While the former reflects the "historical real function" of the author, the latter misrepresents and hides its deployment. Similarly, another example is the analysis of history and knowledge production based on continuities and its opposite, an analysis guided by discontinuities. The first type of approach constitutes a misrepresentation of historical accuracy that can only be challenged when rejecting teleological interpretations. Nonetheless, there are clear differences between discourse and ideology's opposition to something presented as truth. For instance, while ideology is often deployed to critique empirical or normative explanations, discourse presents an ambivalent position regarding truth and power, focusing instead on what forms of rationality are at work in the configuration of certain practices (Fraser, 1981). So, although they cannot be equally compared, as they have functioned or been used in different ways, we can notice how both operate under a similar logic: a distinction between a real function or image and one that is not.

Foucault challenges a notion of truth that makes appeals to universals and facts and stands in opposition to falseness and misrepresentation. In contrast, he defines truth as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1980a, p.133), those which are constantly separated under "true" and "false" categories. For Foucault, there is no intention of unveiling reality, as there is to analyze

how a particular sense of reality operates and is conformed under regimes of truth that are “linked in a circular relation with systems of power” (Foucault, 1980a, p.133). However, we can also observe how, in the case of the author, Foucault points to the figure of the individual genius as an ideological product, that is, as a representation that inverts and disfigures something from the field of reality, its historical real function. This reference to something real does not respond to facts subsumed by universal categories but to how discourses are mobilized through diverse procedures that bring them up to the level of facts. In this sense, an ideological production is that which conceals not truth but the way a specific truth within a regime of truth is formed and functions.

Based on the previous points, we can advance a more precise position on this matter: Ideology does not stand in opposition to discourse but is one of its mechanisms and procedures contributing to the delimitation and reproduction of discourses. The figure of the individual author would play an important role as an ideological product in providing consistency and stability to the functioning of discursive formations as long as it conceals the discontinuities and ruptures carried by certain regimes of truth. To posit that ideology can reside within the conceptual realm of discursivity does not aim to reconcile the Marxist tradition with Foucault’s points of view but to open new paths to problematize the dynamics of truth within discursive formations. That is, to examine how truths are conformed and how they are presented to sustain and reproduce a specific discourse. Ideology and discourse are no longer positioned as opposite or independent concepts from each other, as they both refer to the same field, knowledge and history, and truth and power.

To conclude this section, we can make some final connections between these ideas and the Arendtian approach to ideology as a narrative. Similarly to the figure of the author, we find in the continuities that Foucault criticizes regarding history and the production of knowledge another clear example of an ideological product concealing the way a regime of truth is formed. Look, for

example, at the figures of *progress*, *evolution* or *rationality* that, as teleological explanations, mask the constant discontinuities that form discourses. As part of such continuities, we can introduce the figure of narratives as ideological and deployed as a discourse mechanism. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between discourses and narratives: while discourses organize multiple meanings and practices within a specific context, narratives function as open structures that connect and shape multiple discourses that might otherwise be unrelated to form and reinforce broader discursive formations (e.g. a political or a religious project). Also, in creating a sense of linearity and consistency, narratives conceal the tactical polyvalence of discourses, which characterizes them as a “series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). This particular discursive dynamic allows different and even contradictory discourses to exist as part of the same strategy.

Ideology as a narrative becomes more than a system of explanation that follows the logic of an idea and misrepresents truth as reality. It is now part of a system of production of truth in terms of discursivity. This way, while a narrative continues to unfold as a process that runs towards the past and future, its deployment allows for a particular discursive formation to sustain its existence through the story it tells about itself. The analysis of continuities as narratives provides insight into how certain discourses depict themselves to uphold a specific ordering of discontinuities. We must also stress that narratives not only inform the production of truth but also point to the systems of power embedded in such regimes. In this sense, power is formulated not in terms of individual intentions or homogenous domination over others but as something that is “employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 98). It translates into apparatuses of knowledge from which truth emerges. It can be observed now how the

Arendtian narrative notion of ideology can be understood as a mechanism to reflect how discourses are deployed as unities and continuities exerting forms of truth and power.

### **Unfolding the Relational Dynamic of Narratives**

In the preceding sections, we have established our definition of ideology. Here, guided by central pieces of Derrida's work, we will delve into the inner dynamics and interconnections of narratives as ideological constructs and discursive tools. Moreover, this section must be read in relation to one of Derrida's (1985) main concepts, *deconstruction*, which refers to the possibility of identifying tensions, similarities, necessities, differences, and mutual ground between a specific set of concepts. More than a methodological procedure, a set of rules, or an analysis, deconstruction refers to a happening or event that provides the conditions to account for such movements. Through this notion, Derrida challenges traditional notions of fixed meanings, binary oppositions and the idea of an immediate connection between language and reality.

In this context, the following discussions will recover Derrida's critique of structures and centers, and the concepts of *freeplay*, *supplementarity* and *différance*, as underlying aspects of deconstruction as they reflect the instability of language and meaning. By embracing the way some of Derrida's ideas connect, we will analyze how meanings and objects carried by such narratives do not stem from fixed structures but rather emerge from the relational nature of language itself. This perspective will also form the basis for examining the ongoing discursive shifts between opposing poles and the resultant power relations following these dynamics.

### ***The Disruption of the Center***

A brief examination of some central ideas of Derrida's (1979) *Structure, Sign and Play in the Social Discourse of the Human Sciences* will guide our approach to the conformation of narratives and the ongoing shifts that occur both within and between them. In this text, Derrida

confronts how structures have been thought from a structuralist perspective embraced by the humanities and social science disciplines. According to him, the *structurality* behind this approach results from the “process of giving [to the structure] a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin” (Derrida, 1979, p. 247). Such a center serves as a principle that orients, balances and organizes the structure while limiting and controlling the freeplay of elements that constitute the formation. Under this particular organization, Derrida notices that while the center defines and determines the possibilities and combinations that can emerge within the structure, it remains unconditioned by the determinations it permits: “The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center” (Derrida, 1979, p. 248). The freeplay within this type of structure is always based on certitude, stability and permanence and reflects a fundamental ground. Furthermore, these fundamental principles always designate “the constant of a presence –*eidōs*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substances, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth” (Derrida, 1979, p. 249).

While describing the inner composition of these structures, Derrida observes the emergence of an event that has disrupted such formations. This rupture occurs in the center itself, as a being-present and natural locus. Such a disruptive event occurs mainly in three places: in Nietzsche’s critique of the concepts of being and truth, in the Freudian critique of self-presence and consciousness, and in Heidegger’s destruction of metaphysics, onto-theology, and the determination of being as a presence. By removing its fixed locus, the center becomes a function, a non-locus from which an infinite number of sign-substitutions and interplay of significations occur *ad infinitum*. The transcendentality and domain of the center are overthrown.

Although Derrida acknowledges the importance of the rupture prompted against the center and its implications, he understands that a complete abandonment of the metaphysical notions that sustain that model is impossible. Thus, he maintains the dynamic of the sign through the concept of supplementarity wherein the center exists merely as a supplementary element within a delimited realm, that of language and freeplay. Within this movement, the disruption of presence occurs, constituting a domain where each element serves as “a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain” (Derrida, 1979, p. 263). Derrida embraces Nietzsche’s affirmation of the world's free play, where active interpretation reigns without truth or origin, accepting the abandonment of security tied to a fixed center.

The movement prompted by freeplay can be better understood by introducing the notion of *différance*, explained through the relationship between speech and writing. In his book *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1997) challenges the Western tradition that relates speech to immediacy and presence while confining writing to a distant and imperfect reproduction. In opposition to this phonocentric and logocentric hierarchy, Derrida claims that whatever can be said about writing - for example, that is derivative- can also be said of speech. In other words, both modes exist under the same dynamics and structures. The underlying element that extends through all language, regardless of its written or spoken form, is the notion of *différance*. However, this concept is not a preceding action or an object, but the language’s mode of existence, the nonfull, nonsimple origin of differences (Derrida, 1973).

*Différance* as an origin can only be grasped as a dynamic rather than a specific moment from which words appear. It aims to reflect that there is no experience of pure presence; every word, signifier, and sign is always determined by a double movement that differentiates them from others and defers them to others' significations. The traditional closed system where a sign

represents something, the signifier-signified relation, is now replaced by what Derrida (1997) calls an arche-writing, where signs refer to other signs *ad infinitum*, and signifiers never reach their ultimate referent.

### ***The Structurality of the Narratives***

We can circle back to some of the main aspects of ideology described by Arendt to better understand how Derrida's critique reflects the unfolding of the narratives behind discourses. At first glance, it would appear that Arendt's analyses of the narratives upholding totalitarianism do not escape the structuralist approach, as such stories are described in terms of a center, History or Nature, from which law is extracted and applied. These two forces would be able to set the narrative in motion and organize all the elements that move within it as they designate a fixed presence. However, from a Derridean perspective, such centers would no longer reflect some substance, entity or ultimate material component but a constant flow of significations and substitutions. Similarly, what Arendt called a dialectical logic can be understood through the movement of freeplay enabled by the supplementarity shaping the center and the relations around it. History or Nature become open shells, tunnels through which meanings pass, and can never be entirely held even if they leave a trace behind them. This perspective also reveals the failure of lying as an intrinsic mechanism of narratives, as lies become irrelevant within a structure where meanings are never attached to a static center.

Addressing ideology through the notion of *différance* can provide a more comprehensive approach to how narratives are deployed. First, embracing this perspective must be read as an explicit attempt to separate ourselves from a metaphysics of presence. This means that what narratives describe are never factual truths or lies. In Foucauldian terms, narratives always reflect specific discursive organizations that allow for other discourses to exist; using Derrida's approach,

narratives display open structures of signification that are not grounded in a fixed, tangible and ultimate object/meaning/signified/referent. Furthermore, we can see the constant changes in the apparent central aspects of narratives because their components are always incomplete as they exist in the realm of difference. However, the constant transformation of narratives must not be confused with an intentional act mediated by will and consciousness. This deployment results from the underlying unfixed nature and origin of language.

One final aspect of narratives arises from the binary logic and dichotomic oppositions that Derrida examines while discussing the relationship between speech and writing. His work shows that both concepts exist in relation to each other under the same field of signification resulting from *différance*. Similarly, we can see how narratives are deployed in relation to their counter-narratives. If we can identify a particular story, it is only because it differentiates itself from another one at the same time as it refers to it as an opposition. A narrative, such as the one that guided totalitarianism, can be fully consolidated only in response to a different story that rejects it and provides a reference from where to locate the play of *différance*. In terms of the narrative's structure, we can think of the center as supplemented by its opposite narrative, from which the freeplay of its components becomes possible. This way, aspects considered part of a specific narrative, such as the connection between different events and groups, and the principles that explain those connections exist in response to their counterpart.

This approach also allows us to emphasize the polyvalent and relational nature of discourses in relation to power. Following Foucault (1978), power can be produced and transmitted through the complex and unstable process in which discourses appear as tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations. Additionally, power is presented as a condition of

production rather than a negative and repressive force, and as a polar and asymmetrically dispersed relation instead of a static object (Frow, 1985).

Finally, we can return to the starting point of this section by pointing out the possibility of identifying the complex dynamics between and within narratives through a deconstructive movement. Embracing a deconstructive approach to narratives implies recognizing them as texts composed of relations, distances and delays presented to us. Deconstruction emerges as an open and unguided attempt to identify those movements as part of a reality that constantly differs from itself and is always evolving into something other than itself, never entirely self-present (Colebrook, 2015).

### **Conclusion: Possible Directions**

This paper aimed to provide a theoretical synthesis in which the concept of ideology has a place in discursive analysis to examine and respond to truth claims in our current times, when such claims are often found in an impasse. This paper, however, has distanced ideology from its characterization as a concealing image of reality reflected through the figures of false consciousness or a camera obscura. Ideology is rather presented as an unfolding narrative, that functions as a discursive mechanism and is conformed by the dynamics of freeplay, *différance*, and supplementarity. Truth is understood as part of ongoing and ever-changing narratives that aim to sustain and reproduce practices and meanings, which exist in relation to other narratives and discourses. In other words, truths, presented as central components of different narratives, are disputed on a discursive field while simultaneously being shaped by those truths contained in counternarratives.

A few conclusive considerations must be made regarding this paper's limitations, scopes and directions. First, it is important to recognize that the approach proposed here, although focused

on exploring a series of theoretical connections, aims to respond to a particular social and political context. Identifying places where Arendt, Foucault and Derrida's work share ground while advancing new directions must be read as an emerging attempt to address the conditions that frame today's discourses and narratives. In this sense, this work is an explicit confrontation to the long history of critiques directed against poststructuralism concerning its presumed lack of contact with reality. Rejecting truth in the forms of totalities, universals, foundations, or metanarratives has been criticized by pragmatists' perspectives as going hand-in-hand with a defence of the political status quo (Eagleton, 2003). Similarly, denying that language has direct referents in the real world has been presented as a naïve and politically disabling position where all arguments fall apart and turn powerless those who are critical of power itself (Thwaites, 2015). Approaches such as Derrida's, which embark upon long, meticulous explications of singular words and the use of wordplay, tend to leave his work open to the charge of abstraction, resembling a painting that, observed too closely, turns into mere streaks and blurs (Eagleton, 2003a).

In contrast to those critiques, this paper argues that the description of diverse ideological and discursive dynamics gains relevance when used to identify, question and disrupt the apparently fixed nature of certain narratives and the relations of truth and power established within and between them. Addressing from this perspective, recent encounters between movements such as Black Lives Matter and its counterpart, White Lives Matter, would allow us to reflect on aspects such as: the unfixed character of race located at the center of both movements, the narrative that each movement tells about itself and the other, the consistency produced between the truth claims that arise from them, and the moving relations of power enabled by and shaping such narratives. It becomes impossible to understand one of these movements without addressing its opposite. Similarly, rather than looking at the changes and decisions made by left and right political groups

only as direct attempts of deceiving to gain power and control, we approach them as a reflection of the necessary consistency that their narratives unfold to sustain and reproduce their discursive practices. Consistency arises in response to opposing narratives, as both shape themselves and their practices by incorporating the emerging novelty of other narratives into their structure.

In essence, this paper aims to be one more argument that adds up to the abandonment of truth as a fixed, buried and lost treasure needing to be recovered. It intends to set the ground for an alternative perspective for examining contemporary social and political events framed by today's digital and polarized interactions. It seeks to reevaluate truth through the lens of consistency as a discursive, ideological, narrative and relational construction from which meaning is built. Finally, it recognizes that opening new paths only becomes accessible by disrupting and deconstructing these persistent constructs.

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<sup>1</sup> Arendt's analysis of Adolf Eichmann's case, a Nazi officer who was charged with overseeing the mass deportation of Jews to concentration camps and killing centers, was central in her development of the concept of "banality of evil." This term aimed to capture how an individual could become banal within a logical system, losing the capacity for thinking.

<sup>2</sup> Although Arendt critiques the constant inconsistencies in the data presented within totalitarian regimes, her approach to the distinction between truth and lies is problematic to her description of ideology. If ideology as a system allows reality to be explained under a law of movement guided by a dialectical logic, which implies that anything can be introduced in its motion, then why does it need to lie for consistency? A deeper examination of this Arendtian distinction is proposed by Derrida (2002) in his lecture *History of the Lie: Prolegomena*.

<sup>3</sup> A whole chapter about Isak Dinesen's life and her role as a storyteller can be found in *Men in Dark Times* (Arendt, 1983).

### SECTION 3: FRAMING THE FEMINIST PROTESTS IN MEXICO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLARIZED DISCURSIVE DYNAMICS AND GENDER POWER RELATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the polarized discursive dynamics surrounding the feminist protests in Mexico on March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of 2020 that responded to a dramatically rising number of femicides in the country. Focusing on Facebook comments to selected news articles related to the protests, the study examines how such exchanges are organized and shaped by two dominant narratives: one aligned with the political project of President López Obrador, “the Fourth Transformation,” and the other, a conservative-inflected counter-narrative challenging the former. Drawing upon a synthesis of concepts from Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, the paper conceptualizes narratives as open structures and discursive mechanisms that help organize, delimit, or anchor meanings in discussions of the protests. By employing an inductive thematic analysis, two central themes emerged, reflecting discursive inconsistencies within and between the opposing narratives, and the reproduction of gender-based power relations. These themes revealed feminist demonstrations as *sites of discursive encounters* where meanings related to such events are contested and reorganized in relation to predominant or hegemonic narratives. Based on this analysis, the paper reflects on polarization as a fluid, discursive, and relational dynamic, where opposing positions constantly adapt and redefine themselves in response to one another. The findings of this work disrupt the seemingly fixed nature of polarized narratives while emphasizing how gender-based power relations are reproduced within these dynamics, ultimately

overshadowing and eclipsing the central issue that initiated the protests: the structural and pervasive violence against women in Mexico.

### **Keywords**

Femicides, feminist protests, narratives, discursive encounters, polarization

### **Introduction: Framing the Feminist Protests**

In March 2020, Mexico's social and political climate was marked by two main events. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, thousands of protesters took to the streets for International Women's Day demonstrations, gathering in central public squares across the country. The following day, March 9<sup>th</sup>, women all over Mexico took part in a nationwide walkout, deliberately refraining from going to work, school, regular activities and even participating using social media. These two actions protested gender-based violence and the increasing number of femicides in Mexico during 2019 and the first months of 2020. According to the National System of Public Safety, 944 femicides were recorded in 2019, an increase of 128% since 2015. By February 2020, 165 new cases had already been added to these statistics (SNSP, 2024). On March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, women of all ages, driven by impunity and injustice, delivered a powerful message to society: "We are getting killed."

The concept of *femicide* was central to the organization of these demonstrations. The concept situated these protest actions as a response to a structural and systemic problem rather than one that could be contextualized only in its individual instances. As Radford and Russell (1992) explain, the adoption of the concept of femicide challenges the gender-neutral term "homicide" while positioning the killing of women as part of a *continuum of sexual violence*. This perspective locates male sexual aggression as a means of exerting control and oppression over women while perpetuating a patriarchal society. Similarly, Ana Carcedo and Montserrat Sagot (2002) argue that the notion of femicide dismantles "the arguments that frame gender-based violence as a personal

or private matter and shows its profoundly social and political character, the result of the structural relations of power, domination and privilege between men and women” (pp. 12-13).

