EXPLORING STORYTELLING AS A METHOD TO BUILD LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

(Re)thinking sexuality education with rural women in Sucre, Bolivia from a feminist decolonial perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Although most SRH interventions today are based on a human rights approach, many of them are inherently Eurocentric, modelled around the needs of privileged Global North women and do not acknowledge the experiences and expectations of the target population. As a result, SRH programs commonly fail to reach the most marginalized populations such as the research participants to this study, 14 women who have migrated from remote rural communities to the city of Sucre, Bolivia. In an attempt to question the imposition of allegedly universal SRH programs on women like the research participants, this thesis aims to explore how research on SRH could be conducted from a feminist decolonial perspective. Given the central role methodology plays in such an endeavour, one of the main objectives of this thesis is therefore to examine how storytelling can be used as a method to build local knowledge based on which decolonial SRH programs could be developed. Due to my own positionality as a privileged white woman from the Global North, core to these methodological considerations is the analysis of the role of outside researchers in decolonial research. The other key objective of this thesis project is to provide the research participants a space to share their stories, connect with each other and collectively contribute to the diversification of knowledge production. Regarding the specific research method, five storytelling sessions were carried out. During these sessions which revolved around different theme blocks connected to sexuality and reproduction, the participating women were invited to share their experiences and together create an alternative, collective story. The initial aim of these sessions was to build a body of knowledge which would facilitate learning about the women's own conceptualizations of issues related to SRH. However, eventually the outcome was much broader, producing rich life histories which help to gain a more holistic understanding of the specific needs, experiences, and expectations of the women in regard to their SRH. Concerning the results of this study, the positive feedback from the research participants suggests that building localized SRH programs through a bottom-up approach holds great potential to advance the SRH of the most marginalized. At the same time, informing the methodology with a feminist decolonial perspective does not only open a space to question Eurocentric structures underlying SRH programs but also to tackle patriarchal and oppressive structures impeding women's SRH within communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

GBV   Gender-based violence

IK   Indigenous knowledge

IKS   Indigenous knowledge system

SRH   Sexual and reproductive health

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to contribute to the building of local knowledge, providing marginalized women historically excluded from knowledge production a space to share their stories. It is centred around the experiences of 14 Quechua[1]-speaking *mujeres del campo*[2], Hilaria, Rosa, Yolanda, Julia, Albertina, Tomasa, Placida, Martina, Claudia, Sonia, Ana, Luisa, Catalina and Gabriela who have all migrated to the city of Sucre, Bolivia from remote rural communities and currently reside in Villa Armonía, a largely growing district in the outskirts of Sucre. The idea for this project stems from my personal involvement in the local NGO CEMVA located in Villa Armonía and my experiences and encounters with women such as the research participants. The main aim of this thesis is to learn about how sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services could be decolonized in order to cater the needs of marginalized women like the participating women in a culturally appropriate way. Therefore, the stories, collected through a series of storytelling sessions, are the inspiration, starting point and end result of this thesis at the same time. Apart from supporting the building of a collective story and a counternarrative to hegemonic discourses on the SRH of racialized and marginalized women, these stories support the reimagining of SRH through a feminist decolonial methodology. While I recognize the limits of this written work in achieving this, I consider the more impactful part of this project to be the storytelling sessions as a space for the women to share and learn. In this first introductory chapter, I will start with a brief overview of the context of this study, followed by a description of my research questions and the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Context

Decades after the elimination of the last colonial administrations Abya Yala[3], the region known as Latin America today, continues to be dominated and operated by colonial power structures that shape the lives of people both in the public and private sphere and advance their "cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression/exploitation" by dominant societies and institutions (Grosfoguel, 2007:220). These structures, also known as *coloniality* or the *coloniality of power*, a term coined by Peruvian decolonial thinker Aníbal Quijano (Quijano, 1992:218, 19), can be seen as the continuation of formal global colonialism and work complex mechanisms to keep the modern, capitalist, and patriarchal world-system in place (Grosfoguel,

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[1] Indigenous language

[2] Literally women from the countryside, used to describe women with strong bonds to their original lands and often used synonymously with *campesinas* or Indigenous women.

[3] Originally used by the Cuna peoples in Panama, today Abya Yala, literally translated to 'land in its full maturity' is the widely used term among Indigenous peoples to denominate what has been termed Latin America by the colonizers (e.g., Walsh, 2014).

2007:219). While formal colonialism was enabled by the system of imperialism[4], neo-colonialism is supported by the "reframed discourse of globalization" following the expansionist ideology of imperialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:92).

At the core of the coloniality of power lies a hegemonic system of knowledge production initially imposed through the processes of colonization. Up to this day, this organization of knowledge dominates the world, subjugating, invisibilizing and devaluing any other alternative knowledge systems (Quijano, 1992:218, 19), shaping the relations between the Global South and the Global North[5], and geopolitics (Mendoza, 2016:14).

Based on a Eurocentric worldview, coloniality also informs the interventions and policies of the development sector which plays a crucial role in the maintenance of influence of dominant countries in the colonial world[6]. In the context of sexuality and reproduction, this has translated into Neo-Malthusian[7] development interventions which strongly focus on fertility reduction – or population control – through family planning and the distribution of modern contraceptives. Although this might not sound problematic at first, at the heart of these interventions lies a racist narrative of overpopulation in the Global South, carefully constructed by international institutions and metropolitan societies legitimizing anti-natal policies. Initially, countries such as the United States heading this global campaign, or France[8], justified these policies with the alleged threat young, growing populations in the Global South posed to economic and political stability. Ironically, at the same time as such countries pushed for strict population control measures among colonial societies, they drove strong pro-natalist policies for metropolitan people. Due to the resistance this narrative encountered, decision-makers however changed their reasoning in the late 20th century, reframing family planning as a tool to empower women and thus a necessary means to achieve women's rights (Hartman, 2016; Vergés 2021; Hendrixson & Hartmann, 2019). Nowadays, it is commonly environmental concerns that are used to demand stricter fertility control, a narrative appropriated among others by ecofascist groups (Dyett & Thomas, 2019).

All of these overpopulation narratives – political stability; women's empowerment; environmental protection – depict marginalized and racialized

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[4] Imperialism can be understood as a system of economic, political and ideological expansion achieved through the "subjugation of 'others'" and was initially facilitated by formal colonialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:23)

[5] I refer to *Global South* and *North* as regions not bound to the geographical South and North but characterized by their different socioeconomic situations.

[6] In this thesis the terms metropolitan and colonial world as two opposing societies and sociabilities divided by an "abyssal line" refer not to geographical regions but populations divided by their history and socioeconomic realities (de Sousa Santos, 2018)

[7] Based on the scarcity driven narrative of Malthus in the 1800s who warned that population growth was exhausting the planet's carrying capacity (Hendrixson & Hartmann, 2019:251)

[8] France openly encouraged sterilization and abortions in its overseas departments (Vergés, 2021:37)

people, especially women, as overly-fertile and incapable of making responsible decisions about their reproductive lives, and in need of intervention. Simultaneously, they put the blame for a variety of problems ranging from political instability and migration to the environmental crisis, on the bodies of Global South women. Thereby, the decisive role the Global North and our capitalist world order play in these crises has been categorically ignored. This distorted, patronizing view shows significant resemblance with former colonial narratives portraying Indigenous and enslaved peoples as over-sexualized non-humans in need of 'civilization' – only that the 'civilizing mission' of Christian colonizers (Lugones, 2010:743, 744) has turned into a mission for development; a mission for *empowerment*. Within this mission, it is not only experts and decision makers but also civilizational feminists[9] who support the imposition of development interventions.

As indicated, both the civilization and the development mission have been legitimized by a similar reasoning, framing their subjects as *in need* of civilization/development. Thereby, the means and methods employed by colonizers as well as development agencies to achieve these goals have been characterized by violence. Sexual violence and exploitation were commonly used by the colonizers to subjugate local peoples (Lugones, 2010; Morgensen, 2012; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012), while forced interventions were common for late 20th century SRH interventions. Developed by 'international experts', large scale 'family planning' programs, supported by foreign aid coming to a large part from the UNFPA, USAID and the World Bank, relied to a large extent on coercion and deception. Means of population control included mass sterilizations and forced insertions of IUDs and hormonal implants, commonly by unskilled professionals and without medical follow-up, leading to devastating long-term health outcomes and high casualty rates (Hartmann, 2016; Hendrixson & Hartmann, 2019).

Although such interventions were more common and systematic in Southeast Asia, pressure on national governments, especially by the U.S., to implement stricter population control measures was exerted on many countries in Abya Yala too. While resistance, especially from leftist governments, was strong, in some countries such as Peru, where close to 300,000 women were sterilized during the Fujimori regime in the late 20th century, foreign agencies managed to push through strict population control measures (Dyett & Thomas, 2019:214, 215).

In Bolivia, the country context of this thesis, no valid evidence supports the rumours of forced interventions surrounding the involvement of the Peace Corps in the provision of family planning services (e.g. discussed in Geidel, 2010). Nevertheless, the U.S., in the form of USAID, had significant say in the design of family planning services in Bolivia which thus followed the prevalent population

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[9] I use the term civilizational feminists/feminism (Vergés, 2021) synonymously with white, mainstream or conventional feminists/feminism

control narrative, focusing strongly on the provision of contraceptives and measured mainly by the rate of population decrease. Due to various factors, among others the highly commercial considerations of USAID, the massive investments however had little effect and instead left the Bolivian healthcare system fragmented (Tejerina et al., 2014).

Although most development interventions targeting SRH[10] do not depend on coercive and violent strategies anymore[11], focus still lies on the provision of modern contraceptives and the lowering of birth rates, with the climate crisis reviving the debate on population growth (Dyett & Thomas, 2019:206). Framed in a human rights context and based on a medical discourse, these interventions emphasize the importance of voluntariness, empowerment of women and the economic and social dimensions of high fertility rates. However, they commonly do not consider lived experiences nor the structural oppression impacting the SRH of racialized people (Vergés, 2021). By generalizing the needs of women and girls based on the experiences of white privileged women, and employing a narrow lens to complex issues, interventions often fail to acknowledge the root causes of issues connected to SRH and offer suitable solutions, and consequently remain unsuccessful (Torri, 2013; Llamas & Mayhew, 2018; Kotanyi & Krings-Ney, 2009).

By relying on allegedly universal truths about SRH derived from the needs of privileged women, the experiences of marginalized women are discredited, and their voices silenced. Historically deprived of their right to take part in decision-making and knowledge production, they are framed as having too little knowledge to make informed decisions, and too oppressed by their male counterparts to be free. Reduced to one homogenous group, in this way marginalized women's real needs are invisibilized. Thus, it could be argued, development interventions tackling SRH based upon generalized assumptions claiming universality are poorly positioned to serve their target group.

This is not to say that women in the Global South do not have a real need for family planning and other SRH services – on the contrary, many women and girls face substantial obstacles in accessing contraceptives. In Bolivia, according to data from household surveys still a disproportionately high percentage of married women has an unmet need for contraceptives (Index Mundi, n.d.; McCarthy et al., 2017). However, access is not necessarily limited by a lack of availability but commonly results from cultural barriers (Kotanyi & Krings-Ney, 2009; Torri, 2013), inequality within communities (Bant & Girard, 2008:250, or discriminatory practices of

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[10] Among international institutions, SRH is considered a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system" and includes having "the capability to reproduce" (UNFPA, n.d.) as well as "a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships [and] the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence" (WHO, 2021).

[11] An exception to this is India (Wilson, 2018)

healthcare personnel (Arachu Castro et al., 2015). In addition, the domain of SRH is much larger than contraception only, and with existing SRH strategies focusing strongly on the provision of contraceptives, little space might be given to the actual needs of women (Bant & Girard, 2008:253).

Linking the issues marginalized, colonial women face in relation to their SRH to decolonial thought, two interconnected problems arise. First, the colonial world (de Sousa Santos, 2018) is widely excluded from knowledge production. This reflects, among others, in the lack of research – for example on Indigenous SRH practices – but also in the universal language used to discuss matters of SRH. As a consequence, SRH interventions are designed with little consultation of the beneficiaries themselves (Bant & Girard, 2008). Second, and closely related to this, what we understand as sexuality and SHR might vary strongly from how other peoples conceptualize these and related terms; or, considering the historical epistemicide of local knowledges, how colonized peoples *used to* conceptualize such terms. Thus, most 'universal' SRH interventions are shaped by the coloniality of sexuality; the construction of sexuality based on the experiences of white women, generalized and simplified, and applied to colonial peoples with only minor adaptations. Hand in hand with this goes the colonial construction of gender which, among others, dominates the human rights discourse, leaving no space for divergent definitions (Lugones, 2010; Vergés, 2021). Consequently, not only the coloniality of knowledge production, but also the coloniality of sexuality and gender make many SRH interventions designed by international agencies inherently colonial, opening up the question whether these programs can be effective.

In addition to this, the violent history of population control current human rights-based interventions are built upon must not be forgotten. Instead, SRH strategies should be analysed in their historical context, reaching back to the times of formal colonialism when the Eurocentric idea of gender and sexuality started to be spread, as well as to the late 20th century and its horrendous population control agenda. Such a more holistic perspective might help one to rethink if the 'reduction' of colonial peoples is legitimate, given the genocides of their peoples by the colonizers. However, due to limitations of scope, this thesis will not engage in a detailed review of predominant strategies to SRH and their history but instead attempt to rethink SRH from a decolonial and feminist perspective.

1.2 Research Objective and Questions

Given the history of SRH interventions in the colonial world, the overall goals of this thesis project are to contribute to the discussion on decolonizing SRH research and services; and to the creation of local knowledge supporting this decolonization. In order to achieve both of these goals, concepts related to sexuality and SRH we in the

Global North tend to view as fixed need to be decolonized and reimagined – a task that requires an appropriate methodology. Therefore, the first concrete aim of this thesis which is to explore how a feminist decolonial methodology could be used to build knowledge that supports the decolonization of SRH. The specific method employed and scrutinized is storytelling, combined with a local crafting activity. The second, complementary aim is to open up a space for my research participants to meet, share and connect with each other, and engage in collective knowledge creation in an act of resistance against the coloniality of knowledge production.

While the first aim is rather theoretical, informing most of the written part of this project – more specifically this thesis – the second more practical aim informed the fieldwork in Bolivia and the processes surrounding it. Thus, while I do engage with the individual and collective stories of the research participants in this thesis, trying to give them as much space as possible in a thesis, I consider the learning processes in the sessions as more important as their written integration. Consequently, the following thesis has a strong focus on the methodological considerations surrounding the decolonization of SRH research.

For an in-depth examination of the methodology employed this thesis focuses on three different components: The theory; the method; and the role of the researcher. Based on these, the research questions guiding this thesis are the following:

1. How could a feminist decolonial perspective inform research on sexual and reproductive health?
2. How can the stories of rural women in Sucre be used to build local knowledge to decolonize the concept of sexual and reproductive health?
3. What role can outside researchers take up in decolonial research on sexual and reproductive health?
4.

While the first question is of a rather theoretical nature, the second question aims to bring the research participants to the centre. The third question is both a reflection on decolonial research in general as well as my positionality and role in this particular research.

1.3 Structure of this thesis

In order to answer the research questions, in the first chapter I engage in a thorough discussion on decolonial research methodologies, and the ethical considerations tied to these, with a special focus on Indigenous research. Parallelly to this, I discuss decolonial theory with a focus on feminist decolonial scholarships. Based on these, in the next chapter I lay out my own research strategy embedded in the context of this research.

Having established a sound methodological and ethical framework, in the third chapter I move on to the heart of this thesis: the stories of my research participants. In order to better link the experiences of the women to the overall topics decolonization and SRH, this chapter is divided into a set of themes identified as important by the research participants and me. Each theme is discussed on the basis of one story in an attempt to reconcile dominant and decolonial research conventions.

In the fourth chapter, I aim to connect the methodological considerations and the learnings from the storytelling sessions in order to answer my research questions. Through this discussion, I want to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology of this thesis both for this and further research on SRH as well as the engagement of outside researchers in the project of decolonization on a more general level.

As will become evident in the following chapters, this whole thesis is built upon the tensions between 'dominant' and decolonial research as well as my personal struggles to find the right balance between giving space to the individual stories of the research participants and adhering to the structure of a master's thesis. While these tensions create rather paradoxical situations at some points, they also help to adopt a more critical view of research in general, revealing some fundamental issues inherent to academic research.

2. DECOLONIZING RESEARCH

Since the early days of formal colonialism, the knowledges of native peoples have been categorically oppressed and their voices silenced (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:30). As a consequence, until today their stories remain largely unheard, with privileged actors – both public and private – still dominating the production of narratives. In an attempt to question the inherently Eurocentric, often exclusive and racist system of knowledge production, this thesis project aims to give a central space to the individual and collective experiences of the research participants who make this thesis possible. Therefore, I want to start this chapter with one of their stories.

Placida[12] is 33 years old and comes from the Khochas community in Potosí, a city once the centre of the Spanish empire, whose infamous silver mines used to finance the Spanish crown, bringing slavery, death and environmental destruction to the Indigenous peoples inhabiting the barren landscape (Galeano, 2009). Placida is the mother to four children and has been living in Sucre, the former capital of Bolivia, for twelve years. Placida's story, together with the stories of the 13 other women participating in this research, builds the starting and end point of this thesis, its inspiration as well as its outcome.

> My name is Placida, and I am from the community Yaretas in Potosí. Like everyone, I lived with my parents, who had a very conservative ideology. My parents never let me play with boys, not even with my cousins. Instead, girls had to stay with their mothers at home and help them to prepare food from a very young age while the boys were allowed to get together and play with their friends. I attended school in my community until the third grade, while my younger brothers attended until 5th and 6th grade. Besides school, I had to take care of our sheep and goats – my parents were not interested in my education. For that reason, I left for the city where I met my partner. Today I am married and have four children. At first, marriage is beautiful, but later problems come up and we women are the ones who carry the worst part of them with our children. At the same time, we cannot separate anymore as our children would suffer. In the city I started to attend an alphabetization course where I continue my education. My hope is that here in the city my children will get a good education so that they won't be like me or their father – as parents we want them to study. I really wish my community had everything, so I'd be able to move back and live there in tranquillity. I still return to my land with my children regularly as my parents are still alive, so my children can learn and share our customs with their family.

This story is part of a larger collective story, shared by most of the research participants as well as many of their peers. It is a story inherently different from my own, which tells about a carefree life in what we know as the Global North, of a privileged white woman born into a privileged family. It is also a story often obscured behind statistics and generalizations accompanied by stereotypes and judgements. In

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[12] As preferred by the research participants, I use the women's real first name and their real community of origin.

an attempt to question the dominant practices of knowledge production, with this thesis I aimed at bringing the research participants to the forefront and this way support the building of alternative local narratives – an endeavour that proved highly difficult given the necessity of basing this thesis on theory. With this struggle at its core, this chapter will first take a closer look at the coloniality of knowledge production from a feminist perspective and following explore how knowledge production can be decolonized by using an Indigenous research paradigm.

2.1 The coloniality of knowledge production

Voices like those of Placida have been excluded from the hegemonic Eurocentric discourse for centuries by a system known as the *coloniality of knowledge production,* both due to her ethnicity and her gender. Therefore, in this section first the concept of the coloniality of knowledge production will be explained in more detail, followed by a discussion on the *depatriarchalization* of knowledge production which constitutes a central claim of decolonial feminisms.