While demonstrations on March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women’s Day, have historically raised awareness of issues such as legal abortion and gender-based violence, the idea of a national women's silent strike, planned for March 9<sup>th</sup> in 2020, was unprecedented in Mexico. Initially proposed by the feminist collective "Las brujas del mar" (The Witches of the Sea), the proposal for this action was shared via social media using the name "¡El 9 nadie se mueve!" (On the 9th, nobody moves!) and the hashtag "#UnDíaSinNosotras" (#ADayWithoutUs). This call to action, first introduced through a poster on Twitter on February 18th, gained momentum following two high-profile femicide cases in Mexico. The murder of 25-year-old Ingrid Escamilla by her partner on February 8th, along with the dissemination of photos of her body on digital platforms, sparked widespread criticism and outcry from various sectors of society. Just three days later, on February 11th, 7-year-old Fátima Cecilia Aldrighett Antón was abducted from her school and murdered by a couple known to her family. These cases, among others, humanized the statistics of femicides, providing faces and stories that fueled the growing protests and amplified calls for justice (Sandin, 2020).

The movement "El 9 nadie se mueve" quickly gained attention across mass and social media, prompting various institutions, organizations, and businesses to issue official statements endorsing the protest, expressing their solidarity with participating women. Many local governments also pledged support for female employees wishing to join the strike within their respective institutions. However, as expressions of support and interest in participation grew to include politically conservative groups presumed to be aligned with parties that stand in opposition to the left-wing federal government, so did suspicions about the intentions of the movement and

speculations that supporters with conservative political agendas might be using this protest action opportunistically. Despite expressing solidarity with feminist groups and women choosing not to work on March 9th, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador rejected revisions to his strategy concerning femicides<sup>1</sup>. He also cautioned people participating in the protests of a potential infiltration of their movement by conservative elements and insinuated that their participation could be aimed at undermining his administration (Muñoz y Alonso Urrutia, 2020). López Obrador and his party Morena (The National Regeneration Movement) have consistently presented their administration as Mexico's Fourth Transformation, casting their political project as a critical historical moment within the dominant public imaginary of Mexican history, a vivid and powerful narrative that has long been structured around three pivotal historical transformations. In this broader narrative context, the President's suggestion that the feminist protests might be cover for an alternative agenda implied that these actions posed a threat not only to his administration but to the nation's rightful trajectory. Public reactions to the proposed strike on March 9th took shape in two central positions: those who backed the protests and criticized the federal government's handling of femicides and its overall governance, and those who perceived the strike movement as a maneuver orchestrated by conservative factions to impede national progress.

The stark divisions in the meanings attributed to the proposed protests further contributed to the perception of a deeply polarized social and political landscape in Mexican society. At the heart of this polarization, two predominant and popularly characterized narratives, still visible today, became notable and ubiquitous: one aligned with the president's administration and its political party, Morena, and the other diametrically opposed to it. While the latter did not have a clear leader, it has often been linked to political parties such as the National Action Party (PAN) and Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), known for their conservative and neoliberal policies,

as well as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which, despite its identification with left-wing political ideology, has forged alliances with the two conservative parties since the creation of Morena. Furthermore, this polarized climate was evident in the digital dynamics on social media platforms, which became spaces for contesting narratives and constructing new imaginaries, where conversations consistently circled back to these two overarching narratives (Signa Lab, 2019). However, the positions posed seemingly contradictory and uncommon scenarios, such as conservative groups supporting feminist-led protests and a left-wing government undermining and rejecting the claims of a group demanding social justice, challenging common understandings of polarization.

This paper examines the polarized discursive dynamics surrounding the feminist protests planned for March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> with a focus on the comments made by users on social media, reflecting the two distinct narratives noted above. It aims to respond to the question: How did the pre-existing, persistent and opposing narratives of the Fourth Transformation and its rejection organize and shape the contestation of meanings of the proposed protest actions on March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> concerning femicides? Building on analyses of user comments, this work also aims to reflect on the concept of polarization while approaching social media from a non-deterministic perspective by presenting these platforms as embedded in the interplay of existing social practices and discourses.

User comments presented complex and contextualized discursive interactions, which at times resulted in seemingly internally contradictory or inconsistent positions related to the two framing political narratives, rather than a clash between two discrete core sets of values and ideals that align and cohere neatly with one or the other. To elaborate upon the complexities of polarization suggested by user comments, this paper frames the feminist demonstrations as *sites*

*of discursive encounters* – issues, events, and processes whose meanings are negotiated in relation to predominant or hegemonic narratives. User comments about the proposed protests concerning the dramatic rise of femicides in Mexico illustrate active and shifting contestation over meanings within the dominant and pre-existing narrative struggle over the legitimacy of the government's administration cast as Mexico's Fourth Transformation and its counter-narrative rejection. These dynamics will be informed by a theoretical framework that draws upon: Hannah Arendt's concept of ideology as open narrative structures; the relocation of ideology as a discursive mechanism in Foucault's work; and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction through the concepts of *freeplay*, *supplementarity*, and *différance*.

Drawing from this theoretical synthesis to attend to user comments, this paper finds that two dominant narratives –the Morena administration led by López Obrador as Mexico's Fourth Transformation and the conservative-inflected counter-narrative rejection– relationally shaped, but did not determine, Facebook user's comments regarding the proposed protests. A notable effect of these dynamics was that the central concern over violence against women and femicide as structural social problems was elided in these sites of discursive encounter. Analyses of the comments have implications for understanding polarization, a phenomenon often represented as a static and bi-polar distance maintained between fixed positions. Despite the tendency for the two polar and hegemonic political narratives to operate as discursive mechanisms that helped to organize, delimit, or anchor meanings in discussions of the protests, there remained both discursive inconsistencies and points of agreement even where positions clashed. This paper proposes a re-spatialized and fluid conception of polarization taking shape in an ever-morphing dynamic that maintains antagonisms—not strictly in the horizontal, dichotomous manner suggested by the prevailing bi-polar image that the concept carries. Instead, it encompasses multiple, shifting nodes

of significance that are disrupted, delimited, amplified, or silenced in relation to broader hegemonic narrative struggles, often overshadowing urgent and immediate concerns, once ostensibly residing at the centre of the communications.

Before presenting the analysis of user comments and findings, the paper will first introduce a discursive and relational approach to polarization, followed by an outline of the theoretical framework and an examination of the narratives surrounding the protests. A brief explanation of the methodological approach will then be provided, and finally, the findings will be discussed, linking key aspects of the data to the theoretical framework and exploring the broader implications of the study.

### **Polarization and Digital Platforms: A Discursive and Relational Approach**

A growing body of work has emerged around the concept of polarization in recent years. This trend can be seen as a response to diverse shifts in the political, social, and digital landscape, which have intensified perceptions of deeply polarized societies. As Grover (2022) argues, strong political divisions in many countries have been identified through recent studies, positioning polarization as a global phenomenon. The discussion has primarily focused on the role social media platforms play in fostering this type of interaction and the negative implications or consequences it could have on different levels. In this context, studies and articles on echo chambers, filter bubbles, and algorithms have gained significant attention by questioning whether their appearance on digital platforms has increased the levels of polarization by creating like-minded communities (Barbera, 2020). One of the shared concerns emerging from this type of research is the impact that polarized societies could have on current political systems, particularly those that rely on democratic mechanisms (Finkel et al., 2020; McCoy et al., 2018; Tornberg, 2022).

The case of Mexican society has exhibited similar patterns of concern around these issues. Political discussions on topics such as federal and local election processes, human migration, and gender-based violence may reflect increasing levels of polarization in the country (Signa Lab, 2019). In a recent article, Moreno (2024) documents the various facets of political polarization in Mexico, arguing that it is not a new phenomenon but rather the result of the evolution and dynamics of the party system and the ideological and party-based identity of the electorate. Analyses have also explored how digital interactions contribute to polarizing different groups, particularly in the current political context. For instance, Suarez Estrada et al. (2022) highlight the role of digital platforms by examining tweets related to feminist protests against the impunity of police brutality, revealing polarization and an increase in digital violence. Similarly, Gomez and Ochoa (2021) and López-Robles (2023) identify a connection between social media and polarization. However, they both observe that factors beyond digital platforms also play a significant role. Furthermore, some studies frame increasing polarized relations as a risk for Mexican society, describing them as mechanisms for the government to silence political opposition and ignore civil society claims (Olvera, 2021) or as obstacles to building dialogue (Signa Lab, 2019). To introduce the approach to polarization adopted in this paper, it will be necessary to address some of the aspects mentioned above, including the discussions around its characterization, its relationship to social media, and its implications.

One of the main challenges when examining polarization arises from the lack of a shared definition among researchers, which affects how it can be measured and how influencing factors can be identified (Barbera, 2020). Much of the literature emphasizes the political significance of polarization, focusing on aspects ranging from extreme partisan division and distancing (Moreno, 2024) to necessary ideological divergences related to political processes (Grover, 2022; McCoy et

al., 2018). Additionally, less commonly used labels have emerged, centring on social, cultural, moral, and affective polarization to describe distinctions between social groups, identities, worldviews, values, and feelings of trust and distrust (Kreiss & McGregor, 2023). However, these classifications have become increasingly difficult to maintain as separate categories. In this context, DellaPosta (2020) proposes a different approach, combining political division with other seemingly non-political aspects. Rather than viewing polarization as a growing distance over time related to a single element, it is presented as an *oil spill* that gradually spreads, influencing attitudes, opinions, and preferences beyond the political realm. Kreiss and McGregor's (2023) definition illustrates this approach by describing polarization as fundamentally relational, reflecting the separation between various dimensions and preferences that encompass ways of life.

The relationship between polarization and social media has been another central topic in the existing literature, yet it remains without consensus. As Barbera (2020) explains, there is a prevailing perspective among some academics and non-academics that links digital technologies to the exacerbation of polarized relations. This argument posits that digital platforms foster the emergence of echo chambers and filter bubbles driven by algorithms, which can amplify extremist ideas, reinforce users' positions, and isolate them from opposing views (Bail et al., 2018; Banks et al., 2022; Garimella & Weber, 2017; Del Vicario et al., 2016; Törnberg & Törnberg, 2022; Törnberg, 2022). Conversely, another line of research challenges these findings by suggesting that social media facilitates cross-cutting interactions and broad exposure to diverse and even opposing ideas or that there is simply no correlation between these platforms and an increase in polarized interactions (Bakshy et al., 2015; Gomez & Ochoa, 2021; Jones-Jang & Chung, 2022; López-Robles, 2023; Nordbrandt, 2021).

An alternative way to address this disjunction can be found by adopting a discourse-centered approach to digital technologies. This perspective views digital spaces as extensions of socioculturally situated existing practices found in non-digital spaces (Akkaya, 2014). The work of Kreiss and McGregor (2023) exemplifies this approach by demonstrating how historical and structural power relations that produce inequalities between different groups are reflected as polarized interactions on social media. Furthermore, aligning with the critical technocultural discourse approach (CTDA), technological platforms are framed as non-neutral artifacts shaped by the sociocultural context of their design and use, influencing how society organizes its discourses and ideologies (Brock, 2018). The relationship between polarization and social media is presented as non-linear; digitally polarized interactions are not only shaped by the surrounding discourses but also contribute to the processes that shape the practices and meanings within those discourses.

This paper adopts a relational and discursive approach to polarization. Rather than viewing polarization as a rigidly maintained distance between political ideologies, values, or cultural beliefs, it will be understood here in ways that describe what can be observed in social media users' comments, as an ongoing discursive dynamic where opposing positions continuously move and redefine themselves in relation to one another. As discussed later in this paper, this dynamic is driven by open narrative structures that are ideological and discursive. Polarization, in this view, reflects complex and contextualized discursive interactions framed within particular narratives, often resulting in seemingly contradictory or inconsistent positions because they are never static. Aligned with the discourse-centered approach, digital platforms not only embody these dynamics but also reflect them, serving as spaces for repositioning and producing discourses. This approach

will be central to understanding the multiplicity and complexity observed on social media in comments about the feminist protests in Mexico.

### **The Construction of Narratives as Ideological and Discursive Mechanisms**

The theoretical framework this research relies on reflects a series of articulations between the work of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to examine central aspects of how narratives are built and performed by addressing the concepts of discourse and ideology and reconsidering their relationship. This approach recognizes that the meanings and practices in these narratives are not inherent to fixed structures but rather emerge from their relational nature. It also provides a strong foundation for analyzing the constant discursive shifts between opposing poles and the moving power relations that result from these dynamics.

This framework unfolds under three main discussions. First, based on Arendt's analyses of ideology within twentieth-century totalitarianism, narratives are presented as open structures that logically unfold and explain historical events across the past, present and future. Next, by addressing Foucault's distinction between discourse and ideology, the Arendtian notion of narratives is explored as a discursive mechanism that justifies and sustains practices, meanings and power relations embedded in discourses. Finally, Derrida's deconstruction, examined through the concepts of *freeplay*, *supplementarity* and *différance*, becomes central to analyzing the inner dynamics of such narratives and the interplay between opposite ones.

### ***The Narrative Character of Ideologies***

The work of Hannah Arendt emerges as a response to the political experiences shaped by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. This became evident in her preference for calling herself a political thinker rather than a philosopher (Sanchez, 2015). In this context, discussing the concept of ideology constituted a central task for her to understand not only totalitarianism but

also other political practices and experiences that could be found beyond such events (Arendt, 1994a). Here, ideology will be examined as an open and unfolding narrative structure that explains how particular acts can be justified and how such positions can be abruptly changed.

In her examinations of ideology, Arendt questions its common depiction as a “body of statements about something that is” (Arendt, 1953, p. 316) and instead describes it as the logical unfolding of an idea in a constantly changing process. This unfolding brings any central idea to the level of history, transforming it into a law that functions as a way of unveiling the secrets of the past, the complexities of the present, and the uncertainties of the future without necessarily aligning with actual experience (Arendt, 1994a). The continuous adaptation of new events to this process is made possible by a dialectical operation that “explain[s] away factual contradictions as stages of one identical, consistent movement” (Arendt, 1953, p. 317). Arendt’s approach is exemplified in her analysis of Nazism and Stalinism, where central ideas such as the superiority of races and the struggle of classes are manifested as unfolding laws driven by external forces like Nature or History, explaining and guiding all human actions.

Following this, the narrative character of ideology results from its ability to weave together every event in human history into a cohesive and unified story. Racism or antisemitism, for instance, become more than mere irresponsible opinions when used to explain the whole course of history (Arendt, 1994); they become narratives. The common notion of ideology, perceived as a system of beliefs and values, can only be fully comprehended when examining these elements within a story imposed upon individuals, which continues to evolve and be recounted repeatedly. Moreover, in her work *Truth and Politics*, Arendt (1968) acknowledges the political significance of narratives, as they generate meanings that prepare individuals for the future. By acknowledging this dimension, one can also perceive the political influence of ideology, reshaping human

experiences into manageable narratives. Finally, Arendt's perspective on ideology provides the principles for understanding the emergence of open and unfolding narrative structures and, potentially, of the storytellers who preach about what should have been known long ago.

### ***The Deployment of Narratives as Discursive Mechanisms***

Michel Foucault's examination of ideology and discourse, found in some of his early work, will be central to situating narratives as part of the production and reinforcement of practices and meanings embedded in discourses. In exploring this intersection, it will be argued that ideology functions as a discursive mechanism, providing consistency to the inherent ruptures and discontinuities of discursive formations. Furthermore, by recovering Arendt's approach in relation to these discussions, ideology, in its narrative form, will play a crucial role in reflecting regimes of truth and power.

The articulations here are primarily based on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* and related texts such as *The Order of Discourse* and *What is an Author?* Such reflections arise from a critique of traditional knowledge production relying on a history of continuities, consciousness, and linearity, and instead propose focusing on a history marked by ruptures, discontinuities, anonymity, and dispersion<sup>2</sup>. The concept of discourse, defined as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1995, p. 49), emerges as a response to this reconfiguration of how objects are produced and organized, as well as the conditions that determine their historical appearance. These objects and practices are delimited by discursive formations that establish regularity, order, and functioning while reflecting a system of dispersion. Within these delimitations, Foucault (1981) identifies specific discursive mechanisms that function as procedures for controlling, selecting, and redistributing discourse content and their relation to other discourses.

*The author's function* is one example of a discursive mechanism that will be key to understanding the connection with ideology. Foucault (1981) describes the author as a principle that groups, organizes and characterizes discourses while acting as the unity and origin of their coherence and meaning. Although the author is not seen as an individual but as a mechanism for distributing and controlling ideas, it continues to be depicted as one in order to function effectively. For Foucault (1998), the author, as an individual and conscious figure, illustrates an ideological production as it represents “the opposite of [its] historical real function” (p. 222). Despite Foucault’s (1980a) reluctance to use the notion of ideology in other places of his work, its relevance within the discursive formations can be observed here as part of the mechanisms that create a sense of order and consistency in what otherwise would be ruptures, anonymity and dispersion. Moreover, reconsidering ideology as part of discursive formations requires redefining its relation to truth. Following Foucault’s (1980a) definition of it as a system of procedures, ideology should not be understood as opposing universal facts, as it is commonly thought, but as concealing how specific truths are formed and function within regimes of truth.

Similarly to the figure of the author, narratives appear as another ideological production and discursive mechanism. By connecting the previous discussions around Arendt and Foucault’s work, narratives can be presented as more than systems of explanation and misrepresentation of truth. The unfolding of a narrative that runs toward the past and future allows for a particular discursive formation to be justified and sustained by creating continuity and linearity through the story being told. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between discourses and narratives: while discourses organize multiple meanings and practices within a specific context, narratives function as open structures that connect and shape multiple discourses that might otherwise be unrelated to form and reinforce broader discursive formations (e.g. a political or a religious

project). Also, in creating a sense of linearity and consistency, narratives conceal the tactical polyvalence of discourses, which characterizes them as a “series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). This particular discursive dynamic allows different and even contradictory discourses to exist as part of the same strategy. Furthermore, narratives can inform about the production of regimes of truth while pointing out the systems of power embedded in them. Power, here, is “employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 98), which manifests through apparatuses of knowledge from which truth emerges. Thus, the Arendtian narrative form of ideology becomes a mechanism to show how discourses are deployed as unified and continuous formations, exerting forms of truth and power.

### ***The Relational Dynamic of Polarized Narratives***

The last discussion of this theoretical framework will use Derrida’s notion of *deconstruction* as a starting point for exploring the inner dynamics and interconnections of narratives. The concept of deconstruction, understood as the possibility of identifying tensions, similarities, necessities, differences, and mutual ground between a specific set of concepts, reflects a central piece in Derrida’s work as a way to challenge traditional ideas of fixed meanings, binary oppositions, and the belief in an immediate link between language and reality (Derrida, 1985). In this context, Derrida’s critique of structures and centers through concepts such as freeplay, supplementarity and *différance* reflect underlying aspects of deconstruction as they expose the non-fixed and unstable nature of language and meanings. By exploring such aspects, it will be argued that meanings and objects carried by narratives do not stem from fixed structures but rather emerge from the relational nature of language itself. This perspective forms the basis for examining

the ongoing discursive shifts between opposing poles and the resulting power relations that follow these dynamics.

In his article *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida (1979) discusses the way structures have been used to analyze the functioning of society while relying on the idea of a fixed center that organizes and limits all the elements around them. These centers would designate a permanent, stable and fundamental ground by referring to aspects such as an essence, transcendentality, consciousness, God, etc., which Derrida identifies as part of a metaphysics of presence. By approaching the work of Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, he observes a disruption of this perspective, redefining the center as a function rather than a fixed point from which endless substitutions and interactions of meanings occur. Derrida proposes the concept of supplementarity to explain the role of the center as a provisional and supplementary element within the realm of language and freeplay in opposition to the realm of presence. In this context, to better describe the movement of freeplay, he uses the word *différance* as the language's mode of existence or the non-simple origin of differences (Derrida, 1973). This notion aims to reflect that there is no experience of pure presence; every word, signifier, and sign is always determined by a double movement that differentiates them from and defers them to other significations. A clear image of how *différance* performs can be found in the binary logic and dichotomic oppositions Derrida (1997) examines while discussing the relationship between speech and writing. As he shows, these seemingly contrary concepts exist in relation to each other under the same field of signification, following the same dynamics and structures resulting from *différance*.

Circling back to the previous discussions, addressing narratives through this approach can provide a more comprehensive perspective on how they are deployed. First, what Arendt refers to

as a dialectical movement can be explained by the dynamics of freeplay enabled by the supplementarity shaping the center and its relations. This perspective also reinforces that narratives do not describe factual truths or lies: while in Foucault's terms, narratives reflect specific discursive organizations that allow for certain formations to exist, using Derrida's concepts, narratives could be interpreted as open structures of signification that are not grounded in fixed meanings, objects or referents. Similarly, recovering the ongoing movement of *différance* makes it possible to observe how narratives are deployed in relation to their counter-narratives. In this sense, a particular story can only be identified as it differentiates from another while referring to it as its opposite. For instance, a narrative like the one of totalitarianism is fully consolidated when in response to a counter-narrative that rejects it, providing a reference point for the play of *différance*. In terms of structure, the center of a narrative can be thought of as supplemented by its opposite narrative, from which the freeplay of its components becomes possible. Thus, aspects such as connections between events, groups and meanings and the principles that explain those connections in a particular narrative exist in response to its counterpart. Lastly, this perspective also highlights the relational nature of power, which can also be described as an unfixed polar and asymmetrical dispersed relation (Frow, 1985) that shapes what one says, knows, and does (Foucault, 1982).

The theoretical framework proposed here, drawing on key aspects of Arendt, Foucault, and Derrida's work, describes narratives as: *i)* open, unfolding structures that present unconnected and dispersed events as a unity; *ii)* ideological and discursive mechanisms that link various discourses to sustain broader discursive formations while highlighting the production of regimes of truth and systems of power involved; and *iii)* relational, unfixed structures of signification that constantly reposition themselves in response to opposing narratives.

## **The Dissection of a Narrative Encounter: Liberals vs Conservatives**

To examine the polarized discursive dynamics surrounding the feminist protests, it is necessary to characterize the narratives driving these interactions. By analyzing some of the political principles proposed by President López Obrador and his party, Morena, along with their responses to the protests, key aspects of both the government's narrative and its counter-narrative can be identified. These principles are articulated in press conferences and official documents, where the president often plays the role of a storyteller, shaping and connecting the events and components that form these narratives.

An initial characteristic of the government's narrative is its portrayal as a political project situated within a historical and political struggle between liberals and conservatives in Mexico. This narrative is presented as aligning with liberal ideals, intending to undermine the legitimacy of the policies of previous administrations, which are depicted as upholding conservative values. According to Santos Victoria (2022), the government's narrative responds to two forms of conservatism in Mexico: aristocratic conservatism<sup>3</sup>, rooted in feudal privileges and absolutist state traditions; and situational conservatism, characterized by resistance to fundamental change. This way, conservatives are presented within this narrative as those who defend a political model where only a few are privileged and those who react in ongoing opposition to policies and social developments that are perceived to threaten traditions and social structures they value. In contrast, the liberalism proposed by the government is defined by the defence of individual freedom and fundamental rights and a rejection of absolute state power. It is also described as a transformative political movement that critiques existing institutions and advocates for significant transformation in Mexico's social and political life. In this context, Rodríguez de la Vega (2020) identifies three central claims in the government's narrative that intend to distinguish it from previous conservative

administrations: purifying the public sphere through anti-corruption efforts, advancing a redistributive political agenda to counter neoliberal policies, and embracing austerity as both a governmental practice and a symbol of solidarity with the people.

The government's narrative embraces this historical process by framing its political program as Mexico's Fourth Transformation. This term symbolizes the continuation of pivotal moments in Mexican history: 1) the independence from Spain in 1810, 2) the liberal Reform under President Benito Juárez in the mid-1850s, and 3) the 1910 revolution that led to the 1917 Constitution (Otero, 2018). In this sense, it can be observed how López Obrador frequently references historical figures like Juárez in his press conferences, particularly emphasizing his liberal ideals and opposition to conservatism. For example, in February 2020, Juárez was mentioned 14 times with quotes such as "Nothing by force, everything by reason and law" (López Obrador, February 17, 2020), underscoring López Obrador's effort to associate his administration with Juárez's legacy.

Additionally, the president consistently aligns his political movement with a left-wing ideology, which he defines as standing with the dispossessed and the poor, and advocating for justice, honesty, and democracy (López Obrador, August 17, 2023). In this context, his political project aims to represent a historical shift that, while rooted in liberal values, seeks to steer the country away from a "rightist, neoliberal course towards a more progressive direction grounded in societal change" (Villanueva & Villanueva, 2020, p.1). Moreover, the constant comparisons made by President Obrador through his speeches reflect a clear encounter between two perspectives, reinforcing central aspects of the government's narrative. While his project characterizes conservative and neoliberal governments as dishonest, inefficient, and oppressive, he depicts his movement as fair, caring, and liberating (López Obrador, February 05, 2020). The terms

neoliberals and conservatives are often used as synonyms by Obrador and interchanged with names like “the Mafia of Power,” “the upper class,” or “white collar thieves,” emphasizing and strengthening these distinctions.

By following these principles, the government’s narrative can be seen as an open and evolving structure. Drawing from Arendt’s ideas on ideology, the central force driving this narrative is the historical conflict between two opposing groups: oppressors (neoliberals, conservatives, right-wing parties) and liberators (liberals, progressives, left-wing parties). Mexican history is framed as a continuous clash between these forces, with the president’s project embodying this dynamic. Within this narrative, the encounter between such groups reflects not only economic inequalities rooted in Mexican society but also disparities in moral attributes that determine the roles of those who are part of Mexican history. Documents like the “Ethical Guide for Mexico’s Transformation” (2020) and the re-edited “Moral Handbook” (2018) published by López Obrador’s administration, for example, articulate the moral values expected from citizens under this political vision. In this context, it can also be observed how this narrative functions as a discursive mechanism that unifies various historical, economic, and moral discourses, creating consistency and reinforcing a broader discursive formation, the Fourth Transformation political project.

Another key aspect of the government’s narrative is its relational dynamic with conservatives, who are framed as a group with distinct political, economic, and moral principles. This relation allows the government to constantly present itself in opposition to conservatism in whatever form it could have. From this dynamic, it is possible to observe the emergence of a counter-narrative that is framed as conservative by the government’s narrative, and that has evolved into a consolidated political force that includes various groups, such as political parties

aligned with conservative ideals. Furthermore, similarly to the government's narrative, this counter-narrative is continuously reshaped by positioning itself against its counterpart.

The consolidation of the dynamic between the government's narrative and its counter-narrative becomes clear in President López Obrador's responses to feminist protests. In the first weeks of February, after the demonstrations had been announced, the president expressed support for combating violence against women and emphasized respect for the feminist movement (López Obrador, February 14, 2020). A few days later, as more information had spread, this position was reinforced, but this time by drawing comparisons to his own past protests against previous administrations before becoming president and advising against violence (López Obrador, February 18, 2020). However, on the days preceding the protests, the president introduced concerns about conservative groups infiltrating the movement, suggesting that media attention might be linked to these groups and, ultimately, questioning the motives behind the protests (López Obrador, March 09, 2020).

These responses illustrate the relational dynamics between the government's narrative and counter-narrative. Initially, President López Obrador framed the feminist protests as aligned with his political movement, situating them within the broader group of liberators concerned with addressing social problems in Mexico, even though they were demanding from the government more measures to stop femicides. However, as the protests attracted more attention from various groups, including those depicted as conservative, his stance shifted. The feminist protests were then relocated as part of the opposition, aiming to undermine his administration. This shift highlighted how such narratives shape themselves to maintain distinctions between opposing forces.

Recognizing this political landscape, the following analysis will examine how these narratives organize and shape the positions and discourses surrounding feminist protests in the digital public sphere, highlighting ongoing shifts, inconsistencies, and implications. Two central positions will be considered: the government's narrative, which, despite adopting a liberal and left-wing stance, opposes the protests by portraying them as actions driven by conservative forces; and the counter-narrative, which, while framed as conservative, supports the protests as a reaction to the government's stance.

### **Methodological Approach**

The analyses presented in this paper were conducted using an inductive thematic analysis. This method allowed the examination of user comments on Facebook posts about the feminist protests from two major news outlets: *Aristegui Noticias* and *El Universal Online*. By employing this approach, patterns in the data were identified under particular codes, categories and central themes that reflected the discursive dynamics of the protests.

A key criterion guiding the methodological decisions of this research was identifying digital spaces with high interaction levels where polarized discursive dynamics could be observed. Consequently, Facebook was chosen as the primary platform for data collection, based on a report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Newman, et al., 2020) that identified it as the most used platform in Mexico for accessing news between 2017 and 2020. Additionally, the same report highlighted *Aristegui Noticias* and *El Universal Online* as among the most popular and trusted news outlets in Mexico.

The news articles used for collecting comments were selected based on three criteria: 1) They were published in February and March of 2020; 2) their headlines explicitly referenced the protests using the hashtags *#ADayWithoutUs* or *#March9th*; 3) they were found on the Facebook

pages of the two previously mentioned news outlets. Based on these criteria, 80 news articles were initially gathered. This number was then narrowed down to the 12 most shared articles, consisting of 3 articles for each hashtag from each news outlet.

The comments were selected from the comments sections of these articles by filtering for "Most relevant" and expanding the section to capture around the first 50 comments, excluding the sub-comments. According to the Facebook Help Center, the "Most relevant" option ranks comments to prioritize high-quality content, making it more likely to see at the top comments from your Facebook friends, verified profiles and Pages, and those with the most likes and replies. While this filter may change some of the comments users see based on their friends' engagement, it ensures that the remaining comments shown reflect higher levels of user interaction. Based on this, the main data used for this paper consisted of approximately 600 Facebook comments<sup>4</sup>.

The data analysis was conducted using the NVivo 14 software to identify, classify, and group the comments by codes, categories and themes that would serve as the main source for the following examination and discussion. Approaching the comments through an inductive thematic analysis method means that the classification resulted from multiple patterns identified in the data (Cernasev & Axon, 2023; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), this process involves several steps, including familiarizing oneself with the data, initial coding, creating themes, validating, defining and naming such themes, and interpreting and reporting. However, this process is cyclical rather than linear, requiring the researcher to continually revisit the data, regroup, and reinterpret codes and themes (Saldaña, 2009).

Following this method, an initial list of 37 codes was created, reflecting common aspects or topics. The next phase of the analysis involved regrouping these initial codes based on specific positionings related to the protests, resulting in three main categories: support for the protests,

opposition to the protests, and user reactions to political figures who made statements about the protests. Each category was further divided into more detailed subcategories to capture the diversity of comments. Finally, through a continuous process of reassessment, reorganization, and reinterpretation, two central themes emerged, highlighting key aspects of the data: 1) *Discursive inconsistencies within/between narrative and counter-narrative*, and 2) *Discursive reproduction of gender-based power relations*.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The analysis of the Facebook comments revealed two key themes, each highlighting essential aspects of the complex discursive dynamics shaping the polarized interactions around the protests: first, discursive dynamics that expose inconsistencies within and between narratives, and second, discursive dynamics that reproduce and reinforce gender-based power relations, perpetuating violence against women. To better understand these aspects and their implications, both themes were explored using specific cases as examples, focusing on comments centred around particular topics. As is typical of social media exchanges, these comments were written in colloquial language. Additionally, all interactions occurred in Spanish, meaning some original expressions and writing styles could not be captured in the translation.

#### ***Discursive Inconsistencies within/between Narrative and Counter-narrative***

One of the two types of discursive dynamics identified revealed inconsistencies or contradictions within and between the positionings in the government's narrative and its counter-narrative. These inconsistencies arise when certain stances or values do not align with those expected to be upheld by either side based on their previous explicit references or historical connections. Two cases found in the analyzed material will be used to examine these apparent discursive irregularities and variations: the first case will focus on how some comments frame

violence in the protests, while the second will center on how comments address abortion in relation to the notion of femicide. It is important to note that, although these were not the only cases and comments that reflect such characteristics, they are illustrative of such discursive dynamics.

**Case #1. Common places, opposite positions: violence in the protests.** A recurring topic observed in numerous comments across the news articles, particularly regarding the framing of the feminist protests, was the critique of actual and possible violent acts happening during the demonstrations. These acts were described as the destruction and damage of historical monuments, public buildings, and private businesses. Some comments also mentioned the impact these actions could have on city workers responsible for cleaning and repairing the damage made by protesters the following day. It is important to note that most of the comments discussed here were made either on the day of the demonstrations or in the days following, often referring to actions that had already occurred, such as the painting of public spaces. However, in some comments, it is unclear whether they refer to actual events or are purely speculative. The prevalence and similarity of these critiques might give the impression of a homogenous block of comments that, to some degree, oppose the protests. However, upon closer examination, it was observed that what seemed like a unified opinion actually reflected two distinct positionings: 1) viewing violence as an inherent component of the protests and 2) seeing violence as imposed by external actors.

In the first position, violence is portrayed as a central characteristic of the protests led by feminist groups, with the figure of "masked individuals" frequently highlighted as the primary culprits of the destruction. However, no distinction is made between these "masked individuals" and other participants in the protests. Furthermore, these comments focus their concerns and critiques on the potential material damage resulting from the actions without addressing the protesters' claims about the increasing number of femicides.

“They should charge all the damages to the promoters of this movement in the March 8th protest.”<sup>5</sup>

“Society also wants justice. Let them arrest those who vandalized historical monuments and public buildings. We all want justice.”<sup>6</sup>

“The violence from that group of masked individuals, with that language, has nothing to do with femicide.”<sup>7</sup>

“A march with a destructive attitude and with masked men and women reflects political undertones and cowardice to openly confront any problem, no matter how serious it is in our society.”<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, some comments directly reflect the government's narrative, which views the protests and the feminist groups leading them as aligned with conservative factions aiming to undermine the president's authority and his political transformation agenda. This connection is evident in comments that openly express support for the president, show concern for an attack against the government or use language consistent with their narrative:

“#Don'tLetThemUseYou Remember, we are experiencing an attempted Soft Coup against the current government of Mexico. #ADayWithAllOfUs [is] even more productive... Just wear a #WhiteCloth that day, our fight for Peace against violence must be manifested without violence #AMLOYouAreNotAlone...”<sup>9</sup>

“A day without violence is what we need. Educating within the family. How many women demand respect and are destroying this nation. How sad!!!”<sup>10</sup>

“No, thanks. I love Mexico, I'm not interested in destroying it, but in building it.”<sup>11</sup>

The second position recognized in the comments presents a stark contrast. Although violent acts in the protests are not denied, they are framed as the result of groups outside the movement that have infiltrated with the purpose of disrupting the demonstrations and undermining their claims and goals:

“In favor of the march and the strike, against violence and infiltrators!!!”<sup>12</sup>

“They are encounter groups. The victims' families do not cover their faces. Let us not lose sight of the objective by arguing; that is the intention of the vandalizing groups.”<sup>13</sup>

Similar to the first position, comments here also align with a specific stance on the government. However, in this case, the government is portrayed as mainly responsible for funding and infiltrating these groups to undermine and obscure the central aims of the protests. While some comments mention paid groups without explicitly referencing the government, they can be

interpreted in the context of those that directly blame the president and his administration for the violent acts:

“(…) the president doesn't care about women, he's the one who plants [infiltrates] the anarchist masked women.”<sup>14</sup>

“There are women there whom the government itself sends to generate all this chaos, they even have their codes to identify each other, it's known that they've always done this for many years.”<sup>15</sup>

“They are paid groups to undermine the objective [of the protests] and thus continue doing nothing and ignoring the deaths and disappearances of so many.”<sup>16</sup>

Based on this analysis, it can be observed how, although both positions criticize the use of violence during the protests, they do so as a resource to reinforce opposite perspectives. On the one hand, violence is assumed to be undertaken by the groups organizing the protests, which strengthens a position that rejects the demonstrations and deems them as a threat to the Fourth Transformation project. On the other hand, violence is perceived as orchestrated by the government to silence protesters and dismiss their claims, aligning with the counter-narrative that challenges the administration's legitimating image.

Examining this from a discursive and relational approach, the meanings attributed through the comments to those actions labelled as violent can be interpreted as dependent on the specific set of relations that frame them. In other words, the overall polarized discursive dynamics shape how these actions are understood and played. The focus of the discussion shifts away from violence itself, as both positions implicitly agree in their opposition to such acts. Instead, as the focus shifts towards the narratives, positions function to reinforce the opposition between them.

**Case #2. The reversal of narrative values and positions: equating abortion to femicide.**

Another case reflecting the discursive dynamics surrounding the feminist protests involves Facebook comments reacting to a statement featured in one of the article headlines: "The first femicide occurs when a girl is not allowed to be born due to abortion." This statement was made

by Senator Lilly Téllez, who, at that time, was a member of Morena. Despite her affiliation with this political group, Senator Téllez attracted significant attention for her support of controversial conservative positions on certain topics. Her ongoing conflicts with other Morena members eventually led to her departure from the party a month after the protests and to become an independent Senator. Two years later, she joined the conservative political party PAN.