2.1.1 Coloniality and knowledge production

Basis for the coloniality of knowledge production is the assumption that colonialism did not end with the independence of the colonies but rather evolved into global or neo-colonialism. This new, more subtle version is also known as *coloniality* (Grosfoguel, 2007:219) or as *internal colonialism,* a term preferred by many decolonial feminists (e.g. Paredes, 2017; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012) ad reproduces itself through various domains both on the institutional and individual level, ranging from the educational system to the household and "continues (…) to structure the power relations within the former colonies and between the metropolis and the former colonies" (Mendoza, 2020:49).

Essential for the persistence of colonialism is a global, Eurocentric system of power based on the racialization of peoples, which has been governing and shaping the world like little other factors since the formal installation of colonialism. Known as the *coloniality of power,* a term coined by the Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano (1992:201), this system can be understood as the patterns of power outlasting colonialism which continue to shape culture, labour, and relations between individuals as well as their community in a way that positions the former colonizer – or metropolitan actors – in a superior position (Mendoza, 2016:15). Among others, this power establishes itself through a hegemonic system of knowledge production that renders the knowledges of Indigenous, afro-descendant, poor and other marginalized peoples as inferior and 'localized', while granting dominant, Eurocentric knowledge systems the status of universality (Quijano, 1992; Lander, 2000). Redefined by Edgardo

Lander, the systematic oppression of certain epistemologies is also known as the coloniality of knowledge production (Lander, 2000).

During the times of formal colonialism, the colonization of knowledge production was used as a strategic tool to subordinate Indigenous peoples. Arguing that "their languages and modes of thought were inadequate", the capability of Indigenous peoples' to create knowledge and the existence of local knowledge systems were negated and colonial knowledge systems were imposed, bringing disorder to Indigenous communities, "disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:29). Simultaneously, Indigenous knowledge was appropriated by the oppressor. This mentality has enabled Eurocentric knowledge systems to spread and dominate, gradually driving precolonial knowledge systems towards extinction.

One of the spaces in which the coloniality of knowledge production becomes particularly visible is academia. According to Grosfoguel (Decolonialgroup, 2013), the university as an institution is itself inherently colonial, having for centuries promoted a restricted view of what constitutes knowledge and research. At the same time, the knowledges of Indigenous peoples have become "[commodities] of colonial exploitation as other natural resources" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:62). As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012:104) depicts it:

> Ideas run, like rivers, from the south to the north and are transformed into tributaries in major waves of thought. But just as in the global market for material goods, ideas leave the country converted into raw material, which become regurgitated and jumbled in the final product.

In addition, access to knowledge production remains restricted. Although the number of Indigenous and afro-descendant scholars in academia is increasing, it is still scholars located in the metropolitan world who are dominating academia – including fields such as decolonial studies (Mendoza, 2020:43). After all, scholars who adhere to the principles of conventional academic research and conduct research about Indigenous knowledge (IK) in an objective and distanced way have much greater chances to succeed in their academic career. In contrast, Indigenous researchers for whom IK is not merely a research object but informs their entire life, who they are and how they think, and who assume a truly decolonial position to research face severe obstacles in getting their work published and acknowledged (Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2016:151). Consequently, Indigenous scholars see themselves confronted with the dilemma of whether to adapt IK to dominant research standards and become part of a colonial institution, or to preserve their epistemology and remain in the margins.

At the same time education – both at the university and school level – has historically been used as a tool to alienate peoples from their origin. According to Tuhiwai Smith

(2012:69) schools "were established as an essential part of the colonizing process, a bastion of civilization and a sign that a colony and its settlers had 'grown up'" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:69). Today, many Indigenous researchers struggle to reconcile their position as researchers and as parts of an Indigenous community (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai, Smith, 2012; Kovach, 2009).

The way knowledge is produced – excluding certain marginalized streams of knowledge production – is predominantly colonial. This coloniality not only informs how and which narratives are constructed but also by whom and based on which epistemologies. One way to counter this system and dismantle the colonial structures upholding it, is to decolonize knowledge production.

2.1.2 Decolonization and depatriarchalization

First anti-, or decolonial struggles in Abya Yala date back to the days of the colonization of the continent in 1492. Since then, activists and intellectuals have been resisting the power system dictating the economic, political and social order of the continent as well as knowledge production. However, it was not until the 1990's that decolonial theory found its way into academia. Established by the modernity/coloniality group, the study of decoloniality was a response to the works of postcolonial scholars focused mainly on India and Asia, and an attempt to create an archive of anticolonial writings in Latin America (Mendoza, 2015:2). Inspired by the works of Quijano, the group set out to explore the interdependent relations between coloniality, modernity and capitalism and their ongoing impact on people both in the colonial and metropolitan world (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:8) bringing about what is today known as the decolonial turn (Grosfoguel, 2007).

As Placida's story already suggests, the lives and experiences of my research participants are however not only shaped by colonialism, racism and capitalism, but also by a strictly patriarchal system. In the families of the women, men – be it the brother, father or husband – are the uncontested heads of family who not only have decision-making power in matters regarding the whole family but also what we'd perceive as personal issues of women and girls. Therefore, to fully understand the lived experiences of the women, an analysis of the intersection of race, class and gender is needed. In the eyes of many scholars, conventional decolonial thought however does not offer the tools necessary for such an analysis (Lugones, 2010; Mendoza, 2015; Vergés, 2021). Thus, decolonial feminisms are needed.

More specifically, decolonial feminists condemn the simplistic understanding of gender and sexuality as well as the lack of recognition of the role gender plays in the complex power relations sustaining coloniality. Although most decolonial scholars recognize gender as a constitutive part of the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal world-system and engage in thorough discussions on the topic (e.g. Grosfoguel, 2007:217), in the works of many conventional decolonial thinkers, gender

is understood "only in terms of sexual access to women" (Lugones, 2010:745). According to decolonial feminists, it is only by understanding the profound interrelatedness of race, sexuality, and gender that decolonization can be achieved (Curiel, 2017:43).

While conventional decolonial thinkers are often criticised for being located in the metropolitan world (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012), decolonial feminisms have mostly been developed by colonial women in the colonial world. According to Vergés (2021:10), decolonial feminisms often continue previous women's struggles by reactivating their memory, further developing their practices and theories. Rather than being a 'new' movement, "[d]ecolonial feminisms draw on the theories and practices that women have forged over time in anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial struggles" (Vergés, 2021:24).

Two key concepts decolonial feminisms draw on are patriarchy and gender. While patriarchy can be understood as the system used to subordinate women – just like colonialism was used to subordinate Indigenous peoples – gender is the category by which the subject of subordination is defined.

More specifically, Bolivian feminist Julieta Paredes (2017:5) defines patriarchy as "the system of all oppressions, of all exploitations, of all violences and discriminations that humanity (women, men and intersexual persons) and nature suffer from, constructed historically over the sexualized bodies of women". Executed through social, political, economic and cultural institutions and processes (Aguinaga et al., 2013:49), patriarchy functioned as a vehicle for the installation of colonialism but has been largely ignored in the highly masculinized history of colonialism and its analysis (Galindo, 2020:300). Patriarchy is also core to the extractivist worldview in which everything, from natural resources to a women's body, is monetized and thus necessary for maintaining a capitalist world order (Grosfoguel, 2016:139). As Segato (2016) emphasizes, patriarchy not only targets women but is moreover based on a heteronormative worldview, and thus also a system of homophobia. Highlighting the parallels between colonialism and patriarchy, Paredes (2017:7) compares the colonial invasion with sexual violence as acts of forceful penetration.

Just as colonialism took on different forms depending on the time and place, patriarchy appears in different versions too. Vergés (2021:71) distinguishes between conservative and liberal patriarchies which differ in their intensity and means of control, but ultimately pursue the same goal. However, it is important to make a distinction between patriarchy as a system, and *machismo* as misogynist, sexist attitudes or behavioural patterns of individuals. In this regard Curiel (CICODE UGR, 2017) argues that Indigenous men cannot be the protagonists of patriarchy as they do not have any access to colonial and patriarchal institutions. Instead, Indigenous men have embodied *machista* attitudes shaping their behaviour towards women and people not fitting into the heteronormative standard.

Given the pivotal role of patriarchy for the maintenance of colonialism, dismantling the patriarchal structures infecting institutions as well as mindsets is a prerequisite for the project of decolonization – and vice versa (Paredes, 2017:7). However, following Curiel's distinction between patriarchy and machismo, one could argue that depatriarchalization rather targets the institutional than the individual level.

Moving on to the second key concept, Lugones, drawing on the works of Oyewumi (1997), proposes the concept of the *coloniality of gender* to describe the nexus between race, capitalism, colonialism and gender, and decolonial feminisms as means to overcome coloniality (Lugones, 2010:745, 747). According to Lugones (2010:743, 744), likewise the concept of race, the system of gender was forcefully imposed on Indigenous peoples through the processes of colonization, eliminating local identities and subjugating them to Eurocentric norms and categories. One strategy to achieve this was the "civilizing mission", the conversion of Indigenous peoples to Christianity used to legitimize the "brutal access to people's bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual violation, control of reproduction, and systematic terror" (ibid). Imposing the Eurocentric gender system and the roles it brought along on Indigenous peoples was used as a tool to detach peoples from their community and cosmovision and dismantle their identities through controlling their reproductive and sexual practices (ibid:745). Against the epistemologies of Indigenous peoples based on the principle of duality and complementarity, a dichotomous logic dividing society into men and women as binary, opposed categories was imposed and has been constructing societies ever since (Lugones, 2010:748). According to Paredes (2017:4), gender functions as "the jail which patriarchy constructs around the bodies of men, the bodies of women and intersexual persons" and thus considers the elimination of these jails, the elimination of the concept of gender as a whole as the desirable outcome of communitarian feminism, a form of decolonial feminism common in Abya Yala.

As Quijano (1992:225, 226) argues, due to the distorted history produced by coloniality, people in Abya Yala have embodied European characteristics and habits to a degree that most are not able to see the 'real' image of what constitutes them anymore. This also applies to the imposition of the new gender model which, according to Vega (2013:162), has led to a reorganisation of the family to a nuclear, patriarchal family in which women are assigned the tasks of reproductive work, defined on base of these new gender roles commonly perceived as traditional nowadays (Vega, 2013:162). This also reflects in the life stories of the research participants whose communities consider the patriarchal structures they are built upon as heritage of their ancestors and in standing in stark contrast to the city where many of the behaviours and customs of rural communities are denounced.

Although other decolonial feminists share Lugone's concern that conventional decolonial theory does not take into account gender sufficiently, the concept of the

coloniality of gender is highly debated. Many Indigenous feminists such as Rita Segato (2016:92) critique that Lugones' analysis denies the fact that many pre-colonial Indigenous societies in Abya Yala were built on clear definitions of gender and patriarchal systems although most do acknowledge that the intensity of pre-colonial patriarchies was rather low and only became strictly hierarchical when the gender logic of the colonizers were imposed on them. In this context Mendoza (2015:18, 19) fundamentally disagrees with Vega (2013), arguing that in the Andean region precolonial families were already structured around the heterosexual couple assigned clear gender roles. However, the relations between women and men were more egalitarian and based on horizontal systems of complementarity instead of vertical hierarchies characterized by domination. Thus, the genders were not so much seen as opposing but complementing each other. According to Segato (2016:92), it was the existence of such low-intensity patriarchies which made the imposition of the hierarchical Eurocentric gender system and patriarchy possible and thus paved the way for the colonization of the region. Through the project of modernization, the complementary character of gender relations and the status of women within society were however weakened, although recent political discussions, e.g., in Bolivia, have revived the discussion on the issue (Mendoza, 2015:19).

A more nuanced description of how the Eurocentric conceptualization of gender permeated the relationships between men and women in the colonies is given by the Bolivian feminist activist Maria Galindo (2020:301, 302) who brings together the argumentation of feminists such as Lugones (2010) and those opposing her deterministic view. More specifically, Galindo distinguishes between four modes: 1) the imposition of Spanish gender norms on Spanish women residing in the colonies, 2) the integration of precolonial gender systems into the colonial system aimed at the domination of Indigenous women, 3) the imposition of the Spanish gender system on Indigenous people, and 4) the appropriation of Spanish patriarchal systems by Indigenous populations. Following her rationale, we can see that the gender system regulating Bolivian society today is a complex and unique mixture of different patriarchies tailored to serve the colonizers and adopted by Indigenous men.

Due to the persistence of highly hierarchical patriarchies in colonial societies today, decolonial feminists' critique does not only target metropolitan actors but also their own communities. Therefore, decolonial feminists are often perceived as traitors of their own peoples weakening anticolonial struggles instead of joining forces against the oppressor (Galindo, 2020:301). Local feminists are constantly being accused of "dividing the movement while it is under the fire of repression", stigmatizing their brothers and "acting like Western women", and prompted to be loyal (Vergés, 2021:64). This often forces women to choose whether to position themselves as Indigenous or women (Cumes, 2012). Despite these internal conflicts and struggles, acknowledging the fact that Andean societies were already patriarchal prior to the

colonization is important to avoid what Galindo (2020:309) calls *relative decolonization;* an incomplete decolonization that upholds patriarchy.

Although decolonial feminists do not agree to what extent the concept of gender has existed prior to colonization, they acknowledge that the European gender system has had profound effects on the colonized world. Therefore, regardless of whether the concepts of gender and patriarchy existed in precolonial communities, Lugones' concept of coloniality of gender constitutes a useful tool to examine contemporary issues such as femicides or gender-based violence in Abya Yala (Mendoza, 2015:18) as it "situates gender in relation to the genocidal logic of the coloniality of power" (ibid:20). Moreover, the question of the origin of patriarchy should not be given too much attention as decolonial feminisms enable the opposition of all forms of patriarchy, including pre-colonial ones (Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017:206). In this regard, it is crucial to acknowledge that "indigenous cultures [are] dynamic practices that are in need of re-invention rather than offering a return to an idealized past" (Schiwy, 2007:272). On a similar note, Lugones (2010:743) talks about decolonial societies as *non-modern,* highlighting that decolonization does not mean to return to a *pre-modern* state. Following this line of argumentation, questioning presumably traditional conceptualizations of gender is a part of the process of decolonization. Vergés (2021:31) moreover argues that gender is "a historical and cultural category" that changes over time, rather than being a fixed category.

The assumption that cultures change also opens up the possibility for decolonial feminists to position themselves against the heteronormativism inherent to many decolonial movements and challenge the notion of tradition often used to assert populist *machismo* agendas (Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017:209). As Paredes (2017:7, own translation) summarizes:

> When we talk about decolonization today it means to question, among others, the mandatory heterosexuality, denounce the violence against women as a machista practice, question the penalization of abortion, obligatory and arranged marriage, the monogamy of women and the invisibilization of lesbians.

Delving deeper into the essence of decolonial feminisms, in addition to their criticism of conventional decolonial thought they are also highly critical of mainstream feminism, or civilizational feminism (Vergés, 2021), which is built around the experiences of white women, ignorant of the intersection of gender with race or class, and thus not representative of marginalized women (Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017:205; Vergés 2021). One core criticism is that mainstream feminism is based upon a binary conception of gender which stands in stark contrast to most Indigenous epistemologies. Reluctant to acknowledge the epistemological differences, mainstream feminists' theories are built around their own needs and experiences and imposed in a top-down manner on other women (Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017:205).

Already in the early days of colonialism the behaviour of Indigenous women used to be explained through a comparison with white women. Travellers' stories for example commonly viewed local women through the role of European women, using their own value systems and gender systems as a benchmark (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:9). Such an approach to feminism, Vergés (2021:18) claims, is inherently racist:

> If feminism remains based on the division between women and men, (...) but does not analyze how slavery, colonialism, and imperialism affect this division - nor how Europe imposes its conception of the division between women and men on the peoples it colonizes or how this division creates others - then this feminism is racist.

As civilizational and decolonial feminisms have emerged from different historical settings, it also has to be emphasized that the latter is not a derivation of the former but a self-standing movement. Looking at the status of women in different regions of the world throughout history, while during the Middle Ages women in Europe holding oral knowledge were burnt for being witches – something Grosfoguel (2015) describes as an extreme form of epistemicide – women in the Andean region lived in "parallel systems" where they were considered almost equal to men (Paredes, 2017:6). Thus, the origins of different forms of feminism stand in stark contrast to each other.

Additionally, decolonial and mainstream feminisms do not pursue the same goal: While mainstream feminists, fighting mainly against patriarchy, aim at reforming their social structures towards equality, the fight of Indigenous women is much broader, focused primarily on decolonization of which depatriarchalization is only one part (Grey, 2004:10). As Grey (ibid:19) puts it: "For Aboriginal women, gender is one aspect of a larger struggle whose ultimate goal lies in the achievement of healing, balance and the reclamation of what was stolen, altered or co-opted through colonialism." Vergés (2021:83) adds that "[f]or racialized women, it is not about filling a void, but about finding the words to breathe life into that which has been condemned to non-existence, worlds that have been cast out of humanity". Decolonial feminists therefore act "from a standpoint that presumes *decolonisation* (not feminism) as the central political project" (Grande, 2003:329), aiming at freeing themselves from all Western traits (Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017:200).

In contrast to that, civilizational feminists are commonly considered to be part of the colonial project, driving paternalistic discourses further marginalizing colonial women, coating the term feminism with a rather negative connotation. According to Vergés (2021:12), civilizational feminists are "active accomplices of the racial capitalist order" who "do not hesitate to support imperialist intervention policies" that try to convince women that they are "underdeveloped", that they are not able to exercise their freedom nor rights and will only succeed to "develop" following the example of the metropolitan world (ibid:14). Colonial women, often reduced to their role within

the household, are denied their capability to think and theorize (Cumes, 2012). By advocating for "some very fundamental Western European world views, value systems and attitudes towards the Other", mainstream feminism thus does not represent marginalized women nor their needs (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:45).

As it becomes clear, not only the historical roots and development over time but also the objectives different feminisms fight for differ greatly, highlighting the importance of localized feminisms. While due to these issues some decolonial thinkers reject any collaboration with mainstream feminists or even the use of the word feminism, Galindo (2020:290, 291) stresses the importance of joining forces as ultimately all feminisms pursue the goal of depatriarchalization in one form or another. However, acknowledging the multiplicity of feminisms, she emphasizes that no feminism can claim universality (Galindo, 2020:313). At the same time, decolonial feminists emphasize the need for collaboration between colonial peoples (Paredes, 2017).

In a similar vein with the project of decolonization, decolonial feminism is more than a merely theoretical approach; it is also a practical task, a "critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social" (Lugones, 2010:746). In contrast to mainstream scholarships, in decolonial research paradigms theory cannot be separated from practice as they both are needed to pursue transformative social change (Curiel, 2017:42). In the words of Lugones (2010:755): "The theoretical here is immediately practical". In this regard, Galindo (2020:313) criticises what she calls ideological feminisms – merely theoretical thinking produced in academia constructed upon abstract language and a sophisticated jargon that can only be understood by scholars – and instead calls for intuitive feminism as the natural practice of every woman engaging in depatriarchal and decolonial socio-political practices. Decolonial feminisms are only legitimate if they are actively put into practice and not only enjoyed by a small intellectual elite. This becomes evident as I realize the value of this thesis which lies in the practical implications of its outcome; both in the storytelling sessions and the potential practical applicability to further research.

At the same time, the roots of decolonial feminisms as theories lie in the lived experiences and struggles of colonial women and thus, while Lugones might have been the first to name or write down the concept of the coloniality of gender, on the ground women had been organizing and fighting against it for centuries already (CICODE UGR, 2017). Thus, decolonial feminisms are rather collective endeavours than the work of individual scholars: "One does not resist the coloniality of gender alone (...). Communities rather than individuals enable the doing" (Lugones, 2010:754).