Analyzing the comments made under this article revealed two central stances on Téllez's statement: one supportive and one disapproving. In the supportive position, abortion is explicitly equated with femicide or discussed in relation to it. This alignment allows for a particular framing and criticism of the protests, as they are organized by feminist groups perceived in these comments as pro-abortion. Consequently, these comments critiqued the demonstrators' aims as hypocritical, contradictory, or inconsistent in their claims while applauding the senator's position. Additionally, while some of these comments acknowledge the existence and scale of violence against women, they tend to remove any gender-based perspective and focus solely on a generalized critique of violence and a "defence of all lives", which in some cases includes religious tones. For example:

“What a contradiction! Let's defend all women, especially the most innocent ones! All their lives!!! Thank you, Lilly, for raising your voice for those who don't have one!”

“Congratulations, Lily... It's total hypocrisy and inconsistency to fight against #femicides while promoting femicide from the mother's womb at the same time... abortion=murder... (...) Let's not only fight against "femicides" but against cruel murders in Mexico in general, regardless of gender...”

“Logically, this is in the case that a girl could have been conceived. But regardless you agree or not, abortion is murder. And because of that, many calamities will come. If human justice fails, God's justice will not fail.”

In contrast, the comments disapproving of the Senator's position highlight Téllez's lack of understanding of the concept of femicide and argue that portraying abortion as femicide is impossible since a person with a gender has not yet been formed. Some comments also criticize senators and representatives for their lack of education on these issues and for allowing biases to influence their work:

“Lily Téllez urgently needs to educate herself and understand what femicide is and how insensitive she looks comparing it to abortion. Besides, as a senator, she has the obligation to legislate for the entire country, not just for herself.”

“Actually, it doesn't classify as femicide because within the first 12 weeks we don't know if it's a boy or a girl. Also, it's not a person, so it's not homicide either. Oh well.”

“No. How can we combat femicide when not even senators/deputies know what it is? Femicide is defined as such when a woman is deprived of life simply because she is a woman. In the case of abortion, this is not the case. It is carried out for other reasons. So let's not confuse things.”

“The first requirement to be a public servant is "to have no prejudices"; you must legislate for all of society and not for a sector, you must set aside your beliefs so that you can do a good job.”<sup>17</sup>

Both the supportive and disapproving critiques of the Senator's statement can be interpreted as captured by the positions of the government's narrative and its counter-narrative and, in that way, implicitly reinforcing the antagonism between them. While the comments supporting Téllez might initially appear to reflect conservative values, in this context, they can also be viewed as a way of reproducing Morena's stance by sharing their opposition and critique of the feminist protests and undermining their claims for being considered inconsistent. Conversely, the comments rejecting the Senator's remarks emphasize the importance of accurately defining femicide and the potential consequences of failing to do so, which, in this scenario, could also be taken as an alignment and support for the feminist protests and their claims. Furthermore, it is important to consider the elements absent from the comments when examining the reproduction of these positions. For instance, despite the conservative values clearly displayed in the first type of comments, it is notable that none of them criticize the federal government, which openly holds a left-wing and liberal ideology. Similarly, although some ideas in the second type of comments could be associated with positions historically defended by left-wing groups, there is no direct support expressed in the comments for the federal government.

The two cases presented aim to illustrate the diverse and complex formations produced under a polarized discursive dynamic, as well as its relational nature. Such complexities can often

be perceived as inconsistencies or contradictions in terms of the positions expected to be sustained by certain narratives and discourses, based on their self-depiction or historical association to certain ideas. In the first case, for example, the polarized exchanges do not center on a disagreement about a particular action or value; both positions view violence as wrong and undesirable. The polarized dynamic arises from how the same critique of violence is framed to reinforce each side's broader positioning on this and other events. Similarly, the second case shows that stances on specific topics can deviate significantly from expectations when caught within the shaping forces of narrative tensions. Thus, the critique of abortion and feminist groups, typically forwarded from a conservative perspective, can be upheld by groups supporting a left-wing government insofar as the subject is relationally shaped within the oppositional tensions between its narrative vision and counter-narrative that seeks to undermine it.

### ***Discursive Reproduction of Gender-Based Power Relations***

The second type of discursive dynamic identified in the comments analyzed pertains to the reproduction of specific gender-based power relations that sustain and justify forms of oppression and violence against women. Despite the constant shifting and transforming discursive dynamics around discussions related to the protests, as noted in the previous theme and cases, the reproduction of these power relations persists, irrespective of the narrative or counter-narrative positions. Two cases illustrate this: first, comments focused on family and education as the underlying problems and solutions for femicides; and second, comments criticizing the president's wife, Beatriz Gutiérrez Müller, for her lack of support for the protests.

**Case #1. The role of family and education in the fight against femicides.** A frequent type of comment recognized in the data collected frames femicides as an individual rather than a social problem by suggesting that they are the result of a loss of values and respect connected to

poor parenting and education of kids in Mexico. By identifying this as the root problem, these comments argue that protests are irrelevant to finding solutions to the increasing number of femicides. Instead, they emphasize the need for more responsible parenting and better education as the only way to fix the problem. In the context provided in user comments, the critique of "education" refers to the socialization of children within the home, rather than the official curriculum. Moreover, by emphasizing a traditional family model, some of these comments portray women as primarily responsible for educating and raising their children, and they are blamed if this is not done properly. See for example:

“A strike won't solve the profound social decay, the lack of values, love, and respect for others. This is a sign that we are failing as parents and as a society. If we only dedicated attention and time to our children instead of giving them a cell phone or a tablet to keep them quiet, this would be a different Mexico.”<sup>18</sup>

“(…) A national strike won't fix anything; education, good values, and respect in the family are where society should start.”<sup>19</sup>

“Will a national strike solve the situation? Are the education and care that should have been generated from home and were not given in many cases solved by going on strike? (…) Valuable women educate children who respect others.”<sup>20</sup>

“What if, as women, we take care of raising children with values from a very young age, reprimand them when they are abusive, steal things, do not respect others, (…). There are many things that, as mothers, we can do to raise children with a healthy future for society. (…) If you are a mother, educate with values.”<sup>21</sup>

In this context, comments can also be interpreted as reinforcing the government's opposition to the protests. This is evident not only in the constant critique and disapproval of the demonstrations but also in the way responsibility for femicides is shifted away from the government or culture and placed on families in general, and women in particular. While some comments only implicitly absolve the government from responsibility to act to end femicide and place the blame and responsibility on families, others are explicit in this assertion:

“With [former president] Peña, they [people] didn't even talk about it, and now it's all AMLO's fault. It's not the government's fault; it's the parents who don't educate their children in values and emotions because there are crazy mothers and fathers who don't contribute anything to educating their children. The slaughter isn't the government's fault; it's the lack of love, values, and other issues.”<sup>22</sup>

“The solution is not that; the solution lies solely with us. The government is not to blame and cannot resolve it. The solution is to give and teach values to our children by example, with those around us, fostering values such as respect, tolerance, not discriminating, not criticizing, cooperation between men and women, not allowing machismo or feminism, but simply respecting one another.”<sup>23</sup>

Examination of these comments reveals the reinforcement of specific types of gender-based power relations. First, these comments frame femicides in a way that the existence of structural power dynamics, domination, and privilege between men and women is denied, which, as Carcedo (2000) explains, these elements are central to understanding this phenomenon. Additionally, by relying on a traditional model of family and education, women are portrayed as the primary culprits for the perpetuation of femicides. Due to the role they are expected to play in their families, women are cast as responsible for maintaining the foundation of society. From this perspective, if society deteriorates, women are blamed for failing to provide proper education and instilling good values in new generations. Finally, it is important to note that these comments emerge from a perspective that can be interpreted as supportive of the government’s narrative. Although the government presents itself as aligned with a social and structural critique of Mexico’s problems, these comments perpetuate this individualistic and non-structural approach to femicides, along with the discursive relations of oppression and violence that stem from it.

**Case #2. The figure of the oppressed woman: Beatriz Müller.** Another example of the discursive reproduction of gender-based power relations can be seen in the comments surrounding the stance of the president's wife, Beatriz Müller, regarding the demonstrations. In the weeks leading up to the feminist protests, Müller initially shared a poster on social media endorsing the March 9th strike with the hashtag #ADayWithoutWomen. However, hours later, she deleted the post and replaced it with a new image, urging people not to participate and voicing her support for the president. This shift in her position prompted numerous critiques, with comments questioning Müller’s academic qualifications and achievements, implying that she lacked the capacity for

independent thought or decision-making, and affirming that she only acted according to her husband, López Obrador's directives:

“What good is her doctorate and being as educated as she parades, if she doesn't have the right to express a stance and maintain it, even in the face of dissenting from her old husband's opinion? This woman does not represent the opinion of Mexican women, especially of those with academic preparation, as she clearly doesn't meet the expectations.”

“This lady has become her husband's puppet, lacking her own identity and apparently even her own ideas and freedom of action.”

“That's the 4T [Fourth transformation], what did you expect from someone who is in the shadow of her husband?”

Moreover, some of these comments frame Müller's change of position as an act of oppression by the president, focusing the criticism on him rather than her. In this context, Müller is portrayed as a victim of gender-based violence and, in some instances, as an example of the very violence the protest aims to confront:

“She is the first one suffering from violence. Ma'am, they did not let you occupy the position of "first lady" because the old man wants to be the only protagonist in his story.”

“She may be a victim of domestic violence... Did her husband scold her for thinking without asking permission?”

“Unfortunately, what this shows us is that you also suffer from gender-based violence since you were forced to change your version...and support your husband.”

“Well, yes, she already got her "spank.” She's not a figure of power, her husband annulled her. There is no first lady. With what authority does she ask for something?”<sup>24</sup>

By examining these comments, it becomes clear that the exchanges surrounding this case reflect discourses that reproduce gender-based power relations. Whether the critique is directed at the president or Beatriz Müller, the result is the same: she is stripped of agency, identity, and freedom, and reduced to an extension or mere reflection of López Obrador. It can also be noted that, although these comments do not explicitly express support for the protests, they can be interpreted as aligned with the counter-narrative position that questions the legitimacy of the vision the administration puts forth. This alignment is evident as the critique is not only repeatedly redirected at the president through comments about Müller, but also emerges as a reaction to her

lack of support for the strike. As in the previous case, the discursive reproduction of these power relations appears regardless of the narrative position the comments appear to reinforce. For instance, even though the comments shown here suggest implicit support for the protests against the increasing cases of gender-based violence, they are not exempt from perpetuating the very type of violence being criticized.

Even within the shifting and evolving discursive dynamics surrounding the protests, the reproduction of specific power and gender relations remains evident. These patterns are present in comments aligning with the government's narrative and the counter-narrative. Although these forms of power and violence take different shapes across various contexts, they consistently reinforce a particular understanding of gender-based relationships that legitimizes a particular role and function for women in society.

## **Discussion**

The examination of Facebook comments regarding the feminist protests in Mexico in the spring of 2020 reveals the complexity of polarized discursive dynamics, shaped by two dominant political narratives: that of the current liberal-left administration's vision of the Fourth Transformation and a conservative counter-narrative that seeks to challenge the former. These narratives shape how specific subjects concerning these demonstrations are given meaning and discussed so that they remain captured within the tensions of such hegemonic narratives that endure through constant relational redefinitions. For instance, in the case related to violence in the protests, two distinct types of comments emerged: one portrayed the violence as inherent to the protests, while the other viewed it as imposed by external actors. Though both critiques condemned the violence, each was framed in a way that aligned with the broader opposing narratives of the government and its critics. The first type of comment argued that the violence resulted from the

protesters as part of a politically motivated movement against the government. Conversely, the second type claimed that the violence was perpetrated by government-paid infiltrators to discredit the protests.

The analysis also showed that some comments embraced positions that could seem misaligned with the core principles or assumptions behind the narratives they appeared to be reinforcing. This is evident in the comments where abortion is used to criticize both the demonstrations and the feminist groups organizing them. Although these comments do not explicitly endorse any particular narrative, they align with specific positions based on their function in this context. For example, comments supporting the senator's anti-abortion stance may reflect conservative values but, in opposing the protests, they inadvertently reinforce the government's position, despite its recurrent critique of conservatism.

These apparent inconsistencies can be understood to be a result of polarized relational dynamics, where adjustments to the framing of specific topics maintain broader hegemonic oppositions. The feminist protests in Mexico in 2020 can be seen as sites of discursive encounters where, through the appearance of dynamics and exchanges, such as the ones produced on the comments analyzed from social media, meanings around these events are negotiated in relation to the dominant or hegemonic narratives involved. The cases discussed under the theme of "Discursive inconsistencies within/between narratives" exemplify these discursive encounters, where meanings, values, or ideas related to violence and abortion were reappropriated to either support the government's critique and disapproval of the protests or reinforce the counter-narrative in opposition to the government's stance. Such particular dynamics also reflect the tactical polyvalence of discourses, where diverse and contradictory discourses can be connected within a particular context as they operate as tactical elements moving in a field of force relations (Foucault,

1978). Moreover, this polyvalence suggests that tensions and contradictions do not threaten the hegemonic narratives, since they can only endure in relation to each other. The two hegemonic narratives are interdependent.

The concept of sites of discursive encounters becomes central within the deployment of narratives as open, unfolding structures and mechanisms that continually connect dispersed discourses to sustain a broader discursive formation. These encounters enable the reappropriation and shifting of such discourses, creating a sense of unity within narratives and turning seemingly inconsistent ideas into a coherent image, much like Arendt's (1953) dialectical operation. Moreover, these encounters, resulting from the interaction between narratives, contribute to maintaining broader discursive formations and the regimes of truth and relations of power that emerge from them (Foucault, 1980a, 1980b). In this context, the government's narrative can be seen as a broader discursive formation that connects multiple discourses —such as those related to violence, abortion, and femicide— and reorganizes them through the emergence of sites of discursive encounters to sustain its consistency. Finally, the relational and unfixed traits of narratives, as informed by Derrida's (1973; 1979) concepts of freeplay, supplementarity, and *différance*, become evident in these encounters, where the contestation of meanings results from the interplay between narratives and can ultimately eclipse discussion of an urgent social problem, such as, in this case, femicide.

The findings in this paper challenge the typical portrayal of polarization in previous studies as a clear division between stark positions, such as those in political ideologies, cultural beliefs, or group identities (Barbera, 2020; Kreiss & McGregor, 2023). Instead, polarization is revealed as a fluid, discursive, and relational dynamic, where opposing positions continuously adapt and redefine themselves in response to one another. For example, a left-wing government might oppose

feminist protests, while conservative political groups support the same demonstrations. This opposition arises not from fixed principles or values but from shifting relationships that resist crystallization. By emphasizing the multifaceted character of these interactions, this research showed the need for an approach to polarization that does not rely on binary divisions for its identification but recognizes the multiple and non-static relations involved in positions that are depicted as antagonistic. This perspective aligns with a key principle of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) by rejecting an approach based on relations rooted in static, binary social structures, and prioritizing multifaceted, complex and contextualized discursive interactions (Baxter, 2008).

It is also important to clarify the scope and limitations of the approach to digital platforms used in this study. Following Akkaya's (2014) discourse-centered perspective, the results of these analyses are understood as extensions of existing discursive practices that extend beyond digital spaces. Like Kreiss and McGregor (2023), this study does not view digital interactions on social media as the root cause of the polarized dynamics surrounding the feminist protests. Polarization, as a relational and discursive phenomenon, is not generated or imposed by a single space but reflects the multiple conversations occurring across different spaces. In this context, the Facebook comments analyzed should be seen as taking place within non-neutral technological platforms, shaped by their sociocultural environment while simultaneously influencing discursive dynamics beyond these platforms (Brock, 2018). Therefore, future research could build on this work by examining these platforms' technical aspects and mechanisms in more detail to better understand how they interact with polarized dynamics, acknowledging that such interactions cannot be reduced to a simple, linear process.

Another key aspect revealed in the data analysis is the reproduction of power relations based on gender stereotypes and roles within the discursive dynamics surrounding the protests, regardless of the narrative positions. This is evident in the cases examined under the second theme, where comments supporting the government's narrative downplay the structural and gender-based nature of femicides and instead blame women for failing to educate their children to prevent crime and violence. Similarly, comments aligned with the counter-narrative frame Müller's decisions and actions as mere submission to her husband, President López Obrador, thereby stripping her of agency and individuality. These examples illustrate how narratives, by sustaining specific discursive formations, reinforce systems of power that shape regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980b). Recognizing these discursive dynamics highlights how these systems and regimes extend beyond the boundaries of specific communications.

Moreover, the reproduction of these gender-based power relations becomes even more significant when viewed through the lens of one of FPDA's principles, that "social realities are always discursively produced" and "speakers do not exist outside discourse" (Baxter, 2008, p. 248). This principle does not negate the existence of material reality but emphasizes that aspects of it are always directly related to existing discourses. This way, the discursive reproduction of such power relations leads to practices that range from the absence of proper policies or actions addressing gender-based violence on an institutional level to explicit acts of aggression embedded in everyday relationships, with femicides as their ultimate outcome. In this context, it is noticeable that, although the comments collected on Facebook emerged in response to the feminist protests, in most of the conversations, the main concern was no longer the increasing femicides but the support or rejection of broader hegemonic narratives. In other words, femicides are continuously being ignored or denied as a result of such discursive practices. These comments underscore the

impact of these dynamics on both discursive and material levels, recognizing that these categories are not separate or isolated.

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<sup>1</sup> The day after the silent strike on March 9<sup>th</sup>, during a press conference, President López Obrador was asked about any specific changes in his administration's strategy to fight femicides in Mexico, to which he responded: "No, on the contrary, we are going to reinforce the same strategy of addressing the root causes of violence: (...) supporting young people, supporting rural areas, reducing unemployment, ensuring good wages, preventing family disintegration, and strengthening [moral] values" (López Obrador, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Although this critique can also be found in other pieces of his work, such as in the description of genealogy (Foucault, 1977), focusing on Foucault's early work aims to emphasize how questioning continuities is fundamental for developing the concept of discourses and his subsequent writings.

<sup>3</sup> Aristocratic conservatism can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican political landscape, where conservative groups intended to install a monarchical system (Santos, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> A sample of the news articles and comments collected from Facebook has been included in the section Appendix: Sample of Collected Data.

<sup>5</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Paro Nacional #UnDíaSinNosotras, decenas de miles marchan en el #8M y exigen 'ni una más'*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Llaman a paro nacional contra el femicidio para el 9 de marzo*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Paro Nacional #UnDíaSinNosotras, decenas de miles marchan en el #8M y exigen 'ni una más'*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Llaman a paro nacional contra el femicidio para el 9 de marzo*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Me sumo al paro de mujeres; no cuenten conmigo: #Aristegui*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Paro Nacional #UnDíaSinNosotras, decenas de miles marchan en el #8M y exigen 'ni una más'*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Llaman a paro nacional contra el femicidio para el 9 de marzo*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of news article "*Paro Nacional #UnDíaSinNosotras, decenas de miles marchan en el #8M y exigen 'ni una más'*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article "*Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español*" posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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<sup>16</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> All comments examined in this case were extracted from the comments section of the news article “*‘El primer feminicidio ocurre con el aborto’, responde Lilly Téllez a Jesusa Rodríguez*” posted on the Facebook page of El Universal Online on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Llaman a paro nacional contra el feminicidio para el 9 de marzo*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Llaman a paro nacional contra el feminicidio para el 9 de marzo*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Llaman a paro nacional contra el feminicidio para el 9 de marzo*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Llaman a paro nacional contra el feminicidio para el 9 de marzo*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Me sumo al paro de mujeres; no cuenten conmigo: #Aristegui*” posted on the Facebook page of Aristegui Noticias on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Comment was extracted from the comments section of the news article “*No habra sancion para trabajadoras que se sumen a paro de mujeres*” posted on the Facebook page of El Universal Online on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> All comments examined in this case were extracted from the comments section of the news article “*Tras llamar a “Un dia sin mujeres”, Beatriz Gutierrez dice #NoAlParoNacional*” posted on the Facebook page of El Universal Online on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

## SECTION 4: THE VOICES LEFT BEHIND: PROTESTING FEMICIDES AND THE IMPACT OF POLARIZATION IN MEXICO<sup>1</sup>

### **Femicides: The Mexican Context**

Between December 2018, when President López Obrador took office, and July 2024, more than 5,100 women had been killed in Mexico because of their gender. While these figures represent a slowdown compared to the sharp increase observed from 2015 to 2019, when killings of women on the basis of their gender surged by 128%, they remain alarming, as there has not been any significant decline<sup>2</sup>. These crimes are known as "femicides" and stem from deep-rooted gender inequalities. Unlike homicides, femicides are not driven by private or isolated disputes; they result from a culture of oppression and domination that targets women. Mexico's Federal Criminal Code classifies murders as femicides based on several criteria, including whether the victim's body showed signs of sexual violence or if there was a "close" relationship between the aggressor and the victim involving trust, subordination, or superiority<sup>3</sup>. Notably, over 40% of femicide victims in Mexico knew their killer<sup>4</sup>. Worsening the crisis is Mexico's systemic impunity, with many crimes going unreported or uninvestigated, and unreliable data masking the true scale of this problem<sup>5</sup>. As a result, femicides in Mexico have been described as "another pandemic<sup>6</sup>"—one driven not by a virus but by a deeply ingrained *machismo* culture of violence against women, combined with a lack of transparency and justice from the State.

### **The Emergence of Feminist Protests**

In response to the magnitude and complexity of femicides, numerous protests led by feminist groups have gained momentum in recent years, calling on Mexican society to recognize the severity of this structural issue and urging federal and local authorities to implement strategies to combat it. However, Mexico's polarized political climate<sup>7</sup> has muddled the legitimacy and

demands of these demonstrations. This became particularly evident in 2020, when, in reaction to gender-based violence, feminist collectives organized the annual International Women's Day march alongside a silent strike called *#UnDiaSinNosotras* [*#ADayWithoutUs*], during which women across the country abstained from all public activities for an entire day<sup>8</sup>. As support for these protests grew, including from conservative groups aligned with political parties opposing the current left-wing federal government, speculations that the movement was being used opportunistically widely circulated<sup>9</sup>. Despite initially showing solidarity with feminist groups, President López Obrador refused to revise his strategy on femicides and warned that conservative elements might be infiltrating the protests to undermine his administration<sup>10</sup>. This created a scenario where conservative groups, driven by either political interests or genuine concern, backed feminist protests against femicides, while the left-wing federal government dismissed and undermined them.

Several questions emerge in this turbulent political climate: Did conservative groups suddenly embrace feminism despite their long-standing opposition to its principles? Did feminist groups align with conservatives despite historically opposing their ideas? Did the left-wing government adopt conservative positions to counter feminist movements despite traditionally sharing critiques of societal structural issues? More importantly, how does this intricate scenario impact the claims of the feminist protests?

### **Redefining Polarization**

To better understand the complex social and political dynamics surrounding the protests against femicides in Mexico, it is essential to examine the polarized tensions shaping public life. While the term "polarization" has become widely used to describe the intensified division in daily interactions and debates—especially on social media, among general users, public figures, and

politicians—its character is often more complex than it appears<sup>11</sup>. Some scholars, for example, have distinguished between different forms of polarization, such as political, affective, cultural, moral, etc.<sup>12</sup> However, these categories often overlap, and it can be hard to separate one from another<sup>13</sup>. Polarization is also typically discussed with the assumption that clear-cut differences exist between two dominant and opposing narratives. The online communications concerning the feminist protests in 2020, however, suggest that this is not always the case and that polarization may involve more complicated communications.

Understanding the tensions expressed concerning the feminist protests requires consideration of two main narratives that dominated public conversation: one aligned with President López Obrador's administration, linked to left-wing and liberal ideologies, and another that emerged in opposition to the government, often associated with conservative groups. President López Obrador and his party Morena (The National Regeneration Movement) have consistently presented their administration as Mexico's Fourth Transformation, casting their political project as a critical historical moment within the dominant public imaginary structured around three pivotal moments in Mexican history: 1) the independence from Spain in 1810, 2) the liberal Reform under President Benito Juárez in the mid-1850s, and 3) the 1910 revolution that led to the 1917 Constitution<sup>14</sup>. This narrative is presented as aligning with liberal ideals, intending to undermine the legitimacy of the policies of previous administrations, which are depicted as upholding conservative values. Opposing this is a dominant counter-narrative, often held by conservatives, that challenges the legitimacy of Lopez Obrador's administration and rejects its narrative of the Fourth Transformation. Despite the expected liberal and conservative positions from adherents to the respective narratives, each adopted seemingly contradictory stances in public discourse regarding the feminist protests.

A different perspective on polarization can offer insight into these shifts, contradictions, and their implications. Instead of seeing it as a rigid conflict between two opposing sets of ideals, polarization can be defined as a fluid relationship between two narratives where each shapes itself in response to its counterpart. In this sense, the narratives are themselves as fluid as their relation to each other insofar as they mutually inform each other in their opposition. From this angle, a narrative is less about the strength of its core principles and more about its ability to continually distinguish itself from the opposing narrative, reinforcing an "us versus them" dynamic. This does not mean central positions within a narrative cannot be identified, but it emphasizes that these positions are not fixed and that, under certain circumstances, they can shift without seeming inconsistent or contradictory.

### **The Impact of Polarization: Between Narratives**

Viewing polarization this way helps explain the unexpected positions that emerged during the feminist protests of 2020 in Mexico. The left-wing federal government's dismissal and critique of the protests was not due to an abandonment of their commitment to addressing structural social issues. Rather, it was a necessary response to distinguish themselves from what they perceived as a movement tainted by conservative influence. Similarly, the conservative groups' support for the protests did not signal an embrace of feminism but rather the reinforcement of its opposition to those the protests were directed against, the federal government.

A central aspect of the interaction between the two dominant narratives is that, whether they are intentional political strategies or not, they play a critical role in shaping the public discourse surrounding the protests. On social media, for instance, discussions under news articles about the protests frequently centred on two things: accusing the feminist movement of being driven by a hidden conservative agenda or attacking President López Obrador and his

administration. In both cases, the focus was diverted away from the pressing issue of femicides and the lack of an effective government response. Instead, these conversations reinforced existing political divisions by either questioning the legitimacy of the protests or shifting attention toward criticizing perceived political opponents, rather than addressing the root problem. In other words, polarized dynamics create scenarios where, due to the intricate relationship between both dominant narratives, urgent and immediate concerns that were once central to the conversation become overshadowed.

### **Keep the Conversations Going**

The problem of femicides in Mexico, like many systemic issues, is deeply complex and demands a multifaceted approach—for example, enhancing mechanisms for classifying, identifying, and prosecuting these crimes. However, a crucial factor in addressing this crisis lies in the nature of the conversations we produce around femicides. Protests, such as those in 2020, are vital for sparking dialogue that can challenge Mexico’s patriarchal culture while pushing for concrete actions to combat femicides. In this context, it is essential to recognize how public discourse and political actions are shaped by the fluid dynamics of polarization, which often shifts focus away from the femicide crisis and instead reinforces dominant narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> All the references have been included as endnotes in order to maintain the structure and reading flow of an open editorial.

<sup>2</sup> Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública. (2024). *Informe sobre violencia contra las mujeres. Incidencia delictiva y llamadas de emergencia 911*. Centro de Información, con corte al 31 de julio de 2024. <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>

<sup>3</sup> Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública. (2018). *Instrumento para el Registro, Clasificación y Reporte de los Delitos y las Víctimas CNSP/38/15 Manual de llenado*. <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-299891?state=published>

<sup>4</sup> Sandin, L. (March 19, 2020). *Femicides in Mexico: Impunity and Protests*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/femicides-mexico-impunity-and-protests>

<sup>5</sup> Wilson Center & Mexico Institute. (2023). *National Forum On Femicide: Visions And Solutions*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/first-national-forum-femicide-visions-and-solutions-2023-report>

<sup>6</sup> Gonzalez, H. (March 01, 2021). ‘Los feminicidios son la otra pandemia en México’: Rossana Fuentes Berain. *Aristegui Noticias*. <https://aristeguinoticias.com/0103/libros/los-feminicidios-son-la-otra-pandemia-en-mexico-rossana-fuentes-berain/>

<sup>7</sup> Signa Lab ITESO. (February 19, 2019). *Democracia, Libertad De Expresión Y Esfera Digital. Análisis De Tendencias Y Topologías En Twitter. El Caso De La #Redamlove*. [https://signalab.iteso.mx/informes/informe\\_redamlove.html#footnote-03](https://signalab.iteso.mx/informes/informe_redamlove.html#footnote-03)

<sup>8</sup> Melimopoulos, E. (March 09, 2020). Millions of women in Mexico expected to strike over femicides. *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/9/millions-of-women-in-mexico-expected-to-strike-over-femicides>

<sup>9</sup> Muñoz, A. & Urrutia, A. (February 22, 2020). *Los conservadores están metidos en el movimiento feminista: López Obrador*. La Jornada. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2020/02/22/politica/002n1pol>

<sup>10</sup> López Obrador, A. (March 10, 2020). *Versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa matutina del presidente Andrés Manuel López Obrador*. AMLO. <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2020/03/10/version-estenografica-de-la-conferencia-de-prensa-matutina-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-273/>

<sup>11</sup> Barberá, P. (2020). Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 34-55

<sup>12</sup> Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2023). A review and provocation: On polarization and platforms. *New Media & Society*, 26(1), 556-579. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231161880>

<sup>13</sup> DellaPosta, D. (2020). Pluralistic Collapse: The “Oil Spill” Model of Mass Opinion Polarization. *American Sociological Review*, 85(3), 507-536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420922989>

<sup>14</sup> Otero, G. (2018). Morena y la «cuarta transformación» histórica de México. (H. Márquez Covarrubias, “Trans”). *Observatorio del Desarrollo. Debate*, 7(1), 37-43.

## CONCLUSION

The research presented in this portfolio offers significant insights into the implications and effects of polarized discursive dynamics shaping contemporary public discourse, particularly in the context of the feminist protests in Mexico. Through an analysis of digital communications surrounding these demonstrations, the study reveals how dominant narratives frame forms of social and political action while simultaneously reproducing forms of gender-based violence that impact the overall purpose of such movements. In this way, this research underscores the critical role of narratives in maintaining or contesting power relations and demonstrates how fluid and non-static polarization plays a central role in perpetuating these dynamics. The feminist protests, as sites of discursive encounters, become key to understanding both the complexities of these interactions and the urgency of fostering broader discussions and actions aimed at disrupting polarized dynamics in which critical issues are often obscured.

This research, by aiming to trace the intricacies of polarization, makes a contribution to understanding how the critical issue of femicide in Mexico was often elided in public discourse concerning the feminist protests on March 8<sup>th</sup> and March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Furthermore, in its examination of concrete communications, it can help to build upon an understanding of the concept and phenomenon of polarization in its tracking of the complex and mutually-shaping interactions between discrete issues and broader hegemonic narratives. While this analysis concerns a culturally and historically specific case and cannot be generalized, its implications challenge linear and bi-polar models of polarization in ways that can inform studies in other concrete settings of contested communication.

Moreover, the decision to present this work in a portfolio-style thesis format allows for a diverse exploration of the issues discussed here, addressing both academic and public audiences.

Each section of the portfolio, from the academic articles to the teaching dossier and Op-Ed, introduces different yet interconnected aspects of the research. This approach aims to translate complex theoretical and contextual analyses into accessible forms, ensuring the findings and implications explored reach beyond academic circles. By opening these examinations to diverse audiences through teaching materials and non-academic writing, this portfolio intends to create new connections between broader contexts and Mexico's current socio-political landscape.

Additionally, this format has allowed me to demonstrate my scholarly expertise and practical skills, preparing me for a range of roles within and beyond academia. In this sense, the portfolio not only reflects the depth of my research but also showcases my ability to adapt academic insights into pedagogical tools and non-technical discussions. As I move forward in my academic and professional career, this portfolio serves as evidence of my capacity to bridge the gap between theory, practice, and different communication styles, a crucial skill set for continuing to build critical analyses that address complex social issues like gender-based violence and femicides in today's Mexican society.

## APPENDIX: TEACHING DOSSIER

### A. Sample of slides used for Module 1 in the course Digital Culture and Society.



## Digital Culture

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- **Culture** as a set of values, norms, practices and expectations shared (and constantly renegotiated) of a group of people.
- It doesn't imply everyone's behavior to be the same.
- There's no linear progression or necessary improvement.
- Convergence of offline/online practices; old/new media.

## Under Digital Culture

- We become *"active agents in the process of meaningmaking;*
- *we adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality;*
- *we reflexively assemble our own particular version of such reality"*(Deuze, 2006, p. 66)
- Principal Component **Participation, Remediation & Bricolage**

B. Sample of slides used for Module 3 in the course Digital Culture and Society.


## DISCOURSE AS A GROUP OF STATEMENTS

- **'Dialogue** is the primary condition of discourse **all speech and writing is social** (Macdonell as in Mills, 1997, p. 11)
- Differs with the kinds of **institutions and social practices** with the **positions of those who speak** and those whom they address.
  - Discourses are enacted in social contexts.
  - +
  - Do not occur in isolation but in dialogue (in relation/contrast/contradiction to other group of statements).



Discourse-centered approach

- **Socioculturally and Ethnographically** informed studies:
  - Social practices embedded in new media technologies are **socioculturally situated** and embedded in **existing social practices**.
  - Online communicative practices are embedded in **existing styles, registers, and norms (abbreviations and non-standard spellings)**.
  - Blurred lines between **online/offline** and **virtual/real**.
  - Starts with instances of discourse and language in use.



## Critical Technocultural Approach

- **Social Informatics:** systematic, interdisciplinary study of the design, uses, and consequences of information technologies that takes into account their interaction with institutional and cultural contexts. (Kling, 1999)
- Interested in the **conceptual problematics** of ICT use, design, and dissemination: *can only possibly be resolved*.
- Technology as assemblage of **artifact, practice** and **belief**.
- Focuses on the ways that technology users **perceive, articulate, and ultimately define the technocultural space** in which they operate and exist.

Not to forget...

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ICTs are not neutral artifacts outside of society; they are shaped by the sociocultural context of their design and use.

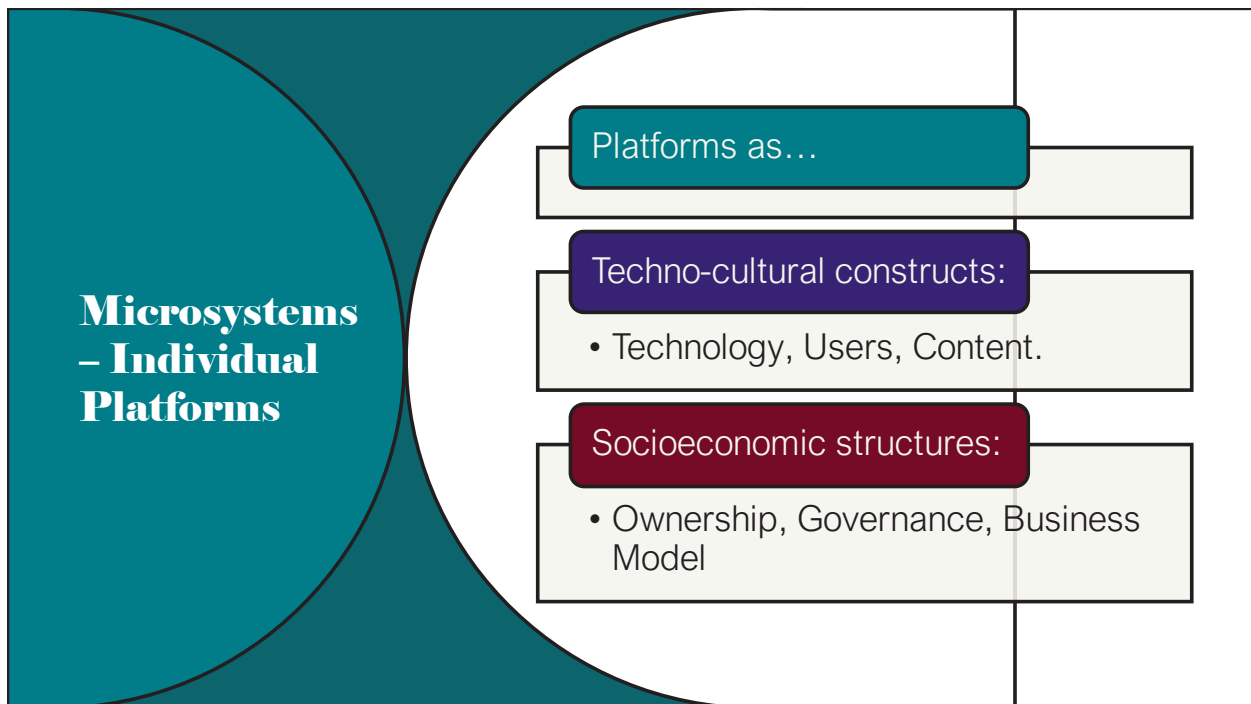
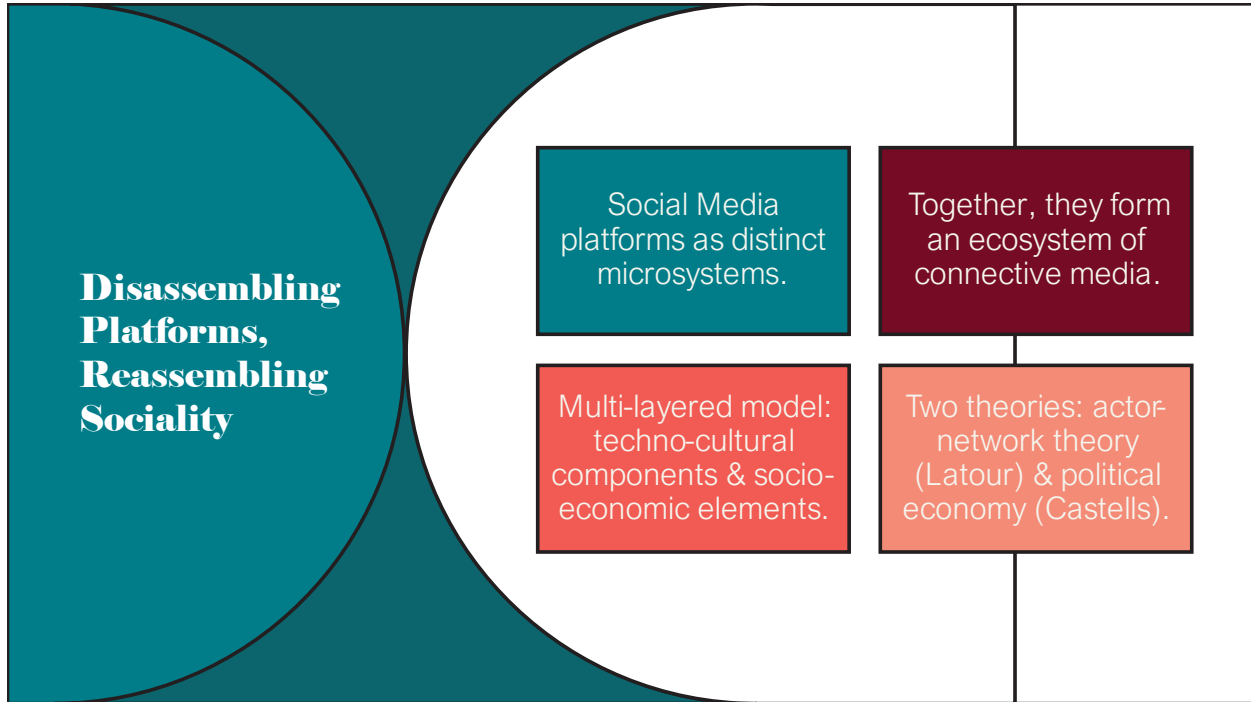
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Society organizes itself through the artifacts, ideologies, and discourses of ICT based technoculture.