2.2 Decolonizing knowledge production

The exclusion of certain populations such as the women participating in this study from knowledge production has had the effect that universalist policies and systems imposed on them through education or health care might not respond to their epistemologies nor needs. Having discussed what the coloniality of knowledge production is and how decolonial feminism resists it, this chapter examine in more detail how knowledge production can be decolonized by employing Indigenous research paradigms. Although among decolonial thinkers the role of academia is highly debated, with Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) for example being rather sceptical of the utility of academic research for the project of decolonization, there has been a growing body of Indigenous researchers who have found their way into the academic world through the establishment of Indigenous research paradigms. To understand what makes an Indigenous research paradigm, following Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and research methods are discussed. Although most of the authors this chapter is based on are rather explicit in differing between Indigenous and what they call dominant research paradigms, as will be discussed later, I do not see this thesis situated in any exclusive research paradigm but an attempt to build a bridge between paradigms.

2.2.1 Indigenous epistemologies

To understand why Indigenous researchers advocate for building Indigenous research paradigms, it helps to start with one of the most fundamental questions in research: What is *truth*? Indigenous research paradigms contest the premise that there only exists one truth which can be discovered through science, proposing that there does not exist such a thing as a single fixed truth. Rather, truths are built through the relationships a person shares with their surroundings, be it their community, the environment or the cosmos, and therefore always dependent on the context (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). According to Wilson (2008:73), "an object or thing is not as important as one's relationship to it" meaning that an object or idea changes its purpose and meaning depending on who uses or engages with it and for what reason. Indigenous ontologies are heavily relational and thus very closely linked to epistemologies as the way we *come to know* is the relationship we form with somebody or something, which at the same time constitutes what we understand as *being the truth* (Wilson, 2008). As knowledges, truths or realities can only come to be through relationships, only someone who is connected to other beings can know (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014:223).

Considering that truths are viewed as the result of relationships dependent on the context, it becomes evident that when conducting Indigenous research, the different realities ascribed to objects or ideas need to be uncovered – a process that requires in-depth knowledge of the context. Among others, it is necessary to

understand the local language and its hidden meanings, social norms and protocols and the relationships between community members as well as with their environment to correctly interpret and understand learnings gathered through Indigenous research (Wilson, 2008).

Looking more closely at the research context, according to Alfaro (2011:2166) in the Andean cosmovision an individual cannot exist without their community in the broader sense, encompassing not only other people but also plants, animals and land. Only through relationships *camac,* the vital power keeping the universe going and in balance, can be achieved. This stands in stark contrast to the individualistic and paternalistic project of modernity which needs to be overcome to achieve a life in balance and harmony and make way for a community grounded in reciprocal relationships based on horizontal complementarity (ibid).

Although epistemologies between Indigenous peoples differ and are not to be regarded as one homogenous category, there are certain epistemological beliefs most Indigenous communities share. One of them is the importance of relations in the creation of knowledge and, closely linked to this and of great importance for this thesis, the value of reciprocity. Indigenous epistemologies from peoples all over the world, ranging from Māori (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) to Cree (Wilson, 2008), and Musqueam (Kovach, 2009) to Aymara (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012) peoples, consider reciprocity a core value and, as Segato (2016) argues, an alternative to materialistic value systems. In the Andes, reciprocity has for centuries been a guiding principle, most importantly in agricultural production – a system also known as *ayni* (Ravindran, 2015:323). Reflecting upon the role of reciprocity in research, Baskin (2005:179), herself of Mi'kmaq and Celtic Nations, argues that "[a]ny research endeavour must thus recognize and work within relationships among participants and researcher" of a reciprocal nature, meaning that all actors give and receive, making the research beneficial and purposeful for both the researcher and the participants.

Given the necessity of engaging in relationships in order to gain knowledge, Indigenous cosmovisions presume that knowledge cannot be created in isolation. Moreover, knowledge cannot be *discovered* by someone, but only *revealed* or *created* through relationships (Drawson et al., 2017:12). This differentiation becomes highly relevant in the context of decolonization as it challenges the concept of 'discovery' as in the 'discovery' of the Americas, as in anthropological studies 'discovering' the habits of Indigenous Peoples, or as in 'discovering' gold. Rather, Indigenous epistemologies build on the premise that knowledge is something inherent to our world, something we can learn from our ancestors or our environment, but not discover. Thus, Indigenous scholars such as Datta (2018b:8) criticize the notion of 'discovery' in research, claiming that it deprives communities of the ownership of

knowledge, and instead promote the idea that knowledge can only be learned, and that this learning must be the result of respectful relationships.

From this we can deduce that Indigenous epistemologies assume that research cannot be neutral nor objective and negate the existence of a 'single point of view' from which a universal truth can be observed. This also reflects in the fundamentally different understanding of the concepts of time and space on which Indigenous epistemologies are based: While regarded as one in many Indigenous epistemologies, time and space are strictly separated in most metropolitan epistemologies. In consequence, in dominant research the separate existences of time and space enable the existence of *distance*. Being able to distance oneself or something makes it possible to conduct objective and neutral research as it facilitates investigating a matter from the outside (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:58). Thus, dominant research "assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold (…) and (…) make sense of the world", promoting "a sense of innate superiority and an overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of indigenous peoples – spiritually, intellectually, socially and economically" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:58) – something Curiel (2015:51) calls the "masculine logic" of dominant research paradigms. According to Grosfoguel (2007:213), in such hegemonic knowledge systems

> the subject that speaks is always hidden, concealed, erased from the analysis (…) [producing] a myth about a Truthful universal knowledge that covers up, that is, conceals who is speaking as well as the geo-political and body-political epistemic location in the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks. (Grosfoguel, 2007:213)

Thus, it could be argued that the principles of many metropolitan, dominant research paradigms do not only conflict with the epistemological fundament of Indigenous cosmovisions but they also categorically rule out the existence of multiple and local knowledge systems and truths, excluding colonial peoples from knowledge production. Due to the contradictions between Indigenous and dominant conceptions of truth and knowledge as well as the dark history of colonialism and the production of knowledge, according to most Indigenous scholars, Indigenous research must therefore build on Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies (Walter and Suina, 2018:234).

With all this in mind, it becomes clear that Indigenous research must be about much more than studying a certain phenomenon, employing certain methodologies or finding alternative solutions to issues: It is a protest against epistemic violence and oppressive practices of academia and a struggle to give voice to marginalized peoples. It brings Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies to the front and challenges hegemonic forms of knowledge production. More specifically, it is based on the

assumption that knowledge can only be created through relationships, promoting respectful, non-hierarchical relationships between all stakeholders involved in research, and giving full credit to research participants as knowledge holders. It moreover concentrates on the personal, lived experience of Indigenous peoples as social beings instead of abstractions of experiences (Wilson, 2008:60).

In Summary, Indigenous research is a tool to "decolonize, rebalance power, and provide healing" (Drawson et al., 2017:12) and part of the struggle for self-determination, development, recovery and survival (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:120). According to Tuhiwai Smith (2012:10), in order to achieve this rather ambitious goal, research must always address the following questions: "Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:10). In order to answer these questions, an Indigenous methodology must inform the research design.

2.2.2 Indigenous research methodologies

Research on Indigenous Peoples has historically served to justify the oppression of Indigenous Peoples, dehumanizing and objectifying them, dissecting their lives isolated from their context. Decolonizing research is not only essential to build just and respectful research paradigms but also to enable Indigenous Peoples to heal, to rebuild and strengthen their knowledge systems and to foster their right to self-determination (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). It is a fight for epistemic justice, "a struggle that demands equality between knowledges and contests the order of knowledge imposed by the West" (Vergés. 2021:13).

One integral part of this endeavour is the use of Indigenous methodologies which can help to expose the research process and ensure that "worldviews, perspectives, values and lived experiences" are central to the research (Walter and Suina, 2018:234). According to Tuhiwai Smith et al. (2016:140), "[m]ethodology can be viewed as the theory and study of the methods used in research to produce knowledge and make meaning in a given field or discipline of knowledge". It is the "interpretative link" between the theoretical approach underlying research, guiding how knowledge is defined, and the "practices of inquiry" used to create knowledge and learn. As Tuhiwai Smith et al. (2016:147) argue, methodologies are not merely applied in research but inform our every-day lives as they guide us in constructing our world view and systematically seeking knowledge, helping us to "unlock social discourse" and thus understanding the world we live in. Wilson (2008:14) agrees with this, stating that "[w]e cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it."

Although Indigenous methodologies might resemble certain conventional approaches such as qualitative methodologies (Kovach, 2009:30), they are not simply opposites or modifications of conventional research methodologies but separate,

independent systems (Walter and Suina, 2018:234). According to Kovach (2009:30), using non-Indigenous methodologies for Indigenous research can be problematic for two reasons: First, non-Indigenous research languages do not provide the necessary tools to make meaning and fully grasp an Indigenous epistemology. Second, methodologies are always built on knowledge which is always political and cultural; "tribal knowledge is not Western knowledge" (ibid). Thus, although qualitative research is of an interpretative nature too and, in contrast to quantitative research, acknowledges subjectivity as a constant factor, it still emanates from a different epistemological standpoint (ibid). Moreover, Indigenous methodologies go far beyond linking theory and research methods; they also provide a framework for integrating "cultural protocols, values and behaviours" as natural elements into research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:15). According to Kovach (2009:35), tribal-centred methodologies should for example always have "a strong narrative component". As Lugones (2010:755) puts it, methodologies have to "work with our lives".

As Indigenous peoples are not a homogenous group, there exist multiple IKSs and Indigenous methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2016:144). Consistent with the overall goal of Indigenous research, Indigenous methodologies do not merely enable research but advance the project of decolonization and self-determination, fostering inclusion and recognition in academia and an epistemological rethinking (Drawson et al., 2017:12). Thus, Indigenous methodologies have the potential to "bring to the centre of the research process marginalized voices subjected to exploitation and abuse through experiments and colonizing research" (Chilisa, Tsheko, 2014:222) and can help to "transform qualitative research from a deficit-based perspective to a resilience perspective" (Drawson et al., 2017:13).

Switching to a resilience perspective is especially important in the field of health research which has been predominantly focused on negative health outcomes instead of focusing on the potential of IK (Wilson, 2008:209). In the context of sexual and reproductive health, deficit-theorizing has for example been a great issue in HIV prevention literature which focuses mostly on the inability of people to prevent the spread of HIV (Chilisa, Tsheko, 2014:226). Indigenous methodologies on the contrary consider the potential of IK as well as the positive implications of research on the community (Drawson et al., 2017:15). Thus, also the question that inform research as well as the style used to convey knowledge commonly deviate from conventional research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:41).

Based on Indigenous epistemologies and conceptualizations of knowledge creation, Indigenous methodologies moreover build on the principles of collaboration and participation requiring the active involvement of the research community as co-designers. While the involvement of participants into research is typical for many qualitative approaches such as participatory action research too, in Indigenous

research the 'insider' nature of the researcher often changes the dynamics and relations between the different actors (Kovach, 2009).

Indigenous epistemologies heavily inform Indigenous methodologies, providing not only guidance for choosing the methods for creating and presenting knowledge but also an ethical framework. Thus, it could be argued that the most – if not only – ethical and legitimate way of conducting Indigenous research is to use an Indigenous methodology tailored to the cosmovision and epistemology of the research participants. At the same time, I acknowledge that many researchers have conducted high quality research with Indigenous peoples using a non-Indigenous research paradigm. However, the question remains whether Indigenous methodologies are to be exclusively used by Indigenous researchers or if non-Indigenous researchers such as myself have a mandate to use them too; a question that will be discussed in more detail following the next section on the specific methods used in Indigenous research.

2.2.3 Indigenous research methods

Key for developing an Indigenous methodology is the right choice of methods. According to Datta (2018a:36), "research methods in Indigenous research serve to preserve Indigenous voices, build resistance to dominant discourses, create political integrity, and most importantly, perhaps, strengthen the community." Methods from dominant research paradigms often do not serve this purpose and rather contribute to the reinforcement of power hierarchies. Interviews, for example, have been criticized for drawing too much attention to the individual instead of the community's voice, reflecting the self-centred, individualistic character of metropolitan societies. Moreover, in many interview situations the power to ask questions and decide on the direction lies with the interviewer who extracts knowledge from the interviewee who is reduced to the position of a knowledge provider (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014:223). Nevertheless, Wilson (2008:39) argues that "as long as the methods fit the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the Indigenous paradigm, they can be borrowed from other suitable research paradigms" too. Tuhiwai Smith (2012:41) agrees, arguing against the categorical rejection of "Western" research methods, emphasising however that methods must be used from Indigenous perspectives and for the purposes of the research community. As a result, it can be differentiated between two different types of methods used in Indigenous research: 'strictly Indigenous' methods that are grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and practises particular for a peoples; and methods 'borrowed' from other research paradigms that have been adapted to the needs of the research community. Commonly, methods from both Indigenous and

non-Indigenous research paradigms are used, an approach also known as mixed methods[13] (e.g. Botha, 2012; Hall et al., 2015).

Starting with the mixed methods approach, or 'blended' methods, according to Hall et al (2015:9), employing "Western" research methods can be necessary to achieve certain research objectives as well as to get one's work acknowledged within academia. Chilisa and Tsheko (2014:223) argue that this approach enables the building of "[webs] of relationships" that provide fertile ground for respectful and harmonious research that appreciates diversity and allows for cooperation and mutual learning, based on a continuous exchange of knowledge and knowledge systems between marginalised and dominant cultures (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014:224). Consequently, this approach supports the Indigenous understanding of knowledge as being based on relationships and might facilitate reconciliation between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous researchers. Datta (2018a:41) stresses the potential of blending Western and Indigenous research methods, arguing that Indigenous peoples do not categorically reject conventional research tools but want to use them in a beneficiary, culturally appropriate way in order to avoid the risk of oppression and appropriation of knowledge, and foster mutual learning. When combining methods, the methodology used should therefore be respectful of the ontology and epistemology of the research community. Moreover, results from analyses conducted with non-Indigenous methods should still pass "through a cultural lens with Elders and Knowledge Keepers" for legitimization (Hall et al., 2015:9).

Nevertheless, while many Indigenous researchers resort to non-Indigenous research methods, it is often argued that using ways to make meaning from dominant research paradigms reinforces the "prioritization of Western ways of knowing" and the superior status of dominant epistemologies (Drawson et al., 2017:13). Baskin (2005:180) critiques that Indigenous scholars are however commonly expected to use conventional methods to legitimize their research, leaving little space for Indigenous perspectives. Thus, most Indigenous scholars favour the use of Indigenous methods.

Indigenous methods of making meaning are often of an empirical nature but can also be "based on philosophical argument and logic", including the analysis of discourses and cultural constructs, which are not directly part of the observable world (Tuhiwai Smith, 2016:140) and closely linked to ceremony. The most prominent Indigenous research methods however revolve around oral narration and conversation, and the creation of textiles. Having persisted throughout colonialism, textile methods such as weaving (Schiwy, 2007) and narrative, or conversational methods (Drawson et al., 2017; Wilson 2008) are still being used within Indigenous communities to transmit knowledge and have also found their way into academia. Respective methods bear certain advantages over conventional research methods as

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[13]Not to be confused with mixed methods approach as combining qualitative and quantitative methods

they foster collective knowledge creation and sharing, and are commonly of a reciprocal nature. According to Chilisa and Tsheko (2014:223), they "reflect the ideal of equality among participants and emphasize building relationships and connectedness among people and with the environment". Conversational methods are moreover important in oral societies where "metaphorical sayings, stories, songs, and proverbs serve as the literature, words of wisdom, commentaries on events and behaviours, and socialization instruments" (ibid:226).

One of the most prominent Indigenous methods are talking circles which are commonly found in different Indigenous communities as the gathering in circles, be it for games, singing or simply socialising, is a widespread way of coming together. As the circle symbolises equality between members it allows for people of different status to come together as equals and enables each one to speak and be listened to with respect (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014:230, 231). Commonly, talking circles involve the use of a sacred object which gives the person holding it the right to talk, "[symbolizing] collective construction of knowledge and relations among group members" (ibid:231).

Another related method is story sharing or -telling which since long before colonial times has been an important way of expressing and storing IK. Storytelling reflects "the genuine and authentic experience of an individual, a team or community" and is a useful tool to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next (Datta, 2018a:36). Storytelling can happen in the form of songs, rituals or even artefacts (ibid.), or simply through spoken text. Wilson (2008:97, 98) distinguishes between three levels of storytelling: sacred stories that follow a certain structure and can only be told by an authorised storyteller; Indigenous legends following an educational goal; and personal experiences. Being a rather practical form of knowledge sharing and creation, it can also involve the comparison and interpretation of stories and is thus highly dependent on the storyteller (Datta, 2018a:37). In this regard, many Indigenous scholars using this method consider storytelling to be a method of creating and analysing knowledge simultaneously, rendering the application of data analysis methods unnecessary. Moreover, according to Schiwy (2007), "[s]torytelling and the embodied transmission of social memory has been associated (…) with indigenous women" while more conventional methods are often regarded as being of a masculine nature.

As storytelling is both a part of everyday life and research, it can enable Indigenous researchers to connect their communities' practises to their research. It ensures relational accountability between the listener and researcher, "incorporates both interpretation and analysis, has room for many explanations for the phenomena being researched, is a creative search for solutions, and is a political act of liberation and self-determination" (Baskin, 2005:180). Although using storytelling might position a researcher in the margins of research, Baskin (2005:172) emphasises that it

enables her to advance Aboriginal knowledges and challenge dominant research practises from an academic standpoint. While she enjoys her "space in the margins", the long-term goal of Indigenous research must however be to penetrate the "centre". This does not imply replacing other worldviews and epistemologies by rather having Eurocentric worldviews "move over" (ibid).

Conversational methods are more than merely methods to gain or gather knowledge congruent with Indigenous epistemologies – sharing stories is an inherently relational act. The same applies to methods evolving around crafting such as weaving, which likewise storytelling is considered to be a predominantly female act in many societies and can be an important part of decolonizing practises (Galindo, 2020). Calling the communitarian feminism she stands for also *feminismo artesanal,* feminism crafted by hand, Galindo (2020) emphasizes women's role in crafting feminism as well as society. On a similar note, Cusicanqui Rivera (2012) describes women in the project of decolonization as the creators of social fabric:

> [T]he feminine practice weaves the fabric of the intercultural through women's practices as producers, merchants, weavers, ritualists, and creators of languages and symbols capable of (...) establishing pacts of reciprocity and coexistence among different groups (...) complementing of the territorial homeland with a dynamic cultural fabric. (Cusicanqui Rivera, 2012:107)

Tuhiwai Smith (2012:34) further explains that in oral societies knowledge can be found in the "fabric of communities (...) stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people carried" which all constitute different systems of knowledge. Due to their incompatibility with dominant knowledge systems, these systems however have commonly been "reclassified as oral traditions rather than histories" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:34). Nevertheless, artisanal activities constitute important sources of knowledge and are at the same time important building blocks of decolonial societies.

As becomes evident, storytelling and crafting, both commonly associated with women, are important tools to create and share knowledge based on Indigenous epistemologies. However, as Kovach (2010:40) argues, it is not so much about the specific method but rather how the method interacts with the research paradigm and the worldviews of the research community that makes a research methodology Indigenous. In this regard it is important to keep in mind that decolonization is not synonymous with a return to the precolonial, but rather the establishment of a dynamic society in which different cultures and epistemologies come together and evolve. Thus, restricting the use to methods considered traditional, or precolonial might limit Indigenous research. Instead, methods should be appropriated, changed and adapted to suit an Indigenous research paradigm.

This opens up endless possibilities for researchers conducting Indigenous research to be creative (e.g., Willox et al., 2012). A good example for this are decolonial feminisms which use a great variety of methods to build knowledge. According to Vergés (2021:14), "[d]ecolonial feminist activists (...) have understood the need to develop their own modes of transmission and knowledge; through blogs, films, exhibitions, festivals, meetings, (...) circulating stories and texts, translating, publishing". However, the methods used must always be consistent with the "philosophical orientation identified in the research framework" and be tailored to the research community and be congruent with the ethical guidelines underpinning Indigenous research (Kovach, 2010:40).

2.2.4 Outsider researchers in Indigenous research

Last, in addition to epistemological, methodological and method-related considerations, the role of the researcher in Indigenous research needs to be scrutinised carefully – especially if the researcher, like in my case, is an outsider to the community, and not Indigenous.

Key to this discussion is the question whether non-Indigenous researchers have the mandate and the capacity to employ Indigenous research methodologies. Wilson (2008:132) argues that cultural appropriation by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers who are not authorized to use certain "cultural and spiritual practices", and "are guilty of inappropriately using and profiting from Indigenous knowledge" is a serious issue in research. Using Indigenous methodologies can thus be an act of hijacking the epistemological project of Indigenous researchers, and advance the coloniality of knowledge production through taking over and assimilating IK to Eurocentric research practises. At the same time, assimilating Indigenous concepts to dominant research paradigms can deprive these concepts of their radicality and political character, and decontextualize them (Grosfoguel, 2016:132). Consequently, the issue of legitimacy has to be discussed properly based on the voices and opinions of Indigenous scholars on the matter.

As in Indigenous epistemologies lived experiences are usually regarded as the most valuable source of knowledge, Curiel (2015:54) argues that people who have experienced certain struggles must naturally enjoy an "epistemic privilege" to study related issues. However, Curiel (ibid) emphasises that this does not categorically exclude 'outsiders' from respective research but imposes certain ethical rules on them. For example, the experiences of people have to be regarded as lived realities and not diminished to mere analytical categories. This is especially important in the light of the violent history of research in which the experiences of Indigenous peoples, especially women, have been commonly misused for academic success, interpreted through hegemonic methodologies and theories of, inter alia, mainstream feminism (Curiel, 2015:56), leaving the real knowledge producers and holders uncited

(Grosfoguel, 2016).[14] In this regard, marginalised research communities are often reduced to the role of producers of "raw material, experiences which are later appropriated by the north and returned as ready theories" (Grosfoguel, 2016:134) and stripped of their rights as knowledge holders. Thus, it is not only important to prioritise Indigenous researchers in conducting Indigenous research, but also to bring the research participants to the foreground.

One scholar who discusses this issue intensively is Datta (2018a:42) who supports allowing non-Indigenous researchers to use Indigenous methodologies and methods in order to empower the research participants, arguing that the use of Indigenous research tools can foster "relationships of trust" and engagement between the researcher and the participants. Thus, employing Indigenous methodologies can not only benefit the community but also the researcher who through this methodology is enabled to critically reflect on their own positionality and identity and undo the power hierarchy between themselves and research participants. As Datta (2018a:43) points out:

> Research (...) provided a great learning space where I as a researcher and participants became we. We (...) collectively decided each of our research steps, including what to do, how to do, who can do, and why we should do. Research became action for us, which was referred to as collective struggle for the community (Datta, 2018a:43).

However, referring to Kovach (2009), it remains unclear if non-Indigenous researchers *can* be capable of using Indigenous methodologies, given their lack of language skills and epistemological knowledge. In this regard, it might help to conceptualise Indigenous research as not one fixed category but a more fluid field with different intensities; while engaging in rituals, using a native language might stay out of reach of most non-Indigenous researchers, applying an ethical framework based on Indigenous epistemologies and using more informal methods might still be feasible.

As we can see, long and complex ethical debates forego Indigenous research. However, while suspicion against non-Indigenous researchers remains high, many Indigenous communities have engaged in fruitful, mutually beneficial research with non-Indigenous researchers (Datta, 2018 a). Thus, I would argue that the focus of ethical considerations should rather lie on *how* to conduct Indigenous research than *who* has the authority to conduct it. To come back to the concept of relationality, Wilson (2008:107) argues that ultimately the legitimacy of research depends on whether the researcher maintains relational accountability, meaning being accountable for the research and the relationships underlying it. This accountability regards the choice of research topic; the choice of methods or relationship building; the way learnings are interpreted; and how learnings are presented. Adhering to the

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[14] Grosfoguel (2016) and Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) heavily criticise scholars such as Mignolo and Quijano for writing their theories without citing the Indigenous people they have received that knowledge from.

principles of relational accountability thus requires careful planning of the entire research process, starting with the choice of topic which must not arise from the individual interest of a researcher but the needs of the community. Rather than being conducted *on* the community, research needs to be conducted *with* and *for* the community (Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2016:151). In order to achieve such research, it is essential to refrain from a "selective incorporation of ideas" and thus let the research participants influence the direction a study goes (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012:104).

When considering if the involvement of non-Indigenous researchers is beneficial, one has to remember that it will need more than the work of only Indigenous scholars to "break the monologues of western academics and to create alternative spaces for the production of knowledge based on other epistemic logics" (Mendoza, 2020:44) – decolonization and depatriarchalization can only be achieved in a collective endeavour. Moreover, resorting to the conceptualization of decolonization of de Sousa Santos (2018), decolonization is not merely the project of Indigenous but other marginalised peoples too, an inclusive concept ultimately affecting all societies. Thus, I conclude that it should be the responsibility of any researcher to adopt a decolonial approach but at the same time acknowledge the controversies of doing so using an Indigenous methodology.

3. BUILDING A FEMINIST DECOLONIAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

Having engaged in a discussion on what decolonial research is and how it can or should be carried out, it is now time to lay out my own research strategy. As I have come to understand, in order to conduct Indigenous research appropriately it has to be tailored to the epistemology and needs of the research community. Therefore, this chapter starts with a brief introduction of the context of this study from the standpoint of resistance. Following this, the ethical framework, research methods and tools used for analysing learnings are presented. Last, the weaknesses and potential conflict points of the methodology chosen are reflected upon, shedding light not only to the process of drafting this thesis but also internal processes driving me in conducting this research.

3.1 Histories of struggle and decolonization in Bolivia

What we today know as Bolivia used to be land inhabited by a variety of Indigenous peoples. The Bolivian Andes in which cities such as the capital La Paz, the former capital Sucre, or Potosí are located in, was part of the *Collasuyu*, the highland region of the Inca imperium known as the *Tawantinsuyu* (Pärssinen, 2021), but also home to other precolonial civilizations such as of Tiwanaku (Ravindran, 2015:323). Given the name Bolivia by the Spanish colonizers, it was officially renamed to *The Plurinational State of Bolivia* in 2009 by the first Indigenous president of the country Evo Morales who adopted a new constitution designed to represent an ethnically diverse country. While taught to use the name Bolivia in school, the research participants however still refer to their land as *Kay pacha[15]*, which, according to my research partner Mostazedo, can mean this or my land, or this world. Among decolonial activists such as Rivera Cusicanqui the term Collasuyu is often preferred.

Bolivia has a violent colonial history characterised by exploitation of both natural and human resources, violence and oppression. However, it also has a rich history of resistance. Already a few decades after the colonisation, first anticolonial resistance in the form of *Taki Onquoy* arose in the region, featuring two Indigenous women, Santa Maria and Maria Magdalena as figures central to the struggle (Millones, 2015; Millones, 2020). Since then, Indigenous people have constantly stood up against the colonial rule, with the most important uprisings taking place in 1780 and 1781 with Indigenous heroines such as Bartolina Sisa, Gregoria Apaza and Isidora Katari fighting side by side their famous male counterparts Tupac and Tomas Katari, not only against the colonial rule but the creeping erasure of Indigenous ways of living. Despite their defeat, resistance continued and culminated in the Bolivian War of

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[15] A concept central to Andean cosmovision, Kay pacha refers to the world humans inhabit and is complemented by the Uku pacha, the underworld, and Hanan pacha, the world of gods.

Independence in the beginning of the 19th century fought to a large extent by Indigenous people. However, independence did not bring the expected liberation of oppressed Indigenous populations but only shifted power to new elites, bringing little improvements for native populations. Thus, the struggle for real independence and decolonization continued (Dangl, 2019).

A next milestone was the election of the leftist Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) party in 1952. Supported by a majority of Indigenous people, the MNR launched a progressive agrarian reform which aimed to redistribute land to Indigenous communities – an endeavour that was only partially successful. Years of political upheaval, a series of repressive military dictatorships, and harsh neoliberal austerity measures in the late 20th century however slowed or reversed progress substantially, giving rise to powerful Indigenous movements such as the *Katarismo* and the more political *Indigenismo* (Dangl, 2019). After two major events in the early 21st century, the gas war in 2003, and the water war in 2000, resistance against (neo)colonial domination culminated in the election of the first Indigenous president Evo Morales in 2005 (Ranta, 2018).

Morales, who governed the country from 2006 to 2019, initiated his presidency as an outspoken critic of imperialism and global capitalism, advocating for an alternative approach to development, promising an inherently different style of governance (Ranta, 2018). Decolonization and interculturality became integral pillars of the new constitution adopted in 2009, and to secure their 'implementation' a vice ministry for decolonization was established (Ramírez Hita, 2014:763).

Despite great improvements in social and labour policies and a significant decrease in rates of poverty and inequality, the country however still relied on a neoliberal market system characterised by a heavy dependence on extractivist activities and the exploitation of natural resources[16], often in conflict with Indigenous communities and environmental protection (Krommes-Ravnsmed, 2018; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020). In addition, Morales' increasingly illiberal style of governance in the past years as well as the heavily contested last elections resulting in Morales' flight into exile have damaged his reputation (Wolff, 2020).

Despite the immense challenges and repression activists still face[17], social movements led by Indigenous people remain strong in Bolivia. Often seen as a continuation of the struggles of Indigenous leaders fighting colonial rule, movements thereby actively recall the spirit of former resistance. Commonly, movements are inspired by the fight of Tupac Katari who – so the legend tells – executed by the

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[16] Most of Bolivia's steep economic growth in the past two decades was the result of high commodity prices such as gas, hydrocarbons and minerals financing the social security system (Krommes-Ravnsmed, 2018)

[17] E.g. Indigenous activists organising against infrastructure projects in the national park TIPNIS (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020)

colonisers died with the words "I will come back and I will be millions" (Dangl, 2019). In this context, the Andean concept of *pachakuti* which can be translated to something like "the return of time" has been commonly used as a symbol of profound social transformation in the early 21st century highlighting the interconnectedness of Indigenous struggles and their cyclical nature (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020:321). Apart from symbols linking to former resistance, movements moreover continue to employ the tactics of their predecessors such as for example road blockades (Dangl, 2019).

Today, Indigenous movements are often concerned with environmental and territorial issues (e.g. Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020), and increasingly led by women, embodying also feminist demands. One such movement is communitarian feminism, a local type of decolonial feminism typical for the region. One of the most famous communitarian feminist groups in Bolivia is *Mujeres Creando Communidad,* founded by Maria Galindo and Julieta Paredes, located in the capital La Paz, which fights, among others, against GBV and the harsh working conditions of and discrimination against domestic workers, and is highly critical of the conceptualization of decolonization of the government (Galindo, 2020). Due to their critique of not only metropolitan elites but also patriarchal structures within their community, communitarian feminists enrich anti-colonial struggles with a demanding analytical lens.

Despite the century-long marginalisation Indigenous peoples in Bolivia have faced, according to the national census in 2012, about 60% of the population of Bolivia still identified as Indigenous, with the largest share identifying as Quechua (INE, 2012). However, defining indigeneity is a challenging task. While after the revolution in 1952 the government started to substitute the term 'Indigenous peoples' with the term *campesino/a,* literally 'peasant', shifting focus from race to class difference between peasants and landowners (Ramírez Hita, 2014:762), the concept of Indigenous identity was revived by Morales whose election victory was carried by political mobilisation and protagonism of Indigenous peoples.

Since then, indigeneity has been proudly reclaimed not only by rural but especially by urban populations and "become a highly visible cultural and political phenomenon", especially in urban spaces (Ravindran, 2015:321, 322). Today, being Indigenous does not require speaking an Indigenous language or living a peasant life anymore and is not synonymous with a precolonial, traditional or old-fashioned lifestyle in opposition to *modern* as commonly suggested by reductionist and racist discourses (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012:99). More than a matter of skin colour or clothing style, indigeneity for Rivera Cusicanqui (Os Mil Nomes de Gaia, 2015) means being watched by different stars than "occidental people", having a certain special bond to your environment and land. Thus, she argues, almost every Bolivian carries indigeneity inside of them and by reviving and nurturing this indigeneity, a person can become Indigenous despite having grown up in a metropolitan environment (ibid).

Linking this to the international discourse on indigeneity, according to Tuhiwai Smith (2012:7) the term Indigenous peoples, used since the 1970's, "internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples". It is a term that highlights the differences between Indigenous peoples but at the same time enables colonized and oppressed peoples to speak with a collective voice, and is thus a vehicle for collective struggle, forming a transparent bond between communities all over the world fighting against colonial structures (ibid). As Twila Cassadore (Rawal et al, 2020), member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe beautifully describes it: "It's like music when we hear the drum, it's calling you. And I feel that from all different cultures they hear the same drum and it's mother earth, mother earth's heart beating, and she's talking to all of us". Having been born out of struggle, it is a politicised, inclusive umbrella term for all first peoples that emphasises their similarities, not only between their knowledge systems or worldviews but especially their experiences with colonialism (Wilson, 2008:15,16).

Discussing indigeneity inevitably leads to the question of 'authenticity'. Being Indigenous is often associated with being inherently different. Reliance on blood quantum and stereotypical images of indigeneity however distort the reality of contemporary Indigenous identities. Thus, most Indigenous scholars oppose such classification commonly used to discredit Indigenous peoples' struggles (e.g., Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:76). Instead of a fixed category, Harris et al. (2013:5) proposes to view Indigenous identity as a process.

> Rather than constituting a unified, fixed and unchanging construct, Indigenous identities are (...) always in flux; they are a response to shifting and diverse social and cultural categories and identifications that are rarely stable. In this sense, Indigenous identities are emergent; a process of becoming rather than being (Harris et al., 2013:5)

In the Bolivian context, the historical, political and social landscape have shaped a rather complex, multi-layered conceptualization of being Indigenous. One core issue is that Bolivian society consists of a complex blend of ethnicities and people of "cultural mutations" with few people being able to trace back their roots to exclusively indigenous ancestors (Galindo, 2006:329). As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) argues, most people are *mestizos/as*[18], carrying both Indigenous and non-Indigenous blood in them. In an attempt to explain this rather complex issue, Rivera Cusicanqui refers to the Andean concept of *ch'ixi* that can be found in both Quechua and Aymara cultures. Simplified, ch'ixi describes a state in which something consists of two colours, for example black and white, which might appear grey from far away, but at a closer inspection remain unmixed (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018). According to Rivera Cusicanqui (2012:105):

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[18] Of both Indigenous and European descent

> The notion of *ch'ixi* (...) reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time. It is the logic of the included third. A *ch'ixi* color grey is white but is not white at the same time; it is both white and its opposite, black. (...) *ch'ixi* combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them.

The cultural identity of communities and individuals in Bolivia is furthermore complicated by the violent history of sexual abuse characteristic for formal colonialism and its impact on the local population (Galindo, 2006).

As we can see, defining indigeneity is a nearly impossible task. One widely accepted approach to tackle this issue is to rely on the self-identification of an individual and its community. However, this brings us to one fundamental question of this study: Asked if they identify themselves as Indigenous, the research participants to this study did not know what the term Indigenous meant. To quote only a few, Yolanda assumed that "I think [by calling us Indigenous] they mean that we are from a determined place, or from a certain village", while Luisa explained that "when they call us indigenous, they call us peasants, at least that's what I understand". Placida added, "I identify as a *mujer del campo* [literally woman from the countryside] or a peasant, I almost do not understand the word Indigenous. We do not use this word in my community, instead they call us people from the countryside."

While initially this came as a surprise to me, a more thorough examination of what it means to be Indigenous revealed that Indigenous might simply not have been the right term to use. As Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues, while the term Indigenous is often substituted through other terms such as *First Nation* or *Native Peoples*, other communities rather identify through the place they originate from. This also seems to apply to my research participants, who themselves identify as women from the countryside or *mujer de pollera*[19], seeing their culture as inherently different from that of 'people from the city'. In this regard it however has to be stated that rather than class, the women seem to see cultural traits as the main difference to urban, non-Indigenous populations. This not only coincides with the attempt to substitute the term 'Indigenous' with 'peasants' by the MNR in 1952, but also reflects in the formulation of the specific questions regarding origin in the national census.[20] Thus, in the context of this thesis I build on the assumption that my research participants identify as rural peoples as an at least related category to Indigenous.

Based on this context as well as the methodological and ethical questions preceding this chapter, it is now time to move on to the research design of this study.

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[19] The *pollera*, a skirt, forms part of traditional clothing. A *mujer de pollera* is thus a woman who wears traditional clothing which can be understood as pertaining to a rural or Indigenous community.
[20] In question 29 respondents had to answer whether they identified as "Indigenous originating from the countryside" (INE, 2012)

3.2 Ethical framework

Although the participating women do not explicitly identify as Indigenous, I argue that it would be more appropriate to situate this thesis within an Indigenous research paradigm, given that their lifestyles and cosmovisions are rather different from metropolitan societies. Nevertheless, due to my own positionality as a non-Indigenous European woman as well as certain limitations to this research discussed in more detail later on, I consider it impossible to conduct Indigenous research as described by scholars such as Wilson (2008), Tuhiwai Smith (2012) or Kovach (2009). Instead, I find this research to be located somewhere in between qualitative and Indigenous research, at a meeting point for two contrasting worldviews.

Starting with the ethical framework, to ensure this study responds at least to the minimum standards of Indigenous research ethics, the following ethical guidelines based on Huria et al. (2019), Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2009) have guided the research process:

- The research process is transparent with research participants being informed about the research purpose, their role, how the information they share is used and what the impact of this research will be.
- Participants have a voice in the design of the research methodology and the selection of methods and can influence the topics that are being discussed.
- Research is carried out in a way that respects the values, customs and cosmovisions of the research participants and follows their ethical and cultural protocols.
- The research setting enables participants and the facilitator to build mutual relationships of trust and the research proceeds with the processes of trust building.
- The research benefits all participating parties and is based on the principle of reciprocity.
- Research participants are remunerated for their time appropriately and according to their preferences.
- The research results are shared with the participants in a comprehensive way.

At the same time, I acknowledge that due to the limitations of a master's thesis as well as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, other principles that are key in Indigenous research such as the prerequisite that the research questions arise from a demand within the community and are formulated by the research participants, or my personal involvement with the research participants, I cannot fulfil. However, by providing the participating women the opportunity to co-design the methodology as well as through employing a research partner with whom I and the women have established trustful relationships, I aim to overcome these issues.

3.3 Research methods

Despite the importance of relationship building, I have found the risks that come with travelling during the Covid-19 pandemic to exceed the benefits of working directly with the research participants. Therefore, the field research was carried out by my research partner Constantina Mostazedo who has been working for the NGO CEMVA with women such as my research participants for years, and who through our work together at CEMVA has become a close friend of mine. Herself originally from a rural community and fluent in Quechua, Mostazedo has an in-depth knowledge of the context and enjoys the trust and appreciation of the local women, although she does not identify as Indigenous.