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Technocultural discourses must be framed from the user's and designer's cultural perspectives.

C. Sample of slides used for Module 4 in the course Digital Culture and Society.



D. Sample of slides used for Modules 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the course Digital Culture and Society.

Enjoyment in prosuming :  
*False consciousness ?*

Exploitation:

- Not necessarily as a coercive production process
- As a result of the unequal possession of production resources

On Web 2.0:

- The production resources are turned over to the prosumer.
- Do wikonomic systems need to be more capitalistic?

# PROSUMER'S EXPLOITATION

## Coveillance & the *Thought Police*

- Social Media as a *panopticon*:
  - Twitter's 'Birdwatch' program.
  - Cancel Culture
- Others as:
  - Threats to be contended with;
  - Allies to be connected to;
  - Victims that need support.

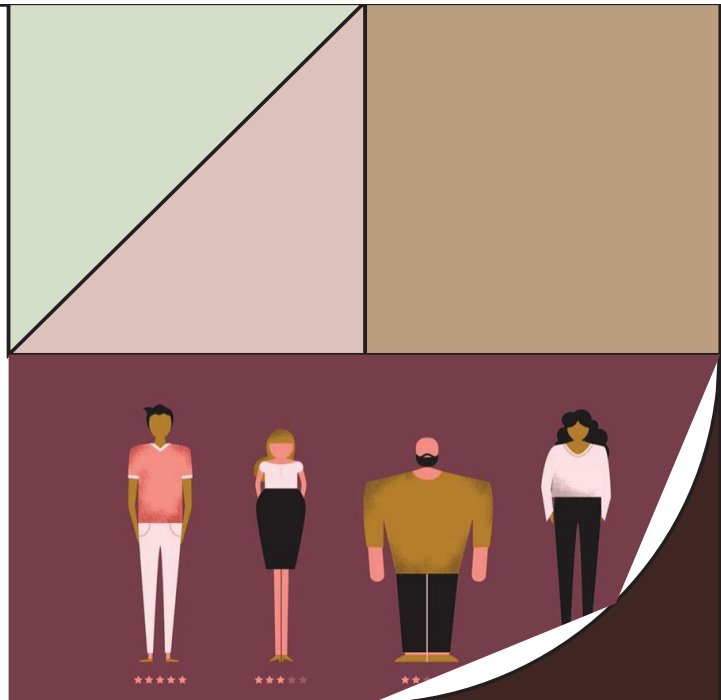

## To understand Digital Activism...

- Overemphasizing the technological aspects  
Vs.
- Recognizing the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which digital practices are situated.
- “We need to engage with the digital activism ecosystem rather than focusing on the development of any particular social media platform or mobile device” (Mishra, 2021, p. 94).



## Algorithms of Oppression

- ICT's / algorithms reflect Eurocentric/white standards of beauty, appearance...
- New technologies rely on offline systems of oppression to “humanize” ICTs.
- TikTok’s algorithm does not decide on its own to remove posts: it represents offline cultural values programmed into its infrastructural build.
- Algorithmic oppression shows how ableism, homophobia, and transphobia are taken up as eugenicist technologies.



E. Sample of slides used for Module 4 in the course Digital Narratives and Social Polarization.

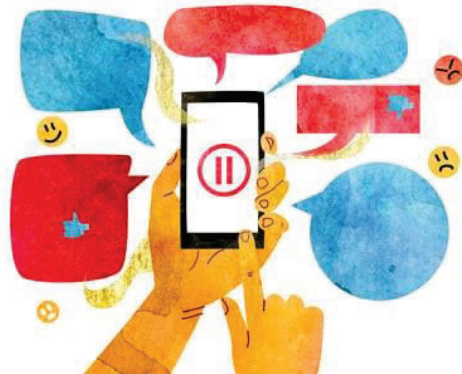
## Truth, Power & Knowledge

Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints. . . . Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Foucault, 1979e: 46)


- Truth is not intrinsic to an utterance; nor is an ideal abstract quality; nor a transcendental way.
  - Something which societies have to work to produce.
  - Discourses are in constant conflict.

## Discourse, Polarization and Social Media



- Polarization...
  - Needs to be understood in relation to the sociocultural context.
  - In relation to different (dominant and non-dominant) discourses in our society.
  - It is embedded in existing social practices.
  - Not the result of social media platforms (technology), but of the diverse discourses shaping technology's use and design (technoculture).
  - It erases the distinction between the virtual/real and offline/online spheres.

F. Sample of slides used for Module 5 in the course Digital Narratives and Social Polarization.

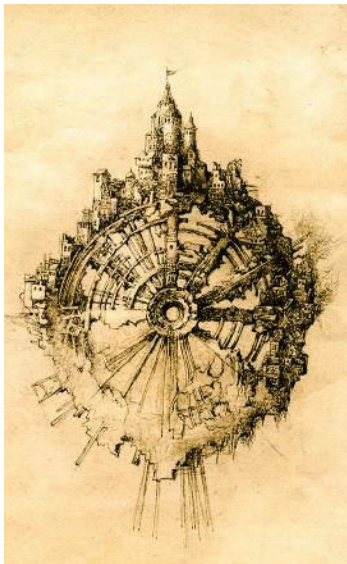


### Ideology & Discourse

What theory to draw from to analyze the determinants of thinking and behaviour?

The distinction between them has emerged from the political climate of 1990s and political orientation

Seeming world-wide collapse of communism as a viable political system.	Marxist influence – ideology.
--	-------------------------------



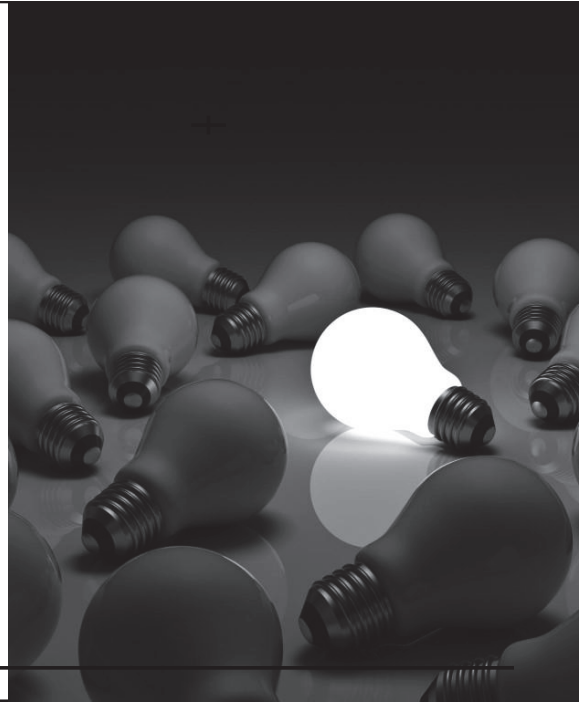
### Ideology as a Narrative

- Operates by taking an idea—whatever it could be— as a principle or law designated by **History** or **Nature**.
- Nazism and Stalinism
  - *Superiority of races*
  - *Struggle of classes*
- Ideology as a narrative rather than a fixed system of beliefs.

/

## Narratives and Polarization

- Polarization is the result of...
  - The encounters and fights between different discourses and their regimes of truth (practices, knowledge and power relations).
  - The necessary interaction between narratives.

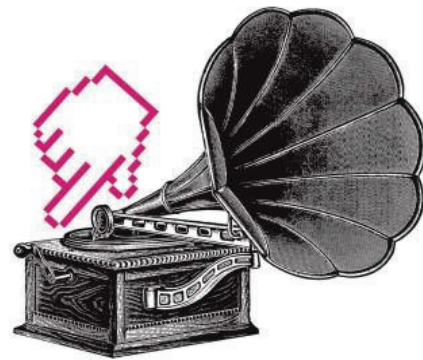


G. Sample of slides used for Modules 1, 2 and 3 in the course Digital Narratives and Social Polarization.

9/26/2023

## What is Digital Culture?

- An emerging set of values and expectations related to our offline and online practices, that rely on the principal components of *participation, remediation and bricolage*
- Community while isolation.
- None of this is new.
- Digital Culture as the continuation of Participatory Culture.
- It is not a replacement of other media cultures.
- There is no digital culture...



11

9/26/2023

## What's behind? Structural Inequalities/Injustice



- Structural Injustice:
  - Practices, rules, policies, institutions, and narratives that are perpetuated through the social structure and persistently disadvantage certain social groups or communities.
  - Settler Colonialism; Capitalism; Heteronormativity; Racial discrimination; Patriarchy.
- Create a structural asymmetry of epistemic power:
  - People can be privileged or lacking credibility depending on the identity they hold or the group they belong to.
- Dialogic injustice:
  - Individuals are not considered equals in the exchange of information and opinions that lead to construction of public opinion.

22

## Ambient Digital Racism

- A digital discursive form of discrimination presented as subtler, polished and without explicit racist language.
- A narrative that allows racist discourse to be posted online and tolerated.
  - "Just asking questions..."
- It's always available and omnipresent through the internet.



# Counter-movements

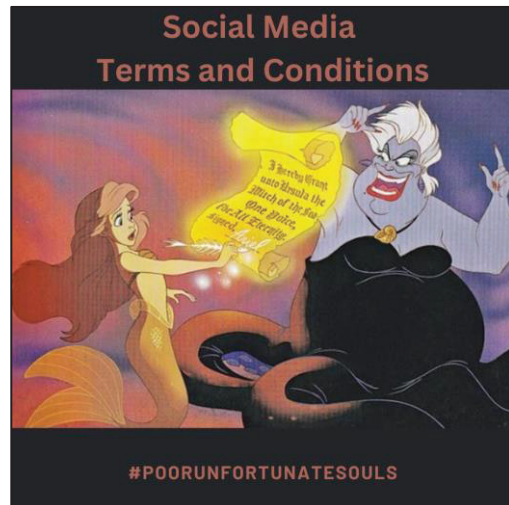
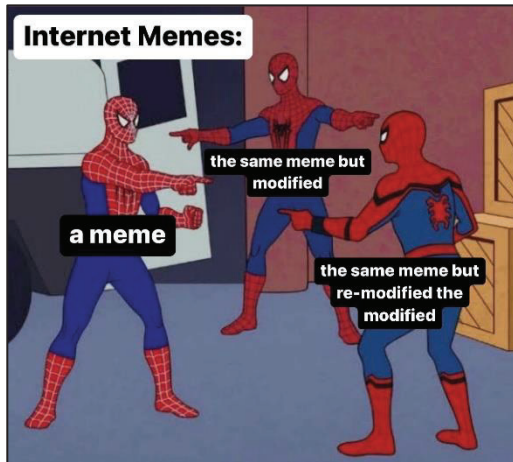
- Black Lives Matter vs. #WhiteLivesMatter #AllLivesMatter #BlueLivesMatter
  - Social Movement: Create social change and collective actions to challenge the structures and represent the interests of an oppressed collective.
  - Counter-movements: Advocate for keeping the status quo and to prevent social changes. They only exist if the social movement they oppose is politically significant.



## Race, Inequality and Polarization

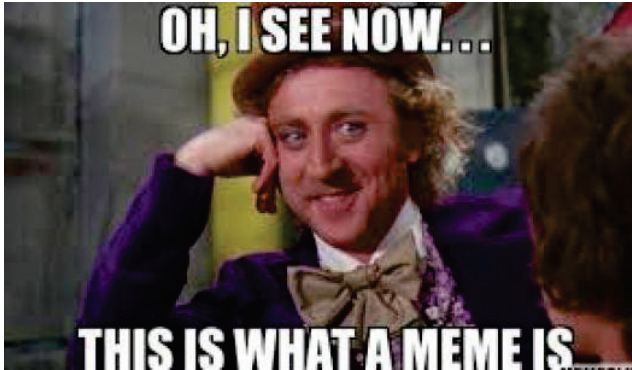
- Polarization → Political identities → Social Groups → Social Structures
  - Social Structures reflect social differentiation and fundamental differences in power.
  - Any analysis of polarization consequences must account for social differentiation in terms of inequality and power.
- Separating polarization from social structures:
  - See the primary concern in the lack of social cohesion and solidarity.
- Polarization is the outcome of struggles for justice.
  - It arises from challenges to dominant groups.

H. Sample of the memes created by students for the activity “Meme-fing the class”.

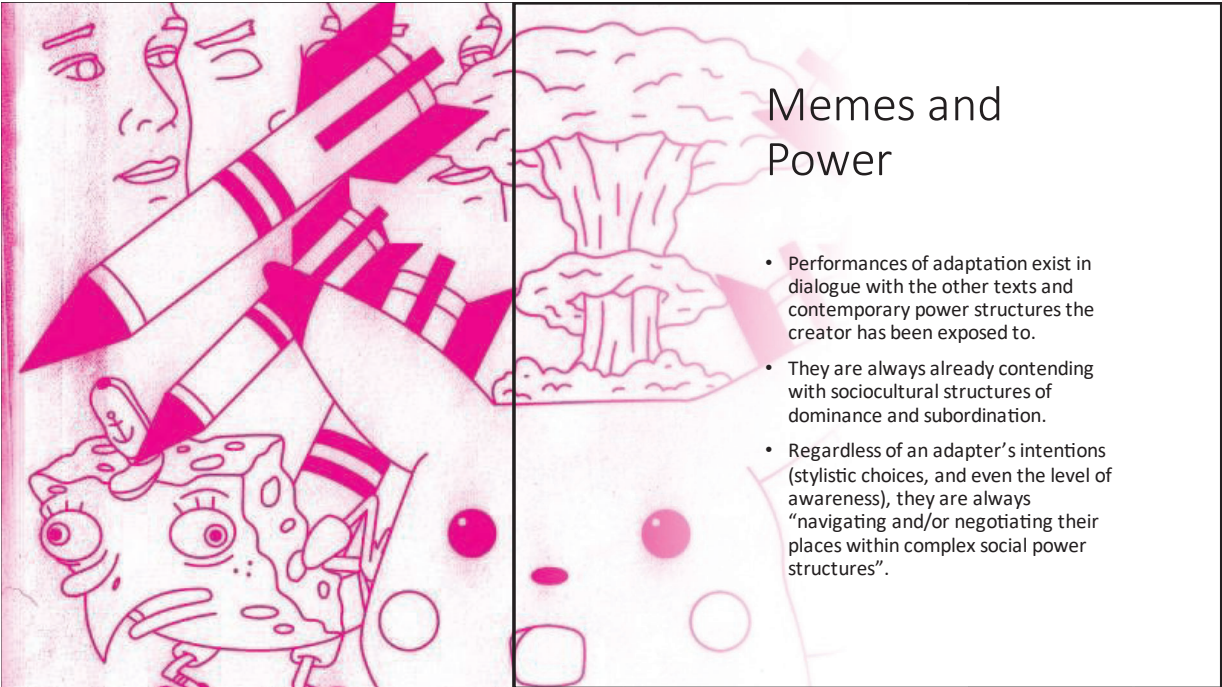


- I. Sample of the slides used for Module 5, “The Meme and us”, in the course Digital Culture and Society.

## Re-defining Internet Memes



- Massive collections of **digital performances of adaptation** that **(re)produce** and **revise** pre-existing content, thus **reproducing or revising culture(s)**.
- Exist and function within social discourses.
- Depend on **participatory culture**.



### Memes and Power

- Performances of adaptation exist in dialogue with the other texts and contemporary power structures the creator has been exposed to.
- They are always already contending with sociocultural structures of dominance and subordination.
- Regardless of an adapter’s intentions (stylistic choices, and even the level of awareness), they are always “navigating and/or negotiating their places within complex social power structures”.

**J.** Sample of a quiz and its rubric used in the course Digital Narratives and Social Polarization.

Quiz #3

1. According to Kreiss and McGregor, polarization should be analyzed as an obstacle to achieving social cohesion and sustaining a more democratic society.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. This concept allows us to identify how different relations of power and inequality are established in our society:
  - a. Social Cohesion
  - b. Social Structures
  - c. Partisanship
  - d. Social Media Platforms
  
3. Select the option that reflects better one of the critiques that Kreiss and McGregor direct against previous studies about polarization and platforms:
  - a. Social cohesion could be undermined if we don't correctly analyze polarization.
  - b. Previous research does not reflect the high levels of polarization produced by echo chambers when reinforcing political identities.
  - c. All the discourses involved in polarized interactions have been treated equally.
  - d. It's important to recognize that when polarized interactions involve multiple identities, achieving an equal and fair society becomes increasingly challenging.
  
4. One of the objectives of Kreiss and McGregor's new normative and conceptual approach is to question the central role usually given to social media platforms in the development of polarization.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. Using a concrete example, explain why Kreiss and McGregor define polarization as an outcome of struggles for justice. Do not use the example offered in the reading (BlackLivesMatter).

-----  
3 points – Polarization arises from marginalized/oppressed **groups that challenge dominant groups and the relations of inequality and power** embedded in our **social structure**. \*[They include an example that reflects relations of inequality between two groups].

2 points – The explanation of the concept is adequate, but the example is not clear/requires more details/is not relevant. OR The example used is appropriate and properly explained, but the explanation about polarization is not clear/requires more details/is not relevant.

1 point – Both of the examples and explanations need more details and clarity. There are some clear wrong elements in the answer. There is no example or no explanation of the concept.

0 points – The explanation and/or example are completely off.

Example:

*Events such as the Oka Crisis are an example of polarization as an outcome of struggles for justice. The Oka Crisis was a land dispute sparked by the proposed expansion of a golf course and the development of townhouses on disputed land in the Pines that included an Indigenous burial ground. The dispute occurred between the Mohawk people in the town of Oka and the RCMP and Canadian Army. As the authors argue, polarization can only be seen as a central threat to democracy if inequality is ignored. In this case, the resistance by the Mohawk people threatened the dominant power structure of the settler colonial status quo. The Mohawk people fighting against their traditional lands being used for a golf course and development of housing reflects polarization as an outcome of struggles for justice because their struggle for equality threatened the power and status of the dominant structure.*

**K. Full Evaluation Report for the course Digital Culture and Society.**

Evaluation Report 202203SOCI3740A

Digital Culture and Society Fall 2022

Instructor: Arturo Tejada-Torres

Eval Opened At: Fri Nov 25 00:00:00 2022 Eval Closed At: Fri Dec 9 23:59:59 2022

Processed At: Sat Dec 10 04:15:40 2022

Submissions: 23

Eligible: 45

Response %: 51.11%

Results Summary: Multiple Choice Responses

	# 1	# 2	# 3	# 4	# 5	# resp.
1 Year of Study	0	2	3	12	6	23
2 Why did you take this course?	# Major		# Minor		.-Degree/GLER requireme #	
	# Interest		#		# resp.	
	15	1	4	3		23
3 My effort in this course was	% Good		.-Unsatisfactory %		# resp.	
	% Excellent		.-Poor %			
5 The course planning and material organization was	26	70	4	0		23
6 The textbooks and other learning materials were	65	35	0	0		23
7 The instructor's punctuality was	57	39	4	0		23
8 The instructor's availability to students, including office hours or by appointment, was	30	61	9	0		23
9 The instructor's explanation of grading criteria was	61	35	0	4		23
10 The instructor's delivery and explanation of ideas and concepts were	52	43	4	0		23
11 The instructor's encouragement of students' questions, discussions, and critical thinking was	52	48	0	0		23
	78	22	0	0		23

12	The instructor's provision of timely and useful feedback on students' work was	57	39	0	4	23
13	The fairness of the assessments (exams and/or assignments) of material covered was	70	26	4	0	23
14	The instructor's effort to make the course as interesting as possible was	74	22	4	0	23
15	The instructor's effort to make the course as challenging as possible was	61	39	0	0	23
16	The instructor's treatment of students with respect and without prejudice was	96	4	0	0	23
17	This instructor overall was	74	26	0	0	23
18	This course overall was	52	48	0	0	23

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### Results Summary: Text Responses

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A. Please comment constructively regarding this course and/or the instructor. Comments must focus only on issues relevant to the teaching of the course.

---



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A peer evaluation might be nice for group projects because very rarely is my team a good team. Just because there's definitely going to be people doing more than others. But also the project being 40% without a peer evaluation is really really really stressful because some group members barely contributed and how they perform still impacts my grade and how well I've done. If I have to teach and tell my teammates what to say and what cases they have to talk about because they aren't willing to put in the effort, I would like that to be reflected on their peer evaluation.

---

Arturo is an excellent instructor. From the beginning he let us know that he is newer to teaching and would be very receptive to any feedback. This was the only time I have seen feedback from students be truly valued. He actually listened to his students and even adapted certain aspects of the course as the class expressed concerns. The University of Lethbridge needs more instructors like this.

---

The quizzes were understandable and assignments were clear

---

This course introduces the field (digital culture) I want to know but never had the opportunity to so this is great, very interesting class format, the workload is stretched out and not very stressful

---

Arturo was a great instructor for this course! He knew what he was talking about and provided current examples relating to course content. He provided efficient and effective feedback on assignments! Also, Arturo was very flexible in deadlines when needed and is always willing to help students out by extending quiz times. All around I appreciated having a professor as understanding as Arturo and will be recommending courses he instructs to others! Arturo by far has exceeded my expectations of this course and as a professor.

---

I am so glad this course was offered as it is different than most of the other sociology classes I have taken and I enjoyed learning about and creating memes! I appreciated that there was no textbook because of all the other readings that were assigned for each module. Arturo was very accommodating and you can tell he really cares about his students. Can't wait to take another one of his classes!

---

I feel as though I had to put very minimal effort into this class to pass as the prof was very lenient, I felt with this that I didn't learn as much from this class. Overall he was still very passionate about it and it went well. I think there was also a lot of miscommunication

---

This course was really interesting and it appealed to our generation (22- 23 year olds) it was super relevant to today's society and the professor did a good job at connecting sociological course material and things we would understand. He also was willing to work with us on content and extensions etc, he really just wanted us to learn. One suggestion is to have the due dates earlier in the semester. The final project and all other assignments were due in middle of November which is an extremely tough time to get groups together and only have one week between deadlines.

---

The instructor shows good effort in trying to get students to participate and have good knowledge about the topic he teaches.

---

I wish we were able to choose our own groups. I got stuck with a student not participating in any of our group work but received the same mark as us. Content and delivery were interesting and relevant.

---

It was a good class. Some of the elements were a bit hard to keep track of, such as having to post on a discord but never being reminded. The professor also forgot to include in our syllabus that he had already picked our project groups therefore it was confusing and anxiety inducing because I believed I had to pick my own group.

---

The content was very good and the class was well structured, the delivery was just a little dry at points.

---

Fantastic teaching method, very flexible in teaching style and forthcoming to concerns and issues throughout the course, that made this class very enjoyable.

---

Good overall! Arturo is very passionate about this topic and that made it exciting to learn about.

---

Arturo is an awesome instructor, especially for a PhD student. He has an incredible breadth of knowledge and made this course engaging and interesting with use of Discord as a form of weekly assignments. I do however wish he would have allowed us to work on our group projects earlier into the semester, perhaps submitting the proposals before reading week instead of after. I think there needs to be more guidance around the discord modules and perhaps a discussion question suggested by Arturo to the students. The class was organized very well, the readings and videos extremely interesting and thought provoking. He is a very accommodating instructor, allowing me to rewrite a quiz past the initial due date, as well as offering reasonable extensions. He took suggestions for what he could improve on really well and immediately changed the format of the quizzes when numerous students were concerned about the difficulty of the quizzes. He always gets back to us as soon as possible for feedback and in emails.

Evaluation Report: 202302SOCI3850A

Digital Narratives and Social Polarization Summer 2023

Instructor: Arturo Tejeda-Torres

Eval Opened At: Sun Jun 11 00:00:00 2023 Eval Closed At: Mon Jun 19 23:59:59 2023

Processed At: Tue Jun 20 04:15:08 2023

Submissions: 9

Eligible: 47

Response %: 19.15%

Results Summary: Multiple Choice Responses

1 Year of Study	# 1-----.	# 2-----.	# 3-----.	# 4-----.	# 5-----.	# 6-----.	# 7-----.	# 8-----.	# 9-----.	# 10-----.	# 11-----.	# resp-.
												9
	0	0	0	6	3							
2 Why did you take this course?	# Minor-----.	# Major-----.	# Degree/GLER requireme #	# Interest #	# resp-.							9
	3	0	4	2								
3 My effort in this course was	% Good-----.	% Excellent-----.	% Unsatisfactory %	% Poor %	# resp-.							9
	22	67	11	0								
5 The course planning and material organization was												9
	56	44	0	0								
6 The textbooks and other learning materials were												9
	44	44	11	0								
7 The instructor's punctuality was												9
	67	33	0	0								
8 The instructor's availability to students, including office hours or by appointment, was												9
	56	44	0	0								
9 The instructor's explanation of grading criteria was												9
	44	56	0	0								
10 The instructor's delivery and explanation of ideas and concepts were												9
	56	33	0	11								
11 The instructor's encouragement of students' questions, discussions, and critical thinking was												9
	78	22	0	0								

12	The instructor's provision of timely and useful feedback on students' work was	44	33	22	0	9
13	The fairness of the assessments (exams and/or assignments) of material covered was	44	56	0	0	9
14	The instructor's effort to make the course as interesting as possible was	67	22	11	0	9
15	The instructor's effort to make the course as challenging as possible was	56	44	0	0	9
16	The instructor's treatment of students with respect and without prejudice was	78	22	0	0	9
17	This instructor overall was	56	44	0	0	9
18	This course overall was	44	56	0	0	9

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### Results Summary: Text Responses

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---

A. Please comment constructively regarding this course and/or the instructor. Comments must focus only on issues relevant to the teaching of the course.

---



---

The podcast was a nice break from the articles. Maybe, you can add more when appropriate to the material.

---

The instructor seems to be quite knowledgeable about the course topics and main concepts. I thoroughly enjoyed his classes as they were interactive and interesting. The instructor seemed to be passionate about the course in general and it was infectious making one listen to his ideas.

---

The course was okay but I found that the professor teaching did not keep me captivated. Also they strayed off the course and it was difficult to follow along sometimes. I also was not a fan of having to write an essay with another student and it could have been an individual assignment.

## L. Courses Syllabus

### SOCI 3740 - Digital Culture & Society

#### I. Course Description

Digital Culture can be broadly defined as a set of practices that arise from the ideological and technological possibilities and limitations of Web 2.0, and that are built on the basis of collaborative, dialogic, emergent, personalized, and context-rich environment formats. Its emergence has prompted the opening of a new field of relationships and communicative practices that have impacted on a cultural, social and political level. The complexity of such practices, and the content circulating from them, has given rise to a number of conversations trying to explain the nature of these platforms while addressing issues related to identity construction, social activism, offline/online dynamics, power and resistance relationships, new linguistic models, and technological determinism, to name a few.

This course will provide an introduction to diverse themes related to digital culture (e.g. participatory culture, digital surveillance, social media platforms, memes, ‘*slacktivism*’, the role of algorithms, etc.) analyzed and discussed from a sociological perspective. Digital culture will be addressed as a discursive field where social practices and meanings are produced and enacted, rather than as a set of neutral technological mediums to create and deliver digital content. The students will have the opportunity to engage with critical perspectives to examine questions, assumptions and implications about the dynamics embedded in such practices. The course will also examine different theories and concepts from where to think and problematize digital culture from its beginnings to these days.

#### II. Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to identify and understand some of the main concepts and practices related to digital culture, analyzed from a sociological perspective. Based on the academic readings, group discussions, and experiential learning, students should also be able to distinguish the social implications of the diverse practices and content that have emerged from Web 2.0 and apply critical and informed thinking to assess their impact and role in fields such as media, politics, economics, activism, entertainment, etc.

#### III. Course Format

The class will be conducted primarily in lecture format. However, discussion will be constantly encouraged to maintain a dialogic and collaborative atmosphere inside the classroom. In addition to our in-person meetings, we will have an online forum where content related to the class (questions, videos, memes, documents, etc.) will be posted every week. Students are expected to engage with this material and with other students making comments, replies, ‘reacting’, or sharing more content. The participation of the students will count for their final grade (see below).

#### IV. Grade Components

Participation	15%
Short Quizzes & Activities	25%
Project Draft Outline	10%
Peer Feedback	10%
Final Project (Product/Presentation)	20%

*Participation:* In accordance with participatory culture (one of the main aspects of digital culture), we will complement our class discussions with collective reflections to be posted on an online forum (*Discord*).

After each module, a group of students previously determined will be in charge of preparing and posting content that clearly reflects central elements of the previous readings and classes. The content can include questions, critiques, examples, concepts, etc., presented in multiple formats such as text, videos, memes, and news articles. Although it is responsibility of the group of students chosen for that module to generate content, it is expected of everyone to participate ‘reacting’, commenting, or sharing more material. The students in charge will be graded according to the accuracy, clarity and engagement shown in relation to the concepts and ideas previously reviewed.

*Short Quizzes & Activities:* By the end of every module, students will have to complete a short quiz that will remain open on Moodle until noon of next day. Once the quiz is open, the student will have only 15min to complete it before it closes. The use of class notes and readings is encouraged during the completion of the quizzes. However, they must be responded to independently. There will be occasions where the quiz will be exchanged for a different activity which will be explained with enough time ahead to be completed. In such cases, students will have the whole weekend to submit the assignment.

*Final Project:* As a result of the different approaches and concepts reviewed, students will have to work on a team project to present in front of the class. They will have to analyze two different ‘cases’ that reflect one or more aspects of digital culture using the concepts and perspectives discussed in class. The best way to describe a ‘case’ is as a “screenshot” of a moment from your (or others’) daily digital practices that draw your attention. Some examples of cases could include: the reaction of users to a political event on social media; the sharing of a viral video or a meme; the way a concrete case of activism is impacted by digital practices; ‘new’ forms of production, entertainment, or socialization; etc.

The analysis of the cases will have to reflect the next questions while addressing the material reviewed in class: what aspects of digital culture can be observed in the cases selected? What social implications or effects can be observed? How is your analysis informed by a sociological

perspective? In addition to these questions, the students will have to present at least two specific questions related to the cases they decided to address.

- a) *Final Project Product:* The students will have the option to select the format for their analyses (e.g. a paper, a video, a podcast, a performance, etc.). The format selected, however, will have to be approved by me. In case of choosing to do a paper, the required length is 10-12 pages approx. with a minimum of 7 references (4 of them from the course). If choosing an audio-visual format, the approximated duration will be of 10 to 15 minutes. The final product (paper, video, audio, etc.) needs to be submitted on the previous session to the presentations. In case of having prepared a product that cannot be submitted (e.g. a performance), the students will have to talk to me to establish the conditions of such circumstances.
- b) *Final Project Presentation:* During the last sessions of the course, the students will have 12-15min to present their analyses in front of the class. Those students who decided to do a paper will have to summarize their key points in a slide presentation. The students that selected a different format will present their product and provide a schematic outline summarizing the main aspects of their analysis in a 3-5 pages document to share with everyone.

*Project Draft Outline:* The students will have to submit a 3-5 pages outline draft of their final project by Week 10. The draft must contain:

- a) an explanation of the cases selected for the analysis;
- b) a set of 3-5 possible questions for both cases that would like to be addressed in the analysis;
- c) the readings and concepts that will be used including a justification on why such perspectives could be relevant for analyzing these cases and questions;
- d) some preliminary ideas (they can be listed under bullets) of what they think they will find by the end of their analysis;
- f) the format chosen for the product.

*Peer Feedback:* I will assign to each student a ‘project draft outline’ from another student, with which they’ll have to engage and offer suggestions and observations related to the cases, questions, approaches, or format selected. These comments will be presented in a different document (at least 1 page length) to be shared with the group of students whose draft was commented and with me. In order to get the 10%, the student’s feedback will have to reflect a thoughtful, committed and respectful attitude to the work reviewed. Also, only those who submit their project draft outline and feedback on time, will get the full percentage.

## V. Important Dates

Project Draft Outline.....Nov 17

Peer Feedback.....Nov 22

Final Project.....Dec 6

Presentations.....Dec 8 & 13

## VI. Grading

A+ = 95-100%      B+ = 80-84%    C+ = 67-70%    D+ = 57-59%

A = 90-94%      B = 76-79%    C = 63-66%    D = 53-56%

A- = 85-89%      B- = 71-75%    C- = 60-62%    F = 0-52%

## VII. Intellectual Honesty

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as extremely serious. Plagiarism means using the words or ideas or research of another person without crediting them – therefore, you need to cite your sources clearly and consistently. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty, definitions of plagiarism, cheating and other academic misconduct, and the penalties associated with these offenses.

## VIII. Ethical Requirements:

Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), recording, opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subject research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

## IX. Academic Accommodation

Students who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Accommodated Learning Centre (B760 UHall, phone 403-329-2766, email: alc@uleth.ca). It is a student's responsibility to register with the Accommodated Learning Centre and if required, to request academic accommodation.

## X. Proposed Lecture Schedule

This is a tentative schedule of assigned readings for each week, intended as a guideline. Students are advised that dates may shift slightly as required. It is important to notice that not all the readings listed below will be required, only those assigned by the professor at the beginning of the module. The rest of the readings aim to provide a 'toolkit' for students to further explore the content of each topic.

- *Week 1 – Sep 8*

## Introduction

### ○ **Week 2 – Sep 13 & 15**

#### *Module 1. Understanding (Digital and Participatory) Culture*

#### Quiz – Sep 15

##### Readings:

- Mark Deuze (2006). Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture, *The Information Society*, 22:2, 63-75, DOI: 10.1080/01972240600567170
- Arditi, D. (2021). Introduction: Caught in the Stream. In *Streaming culture: Subscription platforms and the unending consumption of culture* (First ed.). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- TEDx Talks. (2010, April 13). *TEDxNYED - Henry Jenkins - 03/06/10* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFCLKa0XRlw&feature=youtu.be>

##### Complementary Readings:

- Hadas, Leora. (2009). The Web planet: How the changing Internet divided *Doctor Who* fan fiction writers. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0129>.

### ○ **Week 3/4 – Sep 20, 22 & 27**

#### *Module 2. Surveillance, Capitalism and Digital Culture [3 sessions]*

#### Quiz – Sep 27

##### Readings:

- Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital ‘prosumer’. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13-36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540509354673>
- Fuchs, C. (2011), New Media, Web 2.0 and Surveillance. *Sociology Compass*, 5: 134-147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00354.x>
- Gratch, L. M., & Gratch, A. (2021). Everyday Performances of Surveillance, Sousveillance, and Coveillance. In *Digital performance in everyday life*. ROUTLEDGE.