About the methods of knowledge creation, learning is based on five storytelling sessions which Mostazedo has facilitated throughout the past half year, and which have been audiotaped, transcribed and translated by her to Spanish and by me to English. The aim of these gatherings was to learn about the views, experiences, and ideas of these women in order to better understand their approach to SRH as well as learn about the different factors influencing their decision making. While the dependency on double translations by non-professionals might lead to misunderstandings and a loss of meaning, the final product of these sessions is not supposed to be an exact transcription but rather aims to capture the spirit and overall content of the stories. Nevertheless, I do recognize and acknowledge these linguistic constraints and the need to overcome these in further research.

Regarding the process of arranging the storytelling sessions, Mostazedo started with gathering a group of research participants. By foot, she headed out into the neighbourhood of Villa Armonía and started talking to women, some of whom she knew, some of whom she did not know, and introduced our idea. The women were told that as part of my master's thesis I wanted to organize storytelling sessions in which the participants would be invited to share their stories, especially in connection to SRH. At this moment no mention was made of any remuneration, only that there would be food provided, and it was made clear to the women that it was not planned to develop a SRH program based on the sessions. Most women she encountered showed great interest, and one of them invited her to hold the gatherings at her home and suggested initiating the project by cooking a traditional meal together to get to know each other better. Mostazedo moreover consulted the partners of the women and asked for their permission in order to avoid conflicts and abide by the cultural protocols of the women. Of the initially 16 women, 14 participated until the end, some sharing more, others joining rather as listeners.

Quite quickly, a first informal meeting was held in which the women, surrounded by their children, cooked a traditional *Calapurca* and shared where they

came from, how long they had been living in the city, and how they had been coping with city life. The women, enthusiastic about the next gathering, asked us to provide materials for embroidering *aguayos*, colourful woven cloths (see picture 1) Aymara and Quechua people in the Andes, both women and men, use for various things. As the women participating in this research describe it:

picture 1

> I walk with my aguayo everywhere, even to the market. When I buy my food, I carry it in my aguayo. *Mujer de pollera* [women dressed in traditional clothing] without an aguayo and without manta [other part of the traditional clothing] is seen as unfeminine. - Ana

> The aguayo means a lot to me. Since the generation of my grandparents or great-grandparents it has been part of our traditional clothing and our custom. It is also a tool for work – we use it to carry whatever we have to transport, on our backs. We even charge our donkeys with aguayos. Moreover, we women use it to carry our children on our back, and also for decoration. The more aguayos one has in their home the better. - Placida

> For me it is very important to have aguayos in my home, not having any is almost like having nothing. It is a very important tool that helps us to foster our children – we carry them from when they are born until they are three years old or more – but also to carry or move things. We mothers use up to two aguayos until the child is independent and walks alone. It is a tradition that comes from our ancestors. - Martina

> In my village a woman without aguayo is viewed as a woman without principles nor belongings. - Tomasa.

In response to their wish, the women were provided material and crafting became a central activity of the sessions. While the crafting during the storytelling sessions did not directly produce knowledge used in this thesis, I see it as the red thread guiding the process and as a metaphor for the decolonizing work taking place in these gatherings. Moreover, it is a reference to the practical nature of the task of decolonizing as a "lived transformation of the social" which informs the methodology of this thesis (Lugones, 2010:746); as well as the role women take up in weaving cultural fabric (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012).

In order to provide these gatherings structure and link the storytelling to my research topic, the sessions were divided into thematic blocks. Apart from the introductory session, three thematic sessions and one concluding session were held. While the introductory session was more of an informal gathering in which the participants were familiarized with the research topic and given the opportunity to

get to know each other, the thematic sessions revolved around issues related in some way or another to SRH and education. The thematic blocks were: 1) community and family, 2) education, 3) and sexuality, gender, and reproduction. In the last session, the participants were invited to reflect on the session and give feedback. During this session, the women asked us for small gift baskets for Christmas handed to them at the end of the year and voiced their wish to continue with the activities in the form of a club of mothers in which they could share and connect with their peers but also learn from professionals.

In addition to the experiences of the participating women, I draw on information obtained from informal conversations with Mostazedo through voice messages, zoom and telephone calls to better understand and make sense of the women's stories and discussions.

As conducting Indigenous research should be accompanied by constant and thorough self-reflection (Datta, 2018a), in order to keep track of my personal research journey and reflect continuously on my own standpoint, views and also prejudices, I have moreover been writing a research journal to keep track and evaluate my own thoughts and interpretations. Regarding the dissemination of outcome, the women expressed no wish to be provided a summary of findings but instead wished to continue the activities. Therefore, I will present a summary to CEMVA and encourage the establishment of a respective project, potentially in the form of my own PhD project.

3.4 Analysis of learnings

While the list of Indigenous methods for data collection is long, few Indigenous methods for 'making sense', for analysing data, have made it into academia. As Wilson (2009:118) and Kovach (2009) explain, categorising and analysing knowledge – or stories – stands in opposition to most Indigenous epistemologies in which interpretation is usually left to the audience or conducted by the storytellers themself (e.g., in Wilson, 2009). As Wilson (2009:120) puts it: "In analysis through an Indigenous paradigm, accuracy does not play as big a part in describing the phenomenon but is more important in describing the set of relationships that make up the phenomenon". Therefore, many scholars integrate the analysis into storytelling activities, conducting it collectively with the research participants, e.g. by discussing the stories heard in the group (e.g. Baskin, 2005; Caxaj, 2015; Wilson, 2008).

Nevertheless, as Kovach (2009:131) argues, due to the requirements of academia, many researchers employing Indigenous methodologies use a mixed-methods approach to get their research acknowledged, meaning that while the methods for data collection are Indigenous, the tools to analyse the knowledge gathered are not. Tuhiwai Smith (2012:144) adds that this approach "reflects the

training of indigenous researchers, which continues to be within the academy" as well as the way research is defined by dominant institutions. Most commonly, thematic analysis, a rather descriptive method that involves a comparatively low level of interpretation and emphasises the context a story is embedded in (Vaismoradi, 2013:399; Kovach, 2009) is used to make sense of stories (for example Beltrán & Begun, 2014). After having conducted a thematic analysis, outcomes are however presented in story form in a condensed version on which the researcher then reflects (Kovach, 2009:131).

Following this reasoning, in this thesis I conducted a thematic analysis to find common threads and elements in the stories of my research participants and categorised them. Next, I condensed and rewrote the stories to create more comprehensive and contextualised texts that enable the reader to make their own interpretation. The final stories thus combine pieces from different sessions. In order to strengthen the building of a collective story (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:145), I tried to highlight the similarities between the women's lived realities without interfering with the individual stories too much. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that "[w]hile another storyteller may share a similar experience, truth cannot be abstracted from the life" (Kovach, 2009:132), and that therefore the personal experiences of the research participants should not be merely abstracted to generalizations. Due to space constraints, only selected stories are displayed in full length, supported by extracts from other stories. All stories can be found in full length in the annex.

Regarding the thematic analysis, based on Vaismoradi et al. (2013), first, I coded the stories to help organise them, looking for topics or words central to each story. Next, based on these codes I grouped the story pieces into themes. In this regard, I used both the session topics (family and community; education; sexuality and gender) and topics emerging from the coding to create new themes. Those story pieces that did not fit into these new categories were partially left out, and those remaining were rearranged into theme blocks. Each theme block is represented by one long and comprehensive story.

3.5 Tensions and struggles

As the last chapters have shown, finding the right approach to conducting decolonial research is a demanding task. Not only defining who has the mandate to conduct respective research with which methodologies, but also finding the right balance between the requirements of a master's thesis and decolonial research principles has proven to be a great challenge. Therefore, I want to end this chapter with a reflection on some of these tensions.

To begin with, situating this thesis into a specific research paradigm has been difficult. Scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Wilson (2008) or Kovach (2009) argue

that Indigenous research should be based on Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, requiring a researcher to speak the local language and have an in-depth understanding of the local culture, making it nearly impossible for non-Indigenous researchers to produce Indigenous research. Although these requirements are more than justified, they also draw well-defined borders around Indigenous research, potentially preventing outside researchers from shifting towards decolonial research practices. Thus, other scholars such as Datta (2018a, 2018b) are more open about outsiders conducting Indigenous research, advocating for more exchange between research paradigms. Following this reasoning, I have been trying to navigate between Indigenous and qualitative research, adhering as much as possible to Indigenous and as little as necessary to qualitative research principles. This ambivalent position reflects both in the choice of methods and the structure of this thesis. However, this in-between-position has also had benefits as it has enabled me to adopt a feminist decolonial perspective which allows for a more critical view, also of Indigenous practices.

At the same time, the issue of choosing a research paradigm has opened up the much broader question of defining indigeneity – a concept that previous to starting this research seemed clear to me but has become increasingly blurry throughout the process. The difficulties to place the research participants in the discussion on indigeneity has further complicated the dialogue between theory and practice and has made the heavy focus on Indigenous research paradigms in the chapters on methodology and theory questionable.

Last, another major struggle has been to provide the research participants sufficient space within the written outcome of this research and simultaneously adhering to the structure of a master's thesis. However, as I consider the storytelling sessions themself to be as, if not more important than the written outcome, I still consider this project to be largely participant centred. Conveying this centrality in the written thesis and finding the right path between stories and theory however remains a struggle.

Last, my own positionality and role as an outsider in relation to the research participants requires me to continuously reflect on my argumentation and interpretation to avoid falling back into colonial, patronizing patterns. Especially the bridging between mainstream and decolonial feminism as well as refraining from exoticizing the experiences and culture of the women remain challenges I have yet to learn to overcome. With all these struggles and tensions in mind, it is now time to finally move on to what I consider the most important part of this thesis: the stories.

4. STORIES AND LEARNINGS

The aims of this chapter are to provide the research participants a space to share their stories outside the storytelling sessions; and enable the reader to get to know the research participants, learn about their lives, and foster a deeper understanding of their approach to SRH as well as the factors motivating their decision-making. In order to better understand the individual experiences of the women, I have conducted a thematic analysis of the stories based on which I have categorized them into three thematic blocks: 1) Education, migration and work, 2) culture, community and land, and 3) family, gender and sexuality. The decision to use thematic blocks can be seen as a compromise between the strict categorization typical for qualitative research and the telling-the-whole-story approach favoured in Indigenous research.

While the first thematic block covers factors that could be regarded mostly exterior shaping the lives of the women, ranging from political neglect in the form of lacking infrastructure to the degradation of soil, the second and third block engage more with intrinsic motivations such as culturally rooted value systems and beliefs. Thus, the analysis in this chapter moves from the macro to the micro level, examining issues from multiple perspectives. While this might feel repetitive to the reader, my aim is to enable in-depth learning based on the stories of the research participants, show how multi-layered experiences and decisions in relation to SRH are, and how important a holistic reading of the interplay between experiences is.

Each theme block features one longer story upon which the subsequent analysis is based. While this strategy enables me to demonstrate the importance of presenting stories in their entity, it is also a way of appreciating the women taking part in this research by sharing what they wanted to share without great amendments. All full stories can be found in the annex.

While many of the stories touch upon topics related to sexuality as we commonly conceptualize it in the Global North, they mostly focus on other experiences influential in the lives of the research participants. Following a feminist decolonial understanding of sexuality, I believe these stories to contain learnings crucial for comprehending the research participants' needs and experiences in relation to SRH, as well as for rethinking SRH services. As I want to refrain from extractivist practices, the analysis follows the themes and topics the research participants themselves considered to be important and which thus might not directly link to SRH, starting with the topics of education, migration and work which, all heavily interrelated and interdependent, are central to the stories and lives of the women. Nevertheless, I simultaneously acknowledge that as it ultimately was me who decided upon which pieces to include, the analysis can in no way be unbiased.

4.1 Education, migration and work

Despite great advances in poverty and inequality reduction in the past 15 years due to high commodity prices as well as successful social and labour policies of the socialist government of Evo Morales (Ramos Menar, 2017; Canavire-Bacarreza & Rios-Avila, 2017), today Bolivia, located in the heart of Abya Yala, still remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the region (International Monetary Fund, 2015; World Bank Group, 2020). Notably, the gap between urban and rural communities remains alarmingly high, with rural communities continuing to face severe obstacles in having their basic needs met while urban populations are seeing an increase in life standards. Although the government has put considerable effort into fostering rural development (Ministerio de Autonomías, 2013), many communities still lack access to basic services such as water, electricity, health care or education. For example, while in 2019 about 86% of the total population had access to water, and 59% to sanitation, in rural areas the respective numbers were only 67% and 43% (Cooperación Alemana para el Desarrollo con Bolivia, 2019). In addition, good work opportunities are scarce (Pereira Maldonado, 2018).

Due to the harsh living conditions in the countryside, many campesinxs[21] decide to migrate to cities in search of work, better education for their children and better access to basic services (Roth, 2015; Pereira Maldonado, 2018). This is also the story of my research participants who have all migrated to Sucre from rural communities around Chuquisaca[22] and the adjacent department Potosí. One of them is Rosa, 52 years old and mother to 9 children, who comes from the community of Iroja in Chuquisaca but has been living in Sucre for 10 years. In order to better understand what factors, drive people to leave their rural communities, and how such migration impacts their lives, I want to start by telling Rosa's story.

> I did not attend school for a year; therefore I cannot even sign my name. My parents thought that girls had no reason to attend school, so I had to stay with the sheep all the time and take care of them. Sometimes people make fun of me because I have no education. Moreover, we lived in a place far away with no vehicular road, so no teacher ever got motivated to come and teach us. My parents never let me go out accompanied by boys – in these times there were parents who walked for kilometres with their children to enable them to learn to read and write, two to three hours approximately to get to school, six hours of walking a day. If it was raining, the situation was even worse as crossing rivers became dangerous. After marrying, I continued living in my community for twenty years, six of my children were born on my land. My husband used to travel to the city to earn some money in winter when there was no cultivation, and that way I got to know the city life a little bit. After a

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[21] Gender-neutral wording that includes both campesinas, peasant women, and campesinos, peasant men

[22] Bolivia has 9 departments. Sucre is located in the department Chuquisaca.

while, he suggested moving to the city permanently and I accepted because of my children whom I wanted to have something better. When I arrived in the city, I did not speak any Spanish. In the beginning I cried a lot. We lived in the house of a distant relative on rent, and I did not know how to use the water tap, the light, or the gas container. Sometimes I thought about returning to my community, but then my two other children were born. Now I am 52 years old, and I still live on rent, as my husband does not earn enough to save money to buy land. My husband works as an assistant mason, but it is not a constant job. I myself don't work; I dedicate myself to taking care of my home. Sometimes, I do small temporary jobs, washing clothes, selecting peanuts, for one year I was sweeping the gas station. As a woman, I however believe it is my job to take care of my children and my husband, while the men should work to support their family. However, my husband does not work well and therefore we fight a lot. I often travel to my community to cultivate crops to help me out, as my husband tends to forget that he has many children.

Although this is an individual story about the personal experiences of Rosa, it shares many parallels with the stories of the other women and is thus part of a larger collective story. The first shared component of her story I want to discuss is the lack of education which many of the women experienced, and its impact on their child- and adulthood. In a similar vein with Rosa, the other research participants have enjoyed none to very little formal education when they were young. On the one hand, in rural areas education was – and still is – commonly considered unimportant for girls, and on the other hand, access to education was limited by long distances and a lack of availability.

Instead of attending school, most of the women had to stay at home and help out their mothers, preparing food or watching after the animals, while their brothers were allowed to attend school and enjoy their leisure time outside. Taking part in household activities, from a young age the women contributed to sustaining their families. While some of the women supported their parents in this way, commonly assigned with tasks related to animal husbandry, others were sent to the city to work as domestic workers, contributing with monetary income.

One of them was Yolanda, 27 years old and from the community of Tomoyo in Potosí. After her father had passed away, she was sent to the city to work as a domestic worker when she was eight years old to support her family economically, wherefore she had to interrupt her education. This kind of work, commonly carried out by rural and Indigenous women and a socially widely accepted remnant of colonialism, bears great risks for young girls and women who commonly experience sexual violence and exploitation by their employers (Castaño, 2018). Although none of the women openly talked about experiences of violence, Sonia, who has been working as a domestic worker too, claimed that she would not have 'suffered like she did' working as a domestic worker had she only been able to finish school – indicating her exposure to

a violent or oppressive working environment. This suggests a strong link between low levels of education and exploitative work. Related to this, most of the women have suffered discrimination by people in the city due to their lacking Spanish skills and illiteracy, making low levels of education not only a risk factor for exploitative work relations but also discrimination.

Having experienced themselves what negative impacts a lack of education can have, the women emphasized the importance of education for surviving in the city and finding work. As a consequence, the women are trying to provide their children better educational opportunities and push them to study. At the same time, some of the women are attending adult literacy courses in Sucre, although their responsibilities at home restrict their time and energy resources. The need for adult alphabetization initiatives has also been recognized by Morales' government which has implemented a large-scale program called *Yo puedo*, I can (Canavire, 2011), which has reduced illiteracy in Bolivia greatly (UNESCO, n.d.).

Returning to the experiences of the research participants in their home communities, another shared struggle is the lack of income and work in the countryside and the resultant migration to Sucre. Driven by the wish to provide their children an easier life and more opportunities, many rural families migrate to larger cities (Pereira Maldonado, 2018). As Roth (2015) describes, migration has deep roots in Indigenous cultures: Already in pre-colonial times people left their home communities regularly to utilize the different climates in the region to diversify their agricultural production – a tradition that has been preserved throughout formal colonialism. Today, seasonal migration for work remains a popular strategy to complement agricultural subsistence production which, due to the degradation as well as the parcelization of land, often does not suffice to sustain families anymore (ibid)[23]. Due to this rural exodus, urban centres are experiencing massive growth while many rural communities are stagnating in size (Pereira Maldonado, 2018).

In the home communities of the research participants, migration is a common phenomenon. According to Hilaria, usually it is the men who migrate to cities such as Sucre, Cochabamba, or Santa Cruz for work in winter when all agricultural activities are on halt, for example to work as masons or take part in the *safra*, the sugar cane harvest. Meanwhile, the women stay at home, taking care of the children and animals. Driven by the desire to provide their children better education and a regular income, other times the whole family permanently moves their home to the city. Such migration, the women indicate, comes with great challenges.

First of all, city life requires at least basic Spanish skills, which many Quechua migrants do not have upon arrival in the city. Second, illiteracy further complicates

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[23]However, not all migration is voluntary; in the context of infrastructure projects rural communities are often forced to migrate to make space for construction (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020:324)

assimilation and finding work, and exposes migrants to the risk of exploitation. In addition to this, racism and discrimination against campesinxs as well as the radical change of lifestyle can make life in the city difficult. In the case of Rosa, a lack of Spanish skills, unfamiliar equipment in her new home, as well as her husband's difficulties to find a permanent job were only some of the challenges she faced upon her arrival in Sucre.

Another issue stressed by the women is the dependence on monetary income for survival in the city. While in the countryside most families owned at least small parcels of land, living off the produce of plant and animal husbandry, in the city rent and food need to be paid with money. According to Mostazedo, Sucre is a fast-growing city and therefore prices for rent are increasing steadily, forcing rural migrants to rent substandard rooms for disproportionately high prices. As Hilaria summarises the main differences between rural and urban life: "The city and my community are very different. In my community I find tranquillity, I can produce my own food and I don't need any money. The only problems are the lack of water, electricity and the inclemency of the weather, or when I lose my harvest."