##### Complementary Readings:

- Van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media, Culture and Society*, 31(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098245>

### ○ **Week 4 / 5 – Sep 29 & Oct 4**

#### *Module 3. Language, Technology and New Media: A Discursive approach [2 sessions]*

#### Quiz – Oct 4

Readings:

- Mills, Sara. (2004). Discourse and Ideology. In *Discourse* (2nd ed). New York: Routledge (New Critical Idiom): pp. 26-42.
- Akkaya, A. (2014). Language, Discourse and New Media: A Linguistic Anthropological Perspective, *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 285-300.
- Brock, A. (2018). Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis. *New Media and Society*, 20, 3, 1012-1030.

○ **Week 5 / 6 – Oct 6, 11 & 13**

*Module 4. Connectivity and Social Media [3 sessions]*

Quiz – Oct 13

Readings:

- Dijck, J. v. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001>
  - Chapter 2. Disassembling Platforms, Reassembling Sociality
  - Chapter 3. Facebook and the Imperative of Sharing
  - Chapter 4. Twitter and the Paradox of Following and Trending
- Ellis, D., & Tucker, Ian. (2021). Social media and emotion. In *Emotion in the digital age: Technologies, data and psychosocial life*. Routledge.

○ **Week 6 / 7 – Oct 18, 20 & 25**

*Module 5. The meme and us [3 sessions]*

Activity – Oct 25

Readings:

- Wiggins, B. E. (2019). *The discursive power of memes in digital culture: Ideology, semiotics, and intertextuality*. Routledge.
- Gratch, L. M., & Gratch, A. (2021). “Re-”: Internet Memes as Digital Performances of Adaptation. In *Digital performance in everyday life*. ROUTLEDGE.

○ **Week 7/8 – Oct 27 & Nov 1**

*Module 6. Interrogating Digital Culture(s) [2 sessions]*

Quiz – Nov 1

Readings:

- Gratch, L. M., & Gratch, A. (2021). Digital Performances of Self-identity. In *Digital performance in everyday life*. ROUTLEDGE.
- Rosenbaum, J. E. (2018). *Constructing digital cultures: Tweets, trends, race, and gender*. Lexington Books.

- Thornham, H. (2018). Between irreconcilability and the datalogical anthropocene. In *Gender and digital culture: Between irreconcilability and the datalogical*. Routledge.
- Deery, J., & Press, A. L. (2018). Media and class: TV, film, and digital culture. Routledge.

- **Week 8 – Nov 3 – Collaborative Work Time**
- **Week 9 – Nov 8 & 10 - READING WEEK**
- **Week 10 – Nov 15 & 17**

*Module 7. Digital Activism and Social Change [2 sessions]*

Quiz – Nov 17

Readings:

- Gratch, L. M., & Gratch, A. (2021). Slactivism. In *Digital performance in everyday life*. ROUTLEDGE.
- Bhatia, Aditi. (2019). Digital Narratives of Struggle and Legitimacy in the Arab Spring. In *Discourses of (de)legitimization: Participatory culture in digital contexts*. Routledge.
- Mishra, S. (2021). Digital activism: The power of hashtags and memes. In *Digital Cultures*. ROUTLEDGE.
- Paromita, P. (2022). Introduction. *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/10.4324/9781003196457>

- **Week 11 – Nov 22 & 24**

*Module 8. Algorithms: between neutrality and oppression [2 sessions]*

Quiz – Nov 24

Readings:

- Bucher, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary: exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms, *Information, Communication & Society*, 20:1, 30-44, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086
- Sage Rauchberg, J. (2022). #Shadowbanned: Queer, Trans, and Disabled Creator Responses to Algorithmic Oppression on TikTok. In *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge, pp. 196-209. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/10.4324/9781003196457>
- Slater, K. (2022). Theorizing Cultures of Oversharing on TikTok. In *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge, pp. 196-209. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/10.4324/9781003196457>

- **Week 12 – Nov 29 & Dec 1 – Collaborative Work Time**
- **Week 13 – Dec 6 – Submit Final Project Product**
- **Week 13/14 – Dec 8 & 13 – PRESENTATIONS**

## SOCI 3850 - Digital Narratives & Social Polarization

### I. Course Description

This course emerges as a response to a set of experiences presented to the daily user from social media platforms. These experiences, since the last few years, seem to have intensified and evolved into everyday communication practices defined by a constant polarization process in online settings. This way, stark positions that appear to be reinforced by invalidating, confronting and silencing opposing narratives have increasingly become a more visible and expected aspect of our [digital] culture. At the same time, these practices have provoked different questions about the nature of their dynamics and their possible implications on a cultural, social and political level.

This course will provide an introduction to the study of social [affective and political] polarization and its relation with the emergence and reproduction of diverse narratives as part of our current digital practices. We will examine different phenomena and technological advances that play a significant role in building digital narratives and their deployment under binary models usually reflected through an *us* and *them* figure. From a sociological perspective, we will address issues such as the appearance and relevance of echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, the novel practices of information and disinformation transmission, the function of automated systems like algorithms and bots, and the relation between social media platforms and our social structures, to examine different processes of polarization. In addition, we will contrast some of these discussions with a poststructuralist approach that will allow us to dig into concepts such as discourse, power, ideology and truth to better understand the dynamics and implications of these practices.

### II. Course Objectives

At the end of the course, students will be aware of the different concepts and practices related to the polarization processes in digital settings and their relation to non-digital contexts. Based on a sociological perspective, students should also be able to identify the social implications of the diverse communicative dynamics, structures and narratives shaped by [and shaping] polarization mechanisms. Students will be able to apply critical and informed thinking to assess such implications' impact on political, cultural and social discourses. Students will also become familiar with the basic tenets of the poststructuralist approach in order to problematize some of the assumptions and ideas surrounding the study of polarization.

### III. Course Format

This online course will be delivered in real-time during the days and times indicated. Each week will be divided into two types of sessions [A & B].

- *Session A:* The class will be delivered primarily in lecture format. It will be organized into two lectures of 1:15 hr. with a break of 10-15 min. in between. Lectures will be complemented with different materials such as questions, presentations, videos and recent political and social examples to provoke conversation in class. Sessions A will occur on Mondays.

○ *Session B*: The class will be organized into three main components: *lecture, group discussion & quiz*. i) During the first half of the class, we will start with either a recap or a continuation of the topics discussed in the previous session. ii) Once we have fully finished addressing the content for that week, we will have a group discussion activity guided by a group of different students assigned to each module. iii) We will end the session by having some time to complete individually or in groups a short quiz and reviewing the correct answers after everyone finished. Sessions B will occur on Wednesdays.

#### IV. Course Readings

All of the readings for this course are available free and electronically through Moodle.

#### V. Grade Components

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Due</i>
Concepts and Examples	20%	TBD
Discussion Questions	10%	TBD
Weekly Quizzes	30%	Weekly
Draft Presentation	5%	June 5th
Final Paper	35%	June 21st

Concepts & Examples: Students will present and lead a break-out room discussion in a small group **once** during the term. Students must select two concepts or ideas from the previous class to explain them to their group while using at least two examples that reflect such notions. Presenters are required to submit a 1-page outline before class with the ideas and examples that will be presented. Students are expected to bring videos, images, audio or any other material that could support their presentation. It is important to include references for the examples used (a news article, a paper, a conference, etc.). The presentation should last between 8-10 min. Each group will have two students presenting. Once both students have presented, they will turn the floor over to the students in charge of bringing the discussion questions.

Discussion Questions: Students will bring 2 discussion questions to the break-out room groups to share after the presentation of the concepts and examples **once** during the term. The discussion questions should be based on the week's readings and should seek to criticize, extend or apply central concepts or ideas reviewed in that module. Students are required to submit the questions to the instructor before class. Each group will have two different students every module in charge of bringing their questions.

Weekly Quizzes: By the end of every module [during *session B*], students will have to complete a short quiz in class. Once the quiz is open, the student will have only 15min to finish it before it

closes. The use of class notes and readings is encouraged during the completion of the quizzes. Students will have the option to complete the quiz individually or in groups.

*Final Paper:* Students must write a paper answering 2-3 questions that they will choose from a list provided by the instructor. The questions will need to be answered using a minimum of 3 main concepts or ideas reviewed during the course. Students will need to include two cases/examples to support their arguments and ideas. The paper must be written in groups of 2 or 3 students\*, no longer than 7-8 pages, double-spaced (including references). The content must draw upon at least 6 peer-reviewed sources or academic references (3 of them must be taken from the course reading list).

\*Under certain circumstances, students will be allowed to write the paper individually. The instructor will need to be notified with enough time ahead in order to assess the situation.

*Draft Presentation:* Students will present their final papers as work in process to the class. The presentation should last no more than 5 minutes and should include:

- i) the question(s) that will be addressed;
- ii) the cases chosen and a brief explanation of each case;
- iii) the main concepts/ideas and readings from the course that will be used;
- iv) some preliminary ideas they are thinking to address in their paper;
- v) two supplemental articles they consider will be useful for their paper.

## **VI. Grading**

A+ = 95-100%      B+ = 80-84%    C+ = 67-70%    D+ = 57-59%

A = 90-94%    B = 76-79%    C = 63-66%    D = 53-56%

A- = 85-89%    B- = 71-75%    C- = 60-62%    F = 0-52%

## **VII. Intellectual Honesty**

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as extremely serious. Plagiarism means using the words or ideas or research of another person without crediting them – therefore, you need to cite your sources clearly and consistently. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty, definitions of plagiarism, cheating and other academic misconduct, and the penalties associated with these offences.

## **VIII. Ethical Requirements**

Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), recording, opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must

not undertake any human subject research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

## IX. Academic Accommodation

Students who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Accommodated Learning Centre (B760 UHall, phone 403-329-2766, email: alc@uleth.ca). It is a student's responsibility to register with the Accommodated Learning Centre and if required, to request academic accommodation.

## X. Proposed Lecture Schedule

This is a tentative schedule of weekly assigned readings, intended as a guideline. Students are advised that dates may shift slightly as required. It is important to notice that not all the readings listed below will be required, only those assigned by the professor at the beginning of the module. The rest of the readings aim to provide a 'toolkit' for students to explore the content of each topic further.

### ○ **Module 1.** *Digital Culture: the new public square...?*

[Week 1 - May 8<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>]

Readings:

- Piras, E. (2021). Inequality in the public sphere. Epistemic injustice, discrimination, and violence. *Democracy and Fake News: Information Manipulation and Post-Truth Politics* (1st ed.). Routledge. pp. 30-39 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003037385>
- TEDx Talks. (2010, April 13). *TEDxNYED - Henry Jenkins - 03/06/10* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFCLKa0XRlw&feature=youtu.be>

Complementary Readings:

- Delwiche, A. & Jacobs J. (2013). What is Participatory Culture? In *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*. Routledge: New York, pp. 2-9.
- Mark Deuze (2006). Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture, *The Information Society*, 22:2, 63-75, DOI: 10.1080/01972240600567170

### ○ **Module 2.** *Digital Narratives: disassembling our posts.*

[Week 2 & 3 – May 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> & 24]

Readings:

- Agudelo, F. I., & Olbrych, N. (2022). It's not how you say it, It's what you say: Ambient digital racism and racial narratives on twitter. *Social Media + Society*, 8(3), 205630512211224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305122112244>
- Barberá, P. (2020). Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, pp. 34-55). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Giusti, S. & Piras, E. (2021). Introduction. In search of paradigms: Disinformation, fake news, and post-truth politics. *Democracy and Fake News: Information Manipulation and Post-Truth Politics* (1st ed.). Routledge. pp. 1-16 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003037385>

Complementary Readings:

- Siegel, A. (2020). Online Hate Speech. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, pp. 56-88). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woolley, S. (2020). Bots and Computational Propaganda: Automation for Communication and Control. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, pp. 89-110). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

○ **Module 3.** *Polarization: who should we blame?*

[Week 4 – May 29<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup>]

Readings:

- Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2023). A review and provocation: On polarization and platforms. *New Media & Society*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231161880>
- Törnberg, P., Törnberg, A., (2022). Inside a white power echo chamber: Why fringe digital spaces are polarizing politics. *New Media & Society*, 146144482211229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221122915>

○ **Module 4.** *Discourse: the construction of our (social & digital) reality.*

[Week 5 – June 5<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>]

Readings:

- Bouvier, G. (2015) What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields?, In *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10:2, 149-162, DOI: 10.1080/17447143.2015.1042381.
- Mills, Sara. (2004). Introduction. In *Discourse* (2nd ed). New York: Routledge (New Critical Idiom): pp. 1-28.

○ **Module 5.** *Ideology: the stories we are told.*

[Week 6 & 7 – June 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>]

Readings:

- Arendt, H. (1953, Jul.). Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government. *The Review of Politics*, 15(3), 303-327.
- King, T. (2003, November 6th). The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative (Part 1) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The CBC Massey Lectures*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870>

## APPENDIX: SAMPLE OF COLLECTED DATA

This appendix contains a selection of screenshots from the news articles and comment sections on Facebook that were collected and analyzed in Academic Article II.

#UnDíaSinNosotras El asesino asistió al funeral de la joven y portó una playera con la leyenda: "Ni una más"



ELUNIVERSAL.COM.MX

**Marbella estuvo 5 días desaparecida, encontraron su cuerpo en un basurero** ♦

Crean grupos de apoyo en redes sociales; Estado ocupa el cuarto lugar en feminicidios

👍👎🗨️ Israel Hernandez and 10K others 464 Comments 3.6K Shares

Like Comment Share

 El Universal Online  
February 25, 2020 · 🌐

"El primer feminicidio ocurre cuando no se deja nacer a una niña por causa del aborto", afirmó la senadora



ELUNIVERSAL.COM.MX

**"El primer feminicidio ocurre con el aborto", responde Lilly Téllez a Jesusa Rodríguez**

👍👎🗨️ Israel Hernandez, Lau Mtz Arauz and 10K others 3.6K Comments 16K Shares

Like Comment Share



Aristegui Noticias was live.

March 8, 2020 · 🌐



Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español 📌 <http://bit.ly/2Q06DTX>



Mircha Ra Har and 8.6K others

3.6K Comments 1.6K Shares



Like



Comment



Share



Aristegui Noticias

February 22, 2020 · 🌐



9 de marzo, un día sin mujeres | Video <http://ow.ly/10Pp50ytjLQ>



4.3K

2.2K Comments 209 Shares



Like



Comment



Share





Aristegui Noticias was live.

March 8, 2020 · 🌐

Análisis de la marcha #8M rumbo al paro #UnDíaSinNosotras. Una transmisión especial de Aristegui Noticias en alianza con CNN en Español 👉 <http://bit.ly/2Q06DTX>



25:56 / 1:00:59

👍❤️👤 Mirsha Ba Her and 8.6K others

3.6K Comments 1.6K Shares

Like

Comment

Share



El Universal Online

February 21, 2020 · 🌐

Que siempre no. Ahora Müller llama #NoAlParoNacional, con la que promueve que mujeres y hombres porten un pañuelo blanco en apoyo a López Obrador



Tras llamar a "Un día sin mujeres", Beatriz Gutiérrez dice #NoAlParoNacional

Horas después de llamar al paro en protesta nacional contra la violencia de género, Gutiérrez ...

👍👤 Juan Carlos Amador Navarrete and 17K others




3.8K Comments 5.7K Shares






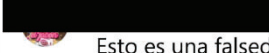
Like

Comment

Share



-  43:43  
No son los monumentos, sino buscar equidad, respeto dando respeto.  
Por que vandalismo y destrucción
- Like Reply 2y    38
- 12 Replies
-  42:20  
Si sra pero no es la manera de manifestarse. Destruya si nuestra cd ni encuerandose  
se ven tan mal quedan pena
- Like Reply 2y   8
- 1 Reply
-  40:21  
Pero no vandalizando afectando negocios, quebrando vidrios , pantarrajeando  
paredes es con un buen ejemplo enseñando a nuestros hijos a respetarse , amarse a  
ellos y a los demás
- Like Reply 2y  36
- 1 Reply
-  40:11  
Gracias, Carmen Aristegui, por esta cobertura, por esta transmisión especial que nos  
permite escuchar tantas voces y palpar una realidad tan lastimosa. Saludos cordiales.
- Like Reply 2y   64
- 11 Replies

-    
El trabajo a cuidarlo y que el gobierno junto con las televisoras dejen de manipular  
a las mujeres , Damas ustedes son la fuerza de la nación y los hombres también ,no  
permitamos tanta crueldad social, mejor que den clases de valores en la televisión y  
den una materia obligada en las escuela se valore.
- Like Reply 2y Edited  2
-    
   
No las puedo apoyar, ya que es un movimiento político que triste que ellas  
luchando por un fin y ahora son utilizadas por los que le han hecho daño a la mujer  
niños niñas adolescentes adultos a todos en fin
- Like Reply 2y 
-    
Esto es una falsedad estás mujeres porque quieren marchar ? Por un lado están a  
favor del aborto y por otro según ellas defienden la vida de la mujer que  
contradictorio
- Like Reply 2y

De acuerdo con la Senadora Lily Téllez, no podemos excluir o discriminar a los Mexicanos que crecen en el Vientre, ni mucho menos condenar a una Muerte letal con la complicidad del Gobierno y el uso de nuestros impuestos.

Los Servicios de salud son para salvar vidas, mucho más nuestros impuestos.

Salvemos las 2 Vidas ❤️

Like Reply 2y

17 Replies



Lili feminicidio es una cosa ,aborto muy diferente sra,UD que toma desiciones y conoce las leyes tiene la razón pero desde su nivel no tiene que tener prejuicios pero en fin..

Like Reply 2y

57 Replies



Que contrariedad ! Defendamos a todas las mujeres, sobre a todo a las más inocentes !

Toda su vida !!!

Gracias Lilly por levantar la voz por las que no lo tienen!

Like Reply 2y Edited

7 Replies



Esta señora se ha convertido en el títere de su marido, careciendo de identidad propia y por lo visto hasta de ideas propias y Libertad de acción, como la chimoltrufia, un día dice una cosa y al día siguiente otra !!!

Like Reply 2y



Es la primera que sufre de violencia. Señora UD no la dejaron ocupar el lugar de "la primera dama" porque el anciano quiere ser el único protagonista en su novela. Solo la deja decir lo que él quiere. Cómo Melania, para la próxima vez que salga parpadee 2 veces si necesita ayuda.

Like Reply 2y

33 Replies



Ya la regañó el marido? Entonces el señor es Machista porque antes ella según apoyaba el movimiento y ahora se retracta? Esto me recuerda el título de una película "DURMIENDO CON EL ENEMIGO". para que se den cuenta que en Palacio Nacional tenemos un Machista que no deja que su pareja pueda decidir por si misma porque afecta su imagen Presidencial, ha y por favor no le vayan a rayar ni pintar su casa que se enoja el señor.

Like Reply 2y