Consequently, marginalization, low levels of education and the urgent need for monetary income often drive rural migrants into the informal sector (e.g. Diaz, 2017) which, according to Gonzales Zuazo (2019), accounts for 50-60% of Bolivia's economy. Commonly, these jobs earn less than a living wage, making it nearly impossible for one person to support an entire family. Thus, children often have to help out financially, which reflects in the disproportionately high numbers of child labour in Bolivia as well as the political reluctance to ban child labour[24] (Fontana & Grugel, 2015). At the same time, many of the women see themselves obligated to work in addition to the social reproductive work they provide. However, as we will discuss in more detail later on, this leads to substantial tensions between their world views and meeting their basic needs, often resulting in intrafamiliar conflicts.

As I start to understand, lacking infrastructure and basic services, little opportunities for work and education, and degrading and shrinking land parcels are factors that negatively affect life quality in rural communities. However, while migration to cities undoubtedly improves the access to education both for children and women, it also brings along great challenges. Many of these challenges are related to the cultural differences between rural and urban populations, and the need to balance between tradition and the requirements of city life. To gain a better understanding of these differences and struggles, next I want to discuss the topics of culture, community, and land.

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[24]Against international trends, in 2014, the legal working age has been lowered to 10 years of age under certain circumstances (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, 2014)

4.2 Culture, community, and land

Although the women have been living in the city for a long time, more precisely between four and 16 years, they still have strong bonds to their home communities and their land which constitute important parts of their identity. All women return to their lands regularly, for local festivities, to meet their relatives, or to cultivate crops, and are moreover want to pass on their customs and traditions to their children. According to Diaz (2015) who has investigated Aymara migrants in Bolivia's capital La Paz, migrants from rural areas commonly keep close ties to their home communities and maintain their customs and traditions, assimilating to city life only to a certain degree. This also applies to Martina, who is 44 years old, comes from the community of Tomoyo in Chuquisaca and has been living in Sucre for 12 years. Martina still returns to her home community with her four children whom she tries to educate according to her community's value system frequently. However, at the same time she acknowledges certain problems the ideology of her peoples holds, reflecting on the differences between her community and the city.

> I did not attend school because my mother passed away when I was very little, for that reason I could not study. We were left with my brothers and my older brother had to take care of us. My father also passed away a year after my mother and the school was located far away from my village and my brothers did not let me go out. I grew up without even knowing how to sign my name. When I arrived in the city, I didn't know how to count money. Therefore, my husband discriminated against me a lot – for being illiterate. I came to the city because I wanted my children to get an education, so that being illiterate stays only in me. I noticed that we have to push our children to study, only in that way will they have a good life. I teach my children what I learned from my parents, first of all respect towards others, and I think that this is our responsibility as parents. I always tell them to not forget where they come from. In my community, we learn about respect towards others, but not about rights, maybe therefore our parents did to us what they wanted; in the countryside you do what your parents and husband tell you to do. Here in the city, they talk about respect for rights instead. My children still go to my lands for special occasions – there is for example one festivity which they like to attend. Like that, they don't forget about our customs. My sons still sow using a plough and they like it.

Martina, who herself has not had the opportunity to receive an education as her parents passed away when she was little, leaving her in the custody of her older brothers who did not allow her to attend school, wants her children to receive a formal education but at the same time to learn about their origin and their ancestors' culture. In order to teach them about their culture, Martina, like most of the women, takes her children to her home community, especially for festivities, where they engage, among others, in cultivation activities. So does Luisa who is 24 years old, from the Huaylla

community in Potosí, and has been living in Sucre for 5 years. For Luisa, teaching her two children by telling them stories about her life in the countryside as well as taking them to her home community is an important part of her children's upbringing:

> I teach my children by talking to them. I tell them like a story the things that I have lived and things I used to do when I was a child or an adolescent, but sometimes I also bring them to the land of my husband where we sow and harvest potatoes, corn, and beans, and in that way my children in some way get to know our culture.

As the women teach us, engaging in cultivation and other traditional activities is a way for children to take part in knowledge creation, strengthen community bonds and thus support the preservation and development of culture. As Sanjay Rawal explores in his documentary Gather (Rawal et al, 2020), passing on knowledge on cultivation and husbandry can be an important part of healing for Indigenous communities, as well as an important step into food sovereignty, providing communities with healthy and nutritious produce. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) adds that manual labour, including working land, is a key activity for building decolonial societies. At the same time, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that there can be no decolonization without the restoration and redistribution of Indigenous lands – an issue that becomes clearly visible as the women talk about the difficulties of purchasing land with a less than a living wage.

Especially for families in which the husband has no regular work, cultivating food crops in their home communities helps to support the family's life in the city. Therefore, many families return to their lands in times of harvest. This also had to be taken into account when conducting the field research, as most of the women participating in the storytelling sessions had left the city for some weeks to attend their land during the research period, requiring one of the sessions to be postponed. However, the land available to families and communities is continually shrinking in proportion to inhabitant numbers, as local populations increase. This problem dates back to the days of the agricultural land reform launched by the MNR in 1952 which redistributed land to dispossessed rural communities but on the one hand failed to include many communities in this reform and on the other hand failed to establish policies that would secure the expansion of these territories with an increase in population growth. In addition to the failure of following governments to continue redistribution, this has had the effect that in families with many children, the share of land each heir is entitled to is relatively small, and often not enough to live off (Dangl, 2019). This parcelization is accompanied by advancing land degradation reducing agricultural productivity and once again poses existential threats to populations scarred by a past of genocide and dispossession (Roth, 2015).

In addition to the strong bond to and dependency on their ancestral lands, the women who all identify as mujeres del campo are also bound to the value systems of their home communities. Teaching their children about the values key to their

cosmovision is thus part of the transmission of local knowledge. One recurring term in this regard is respect as an alternative to rights. While some of the women did talk about rights – especially in regard to education which most of them regarded as a right – it seems that in their home communities the freedoms and duties of a person are more commonly determined in the context of respect. It is a core value that the women have learned from their parents, and which they teach their children, and stands in contrast to the imported, Eurocentric rights framework they have been marginally introduced to by the Bolivian government and local organizations. This is not to say that the women reject the rights framework but a suggestion that there exists a local alternative that might be easier to conceptualize for the women.

As most rural communities and Indigenous peoples in the Andes live according to a reciprocal political and socio-economic system (Alvarez Quispe, 2012) one would suppose that in reciprocal relationships every person should be respected and respect others. However, the stories of the women suggest that in their home communities respect is granted rather unilaterally and interpreted as obedience towards fathers and brothers. As Martina indicates, respect is used by parents as a justification of behaviour that goes against human rights, which could be interpreted as violent behaviour. Again, although none of the research participants openly talked about experiences of violence, testimonies of my research partner, who is a social worker well acquainted with the struggles of migrant women in the area, suggest that the prevalence of violence against both women and children is disproportionately high among respective communities. This also reflects in the numbers of GBV in Bolivia in general, which, already disproportionately high, have been increasing in recent years (Aponte, 2020). Thus, respect seems to be used to consolidate patriarchal systems instead of securing harmonious cohabitation.

In response to this issue, while Martina still believes respect to be a core value to be taught to her children, she also seems to consider if a rights approach would safeguard children in rural communities better. Although following the path of conventional feminism by implementing a women's rights framework could help to change oppressive and violent behaviour, from a decolonial perspective it is a disputed approach. Nevertheless, taking a decolonial path by insisting on local values as they might fall short of tangible results if no deeper analysis of the patriarchal system feeding the current notion of respect is conducted. Therefore, it might be of most use to adopt a feminist decolonial approach to tackle the issue of oppression and violence in the name of respect. This allows one to consider both the alien character of the rights discourse as well as the distortion of the concept of respect through patriarchal systems. As Vergés (2021) argues, adopting 'NGO vocabulary' such as the concept of rights might do more harm than good, as it does not touch upon the colonial root causes of the problem and instead depoliticizes the discourse. Instead, a rethinking and reconfiguration of respect as a fundamental value, embedded in the

concept of *Vivir Bien*[25] as a life lived in harmony, is necessary. In this regard it has to be emphasized that this is not intended to be an idealization of an ancient concept of respect, but rather the suggestion to rethink and adapt this concept. However, I will leave the further discussion of this for the next section.

While the women still engage in cultural practices central to their home communities and live to a great extent according to their traditional value systems, it seems that life in the city has led them to change their attitudes toward certain topics. One great change has been their attitude towards education which the women, in contrast to their parents, consider as a highly valuable and important good for their children, including their daughters. However, although some of the women highlighted the influence peers in the city had on their perception of education, most of them mentioned that the wish for better education for their children had been a main reason for migration. Thus, rather than exterior factors it might have been an intrinsic wish for education resulting from their own personal experiences that led to this change of attitude. Another substantial change in attitude has occurred in relation to gender roles which differ greatly in rural and urban communities and will be discussed in more detail below.

In conclusion, despite their often critical view of certain behaviours and customs, the women still feel deeply connected to their home communities and land which they connect to feelings of tranquillity and security; and want their children to preserve the knowledge and customs of their peoples. As Placida describes it: "I'd really wish for my community to have everything, so I'd be able to move back and live there in tranquillity. I still return to my land with my children as my parents are still alive, so my children can learn and share our customs with their family." Consequently, I would argue that migration, caused mostly by external factors, is not the most desirable solution to the problems people in rural areas face. However, in addition to political interventions, including greater investments in infrastructure in the countryside and a truly fair distribution of land to communities, changes within local value systems need to occur to make life in rural communities more attractive for women.

4.3 Family, gender, and sexuality

As we will soon come to learn, many of the customs and traditions in the women's home communities rely on a patriarchal structuring of society. While many of the women talked about family as a safe place where everybody loves and supports each other, in reality their lives seem to be characterized by a constant struggle between

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[25] Vivir Bien, also known as *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara and *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua which loosely translates to 'living well', is a philosophical Indigenous concept that emphasizes living in harmony (see for example Ranta, 2018)

allegedly traditional, conservative customs and their real-life needs. Two of the greatest struggles in this regard which link directly to issues discussed in relation to work as well as to the value of respect, are strict gender roles and patriarchal oppression. Following the example of previous sections, I want to introduce this topic with the story of one of the research participants, Albertina, who is 31 years old, has been in Sucre for 8 years and is mother to three children.

> My name is Albertina and I am from Potolo. In my community we have very extreme habits. Young women are not allowed to choose their partner, but it is their parents who decide whom they will marry. When married, women have to bear children to their spouses until God says it is enough. I believe that between men and women we should have the same responsibility regarding our children, something that is not happening in our society. Within most marriages, the head of the family is the husband. In my case, my husband does not let me work. He says a woman who works will go off the rails, will go off with other men he thinks, but he doesn't work well either and often we don't have anything to eat. My mother-in-law interferes in our relationship, she thinks that I should not help by working and earning my own money. She only wants me to dedicate myself to the home without working. Maybe I should not have married, but I cannot separate because of my children. I need my husband to support me so my children can study, although the older ones already work and contribute with their salary. For me family means love, sharing, helping and taking care of each other, being together in good and bad times with all your people, having things in common, and being understood and helped by my husband and my sons.

For all of the research participants the family constitutes a key entity in their lives, often including not only close relatives but also non-related community members. As most of the women grew up in households similar to Albertina's where fathers and brothers controlled and restricted the lives of their daughters considerably, early marriage seems to have been a first step to a more self-determined life for many of them. Although, due to its negative impact on children's and adolescents' health and well-being (e.g. Mendoza Tascón et al., 2016) child marriage is considered a breach of international human rights law (UNGA, 2015), for some of the women marriage constituted a safe and socially accepted way to leave their childhood home – according to Tomasa, who herself married at a young age, marriage constitutes the only way a woman can leave her home in a respectful manner. Ana moreover mentioned the role her husband took over as a teacher: "I learned a lot from my husband when I married. I was very young, 15 years old and an orphan, and therefore I did not know anything – he even taught me how to cook. I think it is good to marry young because those who do not get married are viewed badly in my village."

However, despite its potentially emancipating effect, early marriage tends to only shift power from the father and brothers to the husband without granting young

women much decision power. According to the research participants, negative consequences of their marriage included the interruption of their education, having many children as well as problems with their partners, commonly because of jealousy. Due to their economic dependency as well as cultural norms, the women however agreed that one should not separate if they have children with their partner. Although still considered the norm in their home communities, most of the women do not want their children to marry young. Related to this, some of the women have started to see early motherhood rather critically. As Claudia explains: "I am 20 years old and think that it is not good to have children at a young age. Nobody told me when I was younger that it was not good and now I regret that I had children very young. I don't want this to happen to anybody else anymore."

As Albertina's story suggests, relationships with spouses or partners are commonly characterized by strict gender roles and supported not only by fathers, brothers and husbands but also by the women. These gender relations are deeply rooted in Andean cosmovision based on the principle of reciprocity in which men and women have complementary roles that enable them to live in balanced relationships with a just division of tasks (Raby, 2018). Potosí, where many of the women are from, is one of the places in Bolivia where pre-Hispanic traditions have been preserved the best. Known for its rich silver mines, the city used to be the economic centre of the colonial empire and the epicentre of exploitation of Indigenous peoples who worked the mines as well as the natural environment. Characterized by a strong will and resistance against colonial oppression, today communities in Potosí still live by pre-colonial traditions and ways of life, based on the principle of reciprocity (Giorgis, 2000:244, 245). According to Giorgis (2000:241), reciprocity entails the acts of giving, receiving and returning, but while these acts were originally shaped by symmetrical relations, they have been given a new meaning through the capitalist economic system which allows for asymmetrical relations between giving, receiving and returning, legitimizing exploitative work relationships (ibid:245).

Returning to intrafamiliar relationships, one can identify parallels with the concept of reciprocity in the economic sphere. Reciprocity in relationships, it could be argued, manifests itself in a just division of tasks. While women's roles are related to social reproductive work, including taking care of the home, children as well as animals, men are in charge of the security of the family, which includes the task to earn an income. These roles however change when families migrate to the city and consequently lose agricultural production as an income source. While in the countryside both spouses take part in cultivation, contributing to the subsistence of the family, in the city the entire burden of sustaining the family falls on the husband and father who is the only family member with a 'cultural mandate' to earn money. Thus, it could be argued that while in the countryside the woman constitutes an equal and necessary part of the family, doing her share in sustaining the family by taking

care of animals and helping with cultivation, in the city her role becomes restricted to the household, shifting the balance of responsibilities. At the same time, it has to be stressed that the distribution of tasks is not always equal in rural areas either, especially for girls who from a young age seem to carry more responsibility than their male peers.

However, as many of the women lament, often men cannot find any work or do not earn enough to sustain the entire family, breaching their part of the 'contract'. Consequently, some of the women consider it their duty to contribute to earning money. As Julia puts it, as a woman it is not only your task to take care of your husband, children and home but also to help save money to make caring for your family possible. However, many of the women report their partners to prohibit them from working, and some moreover mention the interference of their mothers-in-law. At the same time, most of the research participants themselves see their place at home with their children and do not wish to work. Instead, they considered their role in a partnership of equally shared responsibilities to be taking care of the home, the children and the husband while the role of the men is to provide the economic means. Yolanda for example defends a strict division of roles:

> My children are both boys and I would like that one day when they have partners, they are good women who take good care of them like I do in my home, and that they do not have to fight about work. Every mother would like their sons to be taken good care of by their wives. Men and women have different tasks and obligations, although in the city they say that that is not okay, but I learned since I was young that as women, we are to attend the home, and the men are those who are supposed to work.

Out of necessity to sustain their families as well as a result of exchange with peers in the city, some women have however started to adapt the rigid gender roles to their new life circumstances and work occasionally. At the same time, the women still teach the gender roles they grew up with to their own children and expect respective behaviour also from their sons and daughters in-law.

Trying to look at this issue from a feminist perspective, although sharing tasks equally does respond to a reciprocal philosophy, the stark gap in power granted to men and women by these roles can easily lead to relationships of dependency. While in the countryside it seems that both partners are equally dependent on each other, with women taking over important tasks in animal husbandry and cultivation, in the city women are much more dependent on their partners for economic support. As Mostazedo explains, due to their duties in childcare as well as the restrictions imposed on them by their partners, women are often not able to work and thus reliant on their partners, which commonly leads to oppressive relationships. Albertina for example explains that she cannot separate because she needs her partner to support her family financially.

The change of the meaning of reciprocity in family relationships to some extent resembles the change of meaning of reciprocity as an economic principle, which has shaped Andean cultures since the Inca imperium. Similar to the new capitalist definition through which exploitation and oppression are justified by the unequal value of capital – money versus labour – oppression and violence in relationships could be linked to an unequal valuing of different tasks. Thus, it could be argued that colonizing local values such as reciprocity and respect has changed their meaning significantly and facilitated the installation of a patriarchal, capitalist and colonial system.

Returning to the lived experiences of the research participants, the struggle between becoming economically independent and preserving customs leads to substantial tensions not only between partners but also within the women. Aiming to adopt a decolonial feminist perspective, it is not enough to plead for more inclusion of rural women into the labour market which Vergés (2021) considers a tool to strengthen global capitalism covered as a struggle of women's rights. Instead, the factors leading to oppressive behaviour of male partners need to be analysed and considered in the wider social and economic context. Decolonization in this sense might rather envision the promotion of truly reciprocal relationships based on respect – a key value in the home communities of the women – instead of a change in roles.

Apart from financial dependency, oppressive behaviour from part of male partners moreover affects the sexual and reproductive lives of women. As Albertina mentions, reproduction is often controlled by the husband, and, according to my research partner, a common cause for women to refrain from using birth control – against their will. However, as these storytelling sessions showed, sexuality and reproduction are both topics that are rarely discussed as they are considered taboos. Nevertheless, there were some story fragments that allowed an insight into the realm of SRH in the lives of the research participants, although their scarce nature makes it difficult to build a greater understanding of the matter.

As issues connected to sexuality – and in this regard I refer to sexuality as vaguely defined by the research participants, namely anything that connects to sexual relationships and relationships between a man and a woman in more general terms, as well as characteristics of the biological sexes – are commonly accompanied by feelings of shame, few of the women had ever received any education on related matters. The research participants had never talked about connected issues with their parents, and while some had come into contact with the topic marginally through school or doctor's visits, others had received no sexuality education at all. As Rosa shares:

> I heard about it [sexuality education] for the first time at the health centre which I attended when the doctor that attended me talked to me about it. Never before had I

been talked to about this, and when I heard it I felt very ashamed. For my parents this would be very prohibited – talking about these things is bad education.

In contrast to their home communities, in the city topics connected to sexuality are discussed more freely as Sonia acknowledges: "I even hear about how to protect yourself from diseases and not get pregnant". Still, the research participants claimed to have very little or no knowledge about respective issues. The absence of topics connected to sexuality from the public and private discourse within certain communities also seems to reflect in the language of the research participants. According to Placida, the term sexuality is not used in Quechua: "In Quechua, nobody talks to us about this topic [sexuality], but we say munanakuy which means to like or love each other between two persons, [and] we can also say yachakuna uqunchismanta, which means to learn or know more about our body." Likewise, for most of the women gender was not a familiar concept. According to Yolanda "In Quechua we don't have this word [gender], so the way you ask us, we cannot understand". This not only reveals the epistemological problem of discussing an issue that cannot be translated into the target culture, but also the methodological issue of relying on non-professional translators.

This is not only an issue in Quechua but also other Indigenous languages; according to Tuhiwai Smith (2012:49) "[g]ender distinctions and hierarchies are (…) deeply encoded in Western languages" but not in Indigenous ones. While for many of the women participating in this study gender is equated with being a man or a woman, sexuality is understood as the relations between men and women, including sexual relationships, although the line between sexuality and gender seems to be blurry. Things such as homosexuality or transgender are foreign to the women and would, as they state, be regarded as prohibited in their communities. Because of the lack of use of it, and its absence from the women's native language Quechua sexuality as a concept might not be the right approach, and instead using Indigenous concepts comparable to the issue could be more fruitful.

Initially, the women were hesitant to open up about issues related to sexuality, which were touched upon not only in the session revolving around sexuality and reproduction but also in previous sessions. As Gabriela made it clear: "We are not used to talking about these things – why do we have to talk about them, Doña Constantina…even worse with our children! If it becomes necessary at some point, I'd like another person to talk to them about this." In addition to the shame attached to this topic, the women also perceived to lack the knowledge to take part in the conversation. As Catalina quite drastically described: "On the countryside we lived like animals, without knowing many things, now I do know a little bit already." However, prepared from the beginning that there would be more talk about these issues, with time the women started to be more open and express a certain curiosity

to learn more. In the last session, most of them voiced their wish to continue learning about issues related especially to reproduction and contraception, stating that the sessions had helped them to lose some of their shame. Therefore, as women and mothers many if not most women seemed to be interested in attending some kind of sexuality education. Ana stated that although she had never talked about issues related to SRH in her family, the sessions helped her to lose some of the shame and anxiety she initially felt and now supported the idea of learning more. In addition, many of them started to support the idea of teaching their children more about issues connected to SRH mostly to prevent their children from marrying and having children at a young age, although they did not know how to initiate respective conversations.

Asked about how such learning could take place, the women favoured learning in groups like in the storytelling sessions. While discrimination by medical personnel made them anxious about being alone, within a group of peers, as some stated, they did not feel as ashamed. As Albertina stated: "Listening to my compañeras I realized that I am not the only one suffering as a woman and a mother", adding that she had missed listening to the stories of her people. Sharing in a group moreover seemed to resemble sharing with their families, and according to Rosa enabled her to build relations with the other women. As Claudia's comments suggest, also the way knowledge is conveyed must be rethought – according to her, learning through stories can be easier than through the use of a blackboard or books.

Additionally, the women were in favour of having a professional among them, a woman preferably, who would talk to them in Quechua, emphasizing that that person should also be able to listen. Nevertheless, they also acknowledged that they had little time. This largely reflects the findings of Bant and Girard (2008:53), who found the "ideas and practices related to health, sexuality, and reproduction of indigenous and non-indigenous populations" as a main barrier to achieving a high standard of SRH, advocating to "make services more responsive to cultural expectations". However, Bant and Girard (2008) still stayed within a rights framework to address issues connected to SRH which they defined according to allegedly universal standards.

About the prerequisites for sexuality education to work, Martina stated that "the willingness of each one is the most important thing when one wants to learn, and if there is none, there's nothing" which is a reminder that such a project would have to arise from the needs of the women. However, one problem could be the objection of husbands and male partners to their wife's learning about SRH, as it is still considered bad education.

This suggests that choices of family planning and reproduction likewise almost any choice of a woman should be taken together with the partner to be sustainable. Given the importance of family in the extended meaning, encompassing not only the core family but the community in more general, the approval of the family can be

important to prevent conflicts which again jeopardize the good living, the living in harmony. As we can see, especially mothers in law play a crucial role in decision making: some of the women do seem to view their role as mothers extended to their daughters in law whom they want to take good care of their sons. Simultaneously, many of the women feel pressure from part of their mothers in law in their personal decisions.

Put into the context of wider sexuality education, this could mean that instead of viewing decisions on reproduction as a women's individual choice they should be viewed as concerning the family as a whole. Only 'empowering' or educating women will not automatically lead to more informed and independent decision making if partners are not involved in the process and traditional gender roles and power differences are ignored. This has also been recognized by research – Vergés (2021:54) for example emphasizes the need to additionally analyse different masculinities through a colonial lens in order to achieve the means of decolonial feminisms.

As we can see, the stories of the women had little to do with sexuality or SRH in the narrow sense. Although initially this caused some unease in me as I struggled to connect their stories to my research topic, I have come to learn that understanding the needs and experiences of these women in connection to sexuality and reproduction requires a holistic, in-depth understanding of their life trajectories, making an analysis of their life stories essential for this thesis. However, for a holistic understanding more research is needed. In an attempt to enable such research, the next chapter will focus on scrutinizing the research methodology of this thesis and its potential for conducting feminist decolonial research on SRH.

5. DISCUSSION

Although the storytelling sessions, due to their scope and other limitations, might not bear great learnings about the conceptualization of SRH of the research participants, they provide valuable insights into the lives and value systems of the storytellers. In addition, they offer multiple learnings concerning the research methodology and its potential for further decolonial feminist research on SRH. In an attempt to answer the research questions this thesis is based on, this chapter moves from the personal experiences of the research participants to a more theoretical level, examining three key components of the methodology in more detail: The theory, the methods, and the role of the researcher. Starting with a reflection on the suitability of decolonial feminism as a theoretical lens to investigate matters connected to SRH, I proceed to a discussion on storytelling as a method, and end with scrutinizing my own role and positionality within this research, as well as the issue of outside researchers in decolonial research in more general.

5.1 Feminist decolonial research on SRH

Marginalized women in Bolivia, including campesinas, still face several challenges in regard to their SRH, ranging from limited access to respective health care services, discrimination from part of medical personnel, over culturally inappropriate services, to issues such as high prevalence of GBV (Aponte, 2020; Bant & Girard, 2008; Torri, 2013; Arachu Castro et al., 2015). However, addressing these complex issues is a difficult endeavour. First of all, sexuality is a sensitive topic condemned as a taboo by many societies, due to which people such as my research participants do not feel comfortable to talk about connected matters. Second, language and culture barriers often pose a challenge to outsiders to understand key concepts in relation to sexuality of the target group. Using hegemonic, allegedly universal concepts such as sexuality or gender might therefore not be useful in addressing issues we commonly frame as SRH issues. In this regard, applying a decolonial perspective can help to enable learning based on concepts and values inherent to the target culture. However, given the structural oppression of women that contributes substantially to problems related to sexuality, it is also necessary to add a gender lens. Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the SRH of marginalized women, decolonial feminist perspectives are needed.

Taking a closer look at how feminist decolonial research on SRH could look like, first of all research must arise from a real need prioritized by the research participants. While naturally a researcher needs to approach the participants with an initial idea, the ultimate research problem should be defined together with the participants, in a process that grants the participants space to contribute on equal terms. This might be a challenging task for the researcher as it might lead to the

realization that issues perceived as problems by outsiders are not regarded as such by the ones affected. As Bant and Girard (2008:250) for example found, contrary to the assumption of the researchers that a lack of access to contraceptives constituted the main barrier to family planning, the women participating in the research considered "gender inequality in the community, including social sanctions for not having many children, unequal decision-making with their sexual partners, and gender-based violence" to be the main reasons for abstaining from using birth control. In this regard, an in-depth analysis of what shapes the participants' needs from a feminist perspective is essential to not only hear the voice of the – often patriarchally structured – community, but of women as a group.

Collaboration during the research process must however not be reduced to the drafting of research questions: Instead, collaboration during all stages is needed as decolonial research must always be an act of reversing the historical exclusion of marginalized peoples from knowledge production. In the context of SRH, such exclusion has, among others, become evident on the international policy level where, until the late 20th century, Indigenous women were highly underrepresented in policy making and conferences that directly affected their lives (Bant & Girard, 2008:54). Thus, it must be ensured that women are given the space to speak for themselves and their needs during all phases of research. This also requires the dismantling of stereotypical and biased thinking, e.g. the framing of marginalized women as incapable of making informed choices still present in civilizational feminist discourses.

Prerequisite for the active involvement of research participants is the removal of potential power imbalances between the different actors. Additionally, in order to frame the research problem appropriately, a decolonization of vocabulary and concepts is necessary. Little will be gained by approaching problems with a concept foreign to the research participants. Instead, it is essential to understand problems in their context, based on the epistemologies of the research participants and by using the right methodology. In the case of my research participants for example, it would have been useful to let them define concepts such as sexuality or SRH themselves and frame problems in their own way before starting the storytelling sessions.

In addition, feminist decolonial research must be brave in the sense that it dares to challenge norms and values perceived as traditional and inspect them through a feminist lens. In this regard it has to be kept in mind that culture is a fluid, dynamic concept that lives and thrives off change (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). In the context of my research participants, this could mean challenging the strictly patriarchal structures inherent to their communities and proposing a reflection on, and re-evaluation of, the values of respect and reciprocity. An inspiring example of such an approach is Raby's (2018) work on gender-based violence. Using the concept of Vivir Bien to condemn GBV, she constructs a narrative in which GBV, and the oppression

of women stand in opposition to Indigenous values. Based on this example, the idea of living in harmony the research participants consider to be core to the concept of Vivir Bien, as well as the concept of respect, could be 're-used' to envision a society in which relationships become truly reciprocal and harmonious, leaving no space for oppressive behaviour. In naming and defining such a project of transformation, yachakuna uqunchismanta – a term suggested by the research participants – as a local alternative to sexuality education could be of use.

As the last chapters have shown, it is however not enough to investigate the origin and development of concepts related to SRH but instead a more holistic approach that considers respective issues in their historical, political and socio-economic context is needed. In the case of reciprocity, for example, unequal gender relations might be easier to explain in connection to the capitalist hijacking of the concept of reciprocity in economics and the following change in its meaning. However, how difficult such an analysis is becomes clear when examining the differences between life in urban and rural areas. While in the countryside it seems to be patriarchal structures and machismo that limit women in their decision making, in the city the conditions of metropolitan life such as the dependency on monetary income fostering relationships of dependency, add to the problem. As we can see, both coloniality, showing its face through discrimination and a socio-economic system pushing rural women to the margins; as well as patriarchy, deeply enshrined in the customs and culture of their communities, negatively impact the SRH of the research participants and their peers, making a feminist decolonial approach necessary.

Concluding with the potential positive impacts of adopting a feminist decolonial approach to research on SRH, I argue that it holds benefits for individuals, communities, public policy makers and academics likewise. On the individual and community level, feminist decolonial research does not only provide a space for marginalized peoples to contribute to knowledge creation, but it also opens up a space in which to discuss and renegotiate community values and customs that are harmful for women and girls. For policy makers, respective research can provide valuable insights that can help transform to SRH policies and interventions to be more effective and adopted by a wider population, for example by revealing the coloniality inherent to existing services. Last, for academics, feminist decolonial research paradigms offer an ethically sustainable way to research matters connected to SRH in a holistic and meaningful way. Linking this to Tuhiwai Smith's (2012:120) conceptualization of Indigenous research, this approach seems to hold great potential to foster the self-determination of Indigenous women in regard to their SRH; the development of culturally and epistemologically appropriate SRH services; the recovery of traditional medicine to support SRH; and thus the survival of Indigenous culture, and of Indigenous women.

5.2 Storytelling in SRH research

Moving from the theoretical framework to the concrete methods employed in this study, following storytelling in combination with crafting as a method to create knowledge, and thematic analysis as a means to interpret stories are discussed. Storytelling is a method typical for Indigenous methodologies but can also be found in qualitative research paradigms, for example in the form of narrative inquiry.

Taking a closer look at its practical suitability, it appears that storytelling is a convenient method to gain a deep understanding of sensitive and complex issues such as sexuality, especially if the research participants originate from communities with rich oral histories in which knowledge is commonly conveyed through stories. In this context, the research participants reported collective learning through storytelling to be a familiar and convenient method also used by them to convey knowledge to their children, and in accordance with their customs. However, it is a time intensive method as it requires the building of an environment of trust with well-established relationships between the members in order to allow for meaningful exchange and learning; a state that I doubt can be achieved in a few gatherings; and impossible to achieve through remote research.

In addition to storytelling, the research participants carried out a handcrafting activity, namely bordering aguayos with crochet (picture 2). This activity, proposed by the research participants themselves, turned out to not only have practical use but also provide a rich metaphorical level to the research. While one could argue that bordering aguayos is a way of strengthening gender roles by crafting a tool used to carry children, I would rather see it as a way of strengthening culture. As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) and Galindo (2006) argue, crafting, historically the task of women, is an act of weaving culture connecting the past with the present by engaging in the same activities as their ancestors. Thus, it is not only a tool to carry children – or other goods – but it is a way to involve children in their culture from an early age on. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), who herself found to her Indigenous origin through her 'nana' speaks of the "aguayo complex" children raised in an aguayo experience: Feeling deeply connected to the culture and their ancestors. In this regard it is also important to note that the aguayo is the one part of traditional clothing also women not wearing the pollera (traditional skirt that comes with wearing a special type of blouse, apron, hairstyle etc.) use. In addition, carrying a child in an aguayo frees the mother's hand and could therefore also be regarded as a liberating tool.

picture 2

Coming back to storytelling, in an attempt to provide my research partner a framework for each session, I drafted a list of guiding questions she could use freely to steer the conversations. While for some topics a simple introductory question or nudge was sufficient to initiate storytelling, especially topics concerning origin and community, other questions concerning mostly topics or concepts retrieved from literature the women were not familiar with lead to interview-like situations producing short answers. This serves as a reminder that Indigenous concepts can by definition not be universal and that every peoples have their own unique and independent knowledge systems. Thus, introducing certain topics supposed to be relevant for a certain community can negatively impact the outcome of the session not only because it can affect the direction of the conversation but also because it can alienate the participants. Being asked about concepts such as chachawarmi or Abya Yala found in decolonial literature from the region, the women who were not familiar with the terms immediately felt they had to explain their 'lack of knowledge' with a lack of education, although those terms might simply not be part of the local language.

As we can see, concepts retrieved from literature led to false and biased expectations from my part and had a rather negative effect on the research process. While as a researcher it is undeniably crucial to work with a sound theoretical foundation and base one's research on established literature and other research, one has to be careful to not impose any foreign concepts and at the same time ask meaningful questions. As ultimately certain research questions have to be answered, it might not be possible to draft guiding questions without any presumptions about definitions and conceptualizations key to the research, however, more space than in this research should be given to the participants to frame their own definitions to let their knowledge and experiences guide the process.

At the same time, as a researcher one has to acknowledge that storytelling as a method might not result in the desired research outcome; one cannot expect to gain insights into Indigenous knowledge systems that serve a specific research purpose with a non-extractive approach; and that having finished research, the results may be difficult to link to existing literature. However, this is a problem not unique to Indigenous or decolonial research but a common problem of qualitative research too.

Regarding the presentation of learnings, while building collective stories and knowledge as well as using such knowledge in research might require some kind of systemic analysis, few methods to make meaning of stories that are in accordance with both Indigenous and qualitative research paradigms seem to exist. Based on the works of Kovach (2009; 2021) in this thesis thematic analysis – a rather common tool in Indigenous research using storytelling – was used. However, as Kovach (2009) indicates, rather than being the best suitable method, it might be the least bad.

Reflecting on my own research process, dissecting stories, abstracting them from their context and categorizing them according to my own interpretation of

importance felt like an inherently wrong move, violating the core principles of Indigenous research. Looking back at the criticism of decolonial scholars of what they call dominant research paradigms, one main point is the extractivist nature and history of research. Examining this research process more closely, the thematic analysis consisted of me – an outsider to the cultures of the research participants – deciding upon what themes and topics were important, extracting the most 'relevant' story pieces, and assembling them in what I perceived to be a cohesive way. Although I tried to follow the prioritization of the women, highlighting those parts the women had given most space to in their stories, the result was not as much the women speaking for themselves as me re-telling their stories.

While I acknowledge and struggle with this conflict, I have come to understand the necessity and added value of conducting an analysis which allows for a richer understanding and learning through a deeper engagement with the stories. By presenting at least some of the learnings in story form – although in a condensed and 'polished' way – I attempted to overcome this struggle. Embedding each story in context and trying to introduce the women in a fashion that enables the reader to learn about the individual life paths of the research participants, I hope to have shown that only by viewing stories in their totality, considering the interrelatedness between the different spheres and stages of life, one can learn about their choices and needs. At the same time, I acknowledge that due to the lack of my personal involvement, this could only happen on a superficial level as I do not personally know the research participants.

Despite its limitations, I view the learnings from this research process as valuable for further feminist decolonial research on SRH. More specifically, I believe that the stories of the research participants are important building blocks of local knowledge as they propose a rarely heard perspective to life in the city as a rural migrant woman. By disseminating such stories, listeners and readers will gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the lived realities, the experiences and struggles, but also the potential and agency of the women, and hopefully start to question how current interventions, both from the government and the non-profit sector are designed and implemented.

At the same time, strengthening the feeling of community between the women by connecting them through storytelling has facilitated the building of relationships and encouraged them to build narratives together. Most women seemed to have enjoyed the activities and stated that they learned a lot through listening to their peers. Feeling comfortable and safe in the research setting which resembled their family gatherings, sharing and listening enabled them to get to know each other on a deeper level and connect with each other. Asked about feedback, many of the women voiced their wish to continue with the sessions and their wish to learn more about topics such

as preventing pregnancies. To only cite one of them, Luisa suggested continuing the sessions in the form of a "club of mothers" to help out each other.

Going a step further, the knowledge created can moreover be used in the struggle to decolonize, among others, sexual and reproductive health services. As already touched upon in the previous section, alternative narratives, conceptualizations, and vocabulary based on local knowledge can be used to understand and frame issues related to sexuality and reproduction in a culturally appropriate way. This can be applied to the many levels of SRH services. In public health services, personnel could be trained to explain and reframe matters connected to SRH differently, such as has been done by Kotanyi and Krings-Ney in context of HIV prevention (2009). Moreover, services such as assisting childbirth could be redesigned to follow cultural protocols, as for example done in Peru and Ecuador through the introduction of vertical birth stations (Llamas & Mayhew, 2018). In addition, fostering "therapeutic pluralism" through the integration of traditional medicine can add value to SRH services – an issue investigated among others by Torri (2013) who researches the traditional use of plants in reproductive health by traditional midwives. The importance of decolonizing health care has also been recognized by the Bolivian government under Morales who promoted traditional medicine through the model of intercultural health care, promoting among others the use of Indigenous birth stations and traditional therapists and midwives (Ramírez Hita, 2014:763) – a plan that does not seem to have reached the research participants yet.

More important than any of the interventions mentioned above is however the erasure of discriminatory practices and prejudices from part of health care personnel as well as the provision of health care services in the local language – reflecting not only the wishes of the research participants but also existing research on the matter (Llamas and Mayhew, 2018; Arachu Castro et al., 2015).

In addition to adapting services, education and information about issues related to sexuality, not only provided by public health care services but also NGOs and other actors, should be decolonized too. Again, individual and collective stories of the target population can help to access local knowledge and understand important concepts.

In conclusion, I would argue that stories can be used for three different purposes core to decolonization: First, understanding the experiences, needs and epistemologies of local peoples; second, questioning and critically analysing hegemonic discourses dominating how we understand concepts such as sexuality and underlying respective interventions; and three, building alternatives based on local concepts and value systems. Regarding SRH, this means understanding the real needs of women in the context not only of their culture but also the inherently patriarchal systems they live in; detecting the flaws of interventions coined by coloniality; and

building alternatives that frame problems in an appropriate way and offer appropriate solutions. However, decolonization SRH must always happen from a feminist standpoint in order to avoid that practices perceived as traditional reinforce patriarchal structures and customs.

5.3 Outside researchers in decolonial research

As discussed extensively in the methodology chapter, conducting decolonial research as an outside researcher can be problematic if the approach towards the topic and research in general remains colonial. At the same time, involvement of outside researchers is crucial for the project of decolonization as it cannot be achieved through the work of Indigenous or other marginalized peoples only. Instead, decolonization must be a collective endeavour of everybody to be successful as it requires great systemic change. Thus, it is important to investigate the role of outside researchers and their responsibility in transforming research.

Key for being part of decolonial research for researchers educated and socialised in hegemonic cultures and societies are, so I deduct, two things: one the one hand, the researcher must use a decolonial research paradigm and methodology for the study which requires a deep engagement with decolonial literature and theories as well as with the research participants. As I have pointed out before, this does not necessarily require the use of an intrinsically Indigenous research paradigm arising from an Indigenous epistemology but rather assuming a decolonial position from one's own positioning within academia. On the other hand, it requires the questioning of learned patterns, not only in the realm of research but also in connection to one's understanding of phenomena such as capitalism or history; the decolonization of one's own thinking.

Now, as changing one's beliefs and customs, and recognizing and acknowledging the history of one's own people is undoubtedly a challenging and unsettling endeavour that needs time, learning to do decolonial research can be a difficult process. One way to go through the process of 'unlearning' is conducting research – learning by doing. Following this reasoning, it could be argued that as long as the long-term goal of a researcher is to engage in decolonizing practices, they should be 'allowed' to conduct research on marginalized peoples, even though their first research might not fully live up to the standards of decolonial research yet – as does this particular research. After all, learning from and with research participants is a great way to decolonize one's own mind. However, taking into account the amount of researchers that need to be 'decolonized', this is at the same time problematic in the sense that it makes research communities tools for the personal goal of decolonization of outside researchers. Thus, comprehensive guidelines on how and when to conduct Indigenous research might be helpful to prevent exploitative research.

This discussion brings us right to the core of Indigenous epistemologies as described by Wilson (2008) who emphasizes that learning can only occur through relationship building, and one can only learn from somebody else. Although I have not personally had the chance to get to know and form relationships with the research participants, I still feel that through their stories I have been able to learn and develop my own thinking and worldview considerably. This highlights the importance of stories for the transmission of knowledge and learning which again is a strong argument for integrating stories in their full length and with little editing into research. However, at this point it has to be emphasized that I am acquainted with the context and have lived and worked in Sucre for a considerable amount of time.

Outside researchers' roles in decolonial research, I argue, thus goes far beyond facilitating or conducting research; apart from being a vehicle for spreading stories and strengthening alternative knowledge and epistemologies, they assume the position of learners who learn from their research participants. According to the principles underlying decolonial research, the researcher is thus viewed as the one receiving knowledge and learning from the research participants and not the knowledge holder. Consequently, engaging in decolonial research requires the acknowledgement that one cannot find any truth but will only learn one of many truths from the research participants[26]. As we can see, the role of an outside researcher is thus multi-layered.

Reflecting upon my own research journey, there are considerable flaws and problems with my own role to be found. First of all, the lack of direct involvement due to the remote nature of this research constitutes a breach with one of the most fundamental pillars of Indigenous research, which is relationship building (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Kovach, 2009). Due to the uncertainty of these times I decided to avoid travelling and try to conduct research "from home", having my research partner Constantina Mostazedo conduct the field research on my behalf. As a result of my absence, I could not engage in relationship building, and the power balances between me and the participants remained unclear. Another side-effect of remote research was that the research questions themselves could not be drafted collaboratively with the research participants. Nevertheless, it is possible that my absence has also benefited the process as the women might not have been as comfortable sharing if I had been present.

In addition to the impossibility to get to know and build relationships with the research participants myself, communication with my research partner with whom I share a long friendship has been challenging due to bad internet connection and the time difference. Thus, it has been hard to assess her real feelings and thoughts on this project as engaging in fruitful discussions through virtual meetings is far less easy. As

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[26] Again, this position is not unique to Indigenous research but has also been recognized in many other research paradigms

all this teaches me, especially for outside researchers' personal involvement with the research participants is essential for an ethically sound research.

Another difficulty outside researchers face concerns the interpretation and analysis of learnings. As discussed before, despite the conflict with certain Indigenous research principles, stories should ideally be analysed systematically instead of being left to the interpretation of the reader. While local researchers who have grown up in the research community might dispose of the required knowledge to interpret and analyse stories accordingly, I doubt that outside researchers are equally equipped to do so. Nevertheless, due to its low interpretative character, thematic analysis can be a useful tool to organize and understand stories and reveal hidden layers.

In conclusion, while I consider the engagement of outside researchers in decolonial research important for the greater project of decolonization both in academia, policy making and on the intervention level, this engagement should follow strict ethical rules and contain continuous reflection on tensions and struggles. In the context of SRH research, the researcher must not only become aware of their relation to the research participants as an outsider to their culture, but also examine their positionality in the context of gender. In this regard, being of the same gender does not automatically produce mutual understanding. On the contrary, being educated within the framework of civilizational feminism might nurture certain biases and assumptions that are detrimental for decolonial research and must thus be deconstructed too.

Nevertheless, looking at the outcome of this particular research journey, despite the struggles and unresolved tensions accompanying it, the research participants reported to have enjoyed and benefited from the activities, reinforcing the power storytelling can have.

6. CONCLUSION

As I have come to understand, researching matters connected to SRH in societies inherently different from metropolitan societies with a decolonial approach requires a rethinking of what research is and how it is conducted. Therefore, one of the main aims of this thesis was to examine the potential of employing a decolonial methodology from an outsider's perspective, using storytelling as the main research method. As this thesis has shown, this approach has a lot of potential but at the same time poses complex challenges to the researcher. At the same time, this thesis project aimed at providing the research participants a save space to share, connect and learn together. To conclude this thesis, I want to come back to my research questions, but also take a look at the wider contributions of this thesis as well as its limitations and implications for further research.

6. 1 Reflection upon research questions

Although sexual and reproductive health care programs in most countries have shifted from a population control to a health and rights-based agenda, due to their reliance on allegedly universal conceptualizations of sexuality and gender as well as Eurocentric approaches to education and health, most programs still follow inherently dominant and colonial patterns. While the need for appropriate SRH care is great, it seems that existing programs do not always cater to the needs of the most marginalized, and disregard local knowledges and value systems crucial to understand the lived realities of the target groups. As a response to this mismatch between supply and demand, the aim of this thesis was to explore how sexual and reproductive health care could be decolonized. Therefore, I tried to answer the following three research questions: 1) How could a feminist decolonial perspective inform research on sexual and reproductive health? 2) How can the stories of Quechua women in Sucre Bolivia be used to build local knowledge to decolonize the concept of sexual and reproductive health? 3) What role can outside researchers take up in decolonial research on sexual and reproductive health?

RQ1: How could a feminist decolonial perspective inform research on sexual and reproductive health?

Regarding the first question, decolonial feminism has proven a suitable approach to researching issues related to SRH. In contrast to conventional decolonial thought, decolonial feminisms enable a more nuanced "multidimensional analysis" of issues and not only focus on the interplay of race and class but also gender, whilst simultaneously fighting against the capitalist world order (Vergés, 2021:20). Thus, decolonization from a feminist perspective requires the dismantling of patriarchal structures supporting the coloniality of gender and sexuality. Far from catering only to colonial women, "[d]ecolonial feminisms do not aim to improve the existing system

but to combat all forms of oppression: justice for women means justice for all" (ibid). However, at the same time decolonial feminisms open up a space of struggle and conflict; for many, denouncing patriarchy means denouncing traditional, Indigenous ways of life. In this regard, it helps to envision indigeneity and culture not as fixed, static categories but instead, following Rivera Cusicanqui's (2012) analysis of indigeneity, as dynamic and ever evolving.

While many feminist decolonial scholars such as Lugones (2010), Oyewumi (1997) or Vergés (2021) base their claim for depatriarchalization on the assumption that many precolonial societies did not dispose of concepts such as gender or patriarchy, it has been shown that while the strictly hierarchical type of patriarchy common today undeniably is the result of colonialism, pre-Hispanic Andean societies were largely patriarchal (Segato, 2016; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Mendoza, 2015). Therefore, legitimizing the fight against patriarchy by viewing decolonization not merely as a return to precolonial knowledge systems but as a process of societal transformation might be the more suitable approach. This approach also opens up a space for transforming SRH interventions as it allows for a rethinking of concepts such as sexuality and SRH not restricted by allegedly traditional knowledge.

Taking a closer look at how SRH could be decolonized from a feminist perspective, first allegedly universal conceptualizations of sexuality and gender as well as Eurocentric approaches to health and education must be questioned and analysed in the context of colonialism, including a thorough analysis of the coloniality of gender and sexuality. In a next step, local knowledges related to gender and sexuality must be restored, revived and built. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that knowledge systems are not static but constantly evolve, and therefore need to be adapted to contemporary life circumstances. This might require a rethinking of gender relations beyond the traditional and a renegotiation of societal order. Focusing on values such as reciprocity, core to most Indigenous world views, could be one strategy to depatriarchalize without having to rely on external concepts such as gender equality.

In this regard, knowledge building must not solely be based on pre-colonial knowledges but should also embrace the adoption and owning of other knowledges. For example, modern medicine and its achievements should not simply be abandoned but instead the approach to health and the way people receive treatment and information changed. As Tuhiwai Smith (2012:40) puts it, it is about "reconciling (...) what is really important about the past with what is important about the present and reprioritizing accordingly".

Last, not only knowledge but also the modalities through which knowledge is conveyed must be rethought. For example, for peoples who have a strong sense of community, group learning might be more effective than one-on-one sessions and more in accordance with their epistemologies. Thus, decolonizing SRH care does not

only require a rethinking of the content of respective programs but learning modalities.

RQ2: How can the stories of Quechua women in Sucre, Bolivia be used to build local knowledge to decolonize the concept of sexual and reproductive health?

Moving on to the second question, according to Wilson (2008), Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Kovach (2009), in order to build and strengthen Indigenous epistemologies and decolonize research, Indigenous methods are needed. While scholars argue about the use of non-Indigenous methods in Indigenous research, I saw myself confronted with another question, namely whether the use of an Indigenous methodology is appropriate if the research participants do not directly identify as Indigenous *and* the researcher is not Indigenous. Although Kovach (2010) has used Indigenous methodologies for non-Indigenous participants, she herself does identify as Indigenous.

In my search for an answer to this question, inevitably the question of how indigeneity can be defined came up. Comparing the different approximations of people identifying as Indigenous, I came to the conclusion that although my research participants themselves are not familiar with the term, listening to their stories, they share more traits with declared Indigenous peoples than metropolitan societies. In addition, Indigenous has many synonyms; as Tuhiwai Smith (2012:6) argues, the term "indigenous is problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different" and that Indigenous peoples often identify through "labels that connect us to Mother Earth, and to deeply significant spiritual relationships" (ibid) which applies to the women participating in this research, legitimising in my view the reference to Indigenous methodology.

Nevertheless, due to my own positionality the methodology of this study could not be situated within an Indigenous research paradigm but rather between Indigenous and qualitative research. Regarding the method used to create knowledge, storytelling, typical to Indigenous but also qualitative research, was used. Adapted to the specific research context, a typical crafting activity was added, localizing the research method.

Storytelling allows researchers and research participants to interact on an equal level and engage in mutual learning. According to Kovach (2012:101), "[t]he story can only exist within an interdependent relationship of the narrator and audience". Storytelling allows one to gain a deep and contextualized understanding of an issue and grants the storyteller the power to determine the content and direction of learning (ibid:125). To enable learning, the researcher must interpret and use the knowledge gained through storytelling in a respectful manner, which includes the acknowledgement of the existence of multiple truths (Wilson, 2008:77). Thus, scholars such as Wilson (2008) hesitate to interpret learnings and leave it to the reader to make

sense of a story. In the context of the coloniality of knowledge production, stories are an important tool to build "a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:145) and to "connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story" (ibid:146).

In the context of this study, storytelling accompanied by traditional handcrafting (see the outcome in picture 3) was used as a method to build knowledge about the women's lives, their experiences and their needs in relation to SRH. An important step was to acknowledge that SRH services must go beyond a medical approach and consider the wider context SRH issues arise from. Storytelling, although time consuming, turned out to be a good method to gain this in-depth knowledge. Storytelling not only enables learning about the needs and experiences connected to SRH services, and based on that develop tailored programs according to the world views of the target group, but can also create valuable knowledge about different learning modalities. Moreover, involvement of the target group in research might raise their trust in respective programs and thus their effectiveness.

Although due to limitations in scope and time the learning outcomes of the storytelling sessions in regard to learnings about SRH were not that plentiful, in general storytelling has a lot of potential to build knowledge that provides an alternative to allegedly universal discourses on SRH. Strengthening collective stories, building local knowledges and defining conceptualizations with a feminist decolonial approach, provides an opportunity to rethink and redesign SRH as we know it today.

RQ 3: What role can outside researchers take up in decolonial research on sexual and reproductive health?

Last, reflecting on the question, what role a non-native researcher can take up in this process, first of all the mandate of non-locals in conducting respective research must be illuminated. While according to Curiel (2015:54) those affected by a certain struggle should enjoy an epistemic privilege, most decolonial thinkers – including Curiel – agree that non-Indigenous, or non-local researchers should not categorically be excluded from decolonial research. Instead of their origin, attention should be paid to the way they conduct research. Moreover, as scholars such as de Sousa Santos (2018) argue, decolonization of academia will need to be a shared effort in which researchers from the Global South are supported in their struggle by their colleagues from the Global North, resonating with the idea of decolonial feminism as being for all (Vergés, 2021).

However, engaging in decolonial research also imposes certain ethical rules and restrictions on outside researchers and requires researchers to reflect profoundly on their positionality. This might include the acknowledgement of their historically privileged position as well as the willingness to give up certain privileges. As I have come to understand, this is especially important for researchers coming from a feminist position; to be able to engage in decolonial research, one must also analyse how mainstream feminism has biased ones' own thinking, and deconstruct the colonial patterns such feminism has potentially nurtured. In regard to SRH, this might require a researcher to accept that the needs and experiences of research participants are fundamentally different from one's owns, and that what mainstream feminism determines to be the most desirable solution might not apply to the research context. At the same time, one has to be careful to not precipitately endorse oppressive behaviour and patriarchal structures.

In conclusion, while engaging in decolonial research – especially in feminist decolonial research – might be challenging for outside researchers, I do believe that only a shared effort will bring about change in academia.

6.2 Contribution to the academic discourse and practical recommendations

Regarding the wider goal of this thesis, on the one hand I want to contribute to the larger discussion on decolonization within academia and the strengthening of decolonial feminism as well as the use of alternative research methodologies for more epistemological diversity within academia. On the other hand, I want to provide practical recommendations for decision-makers in charge of developing SRH programs.

Starting with the contributions to existing research, it has to be acknowledged that both Indigenous research and decolonial feminism are growing paradigms that have produced diverse and rich research and activism. However, Indigenous research seems to be a rather narrow research paradigm which, given the impossibility of defining indigeneity, makes it challenging to determine who it is for. Although the scope of this thesis is not great enough to engage in a detailed discussion on this issue, I argue that a deeper engagement with the boundaries of Indigenous research could be helpful to expand the scope of Indigenous research to peoples such as the participants to this thesis too, as well as enabling outside researchers like me to be part of respective research. While methods such as participatory action research are commonly used to conduct research on marginalized people, I do believe that Indigenous research paradigms have great potential for such groups too. In addition, while decolonial feminism is an established theory that has moreover been guiding practice of women in the Global South for decades, although Tuhiwai Smith (2012:152)

acknowledges the importance of "gendering Indigenous debates", Indigenous methodology seldomly seems to have a strong feminist perspective.

Regarding the practical implementation, although there exist various small-scale projects on intercultural sexual and reproductive health care (e.g. Kotanyi & Krings-Ney, 2009; Bant & Girard, 2008; Llamas & Mayhew, 2018), the methodology to build these programs seems to be largely conventional. As this thesis shows, employing alternative methodologies to build knowledge based on which such programs can be developed can have many benefits and facilitate the design of effective and appropriate programs. Especially decolonial feminisms provide valuable tools to research matters connected to SRH. Paired with Indigenous research methodologies, these could have great potential for SRH research. Thus, I see the main contribution of this thesis in its attempt to combine a feminist decolonial perspective with a methodology located between Indigenous and qualitative research paradigms.

Taking a closer look at the implications of this thesis for practice, while there have not been any great new insights into SRH as conceptualized by the research participants nor their needs, I believe that it does show the benefits of basing SRH programs more on local knowledge and helps to revaluate existing programs from a new perspective.

6.3 Limitations and further research

The greatest limitation of this research was its remote nature, which was mainly dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic making travelling at the time of conducting the thesis risky. Although based on the feedback of the research participants as well as my personal learning curve I regard the sessions as being successful, by passing on the task of relationship building to my research assistant, I breached one of the most important principles of Indigenous research, relational accountability. While initially my intention was to explore distance relationship building, I have come to the conclusion that it is a rather impossible endeavour, at least in a time frame this tight. This brings me to the second great limitation, which was the short time dedicated to field research. While this might be excusable for a master's thesis, I do believe that decolonial research must be more in-depth and engagement with the research community go beyond the research period. This connects directly to the last great limitation which was the low involvement of the research participants in the design of the study. Again, time and travel constraints restricted the collaboration in crafting a research strategy, which violated another important principle of decolonial research. Summed up, time and travel constraints made a truly decolonial research process impossible.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations I believe that this thesis can be a good starting point for further research and, for example, build the basis for the development of a community-based sexuality education program grounded in local

knowledge. On the one hand, the exploration of storytelling as a method grants valuable insights for the further development of a decolonial methodology. On the other hand, through the storytelling sessions much has been learned about preferred learning modalities of the research participants that can be used in further research. In addition, it would be interesting to research SRH development interventions in their historical background and not only in the past 50 years. Last, I hope that this thesis will function as an inspiration for other students to explore alternative methodologies for their master's theses and to adopt a more critical approach to research in general.

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ANNEX: STORIES

The following stories have been translated from Quechua into Spanish by my research partner, Constantina Mostazedo, and from Spanish to English by myself. Like the stories presented in the thesis, they consist of bits and pieces from different storytelling sessions and have been slightly edited for readability. They moreover do not contain everything shared in the sessions.

Hilaria

In the 70's we faced many difficult situations in my community, for example there were no basic services like water, electricity and other services. Therefore in these times the nights were very long, the only light we had to brighten up the nights were little kerosene lamps called mecheros. Back in those days we didn't have money to buy enough kerosene so we had to limit the use of light. Therefore we went to bed early when the sun started to set and it became dark – there was no radio to listen to either. In order to get water we had to walk long distances and carry the water in containers called *puyñu* on our backs or with our donkeys and the same way we collected firewood.

We didn't have access to school because of the distance, but also because of the ideology of our parents who thought that women don't need to know how to read and write and that only men had to prepare themselves in case they needed to travel to the city to work. Usually, they travelled in winter after the harvesting season, in search for temporary work to cities like Sucre, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz for the sugar cane harvest called safra, or to work as masons, while we women stayed at home with our mothers or taking care of our children, the sowing and the animals. Personally, I have never stepped foot into a school, I was always with the sheep or goat flocks until I was old enough to marry. That was the first time I left home, but only to go serve another man, form a new family like my parents.

In the countryside the husband is more dominant, something that in the city is not that common anymore, maybe because people are afraid of being denounced or criticised by others, or called machista.

For me, my family are my children, my husbands, parents, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews and my community with whom I live with, day to day. We help each other and we accompany each other in every moment. All my children are in the city and the majority of my family members have also moved to different cities looking for better opportunities for their families. We meet each other one or two times a year during the festivities of my village or for the sowing and harvesting season, but we never lose contact. When we meet the conversations are unique, like they would never end very intimate and enjoyable like family. The city and my community are very different. In my community I find tranquillity, I can produce my own food and I don't

need any money. The only problems are the lack of water, electricity and the inclemency of the weather, or when I lose my harvest.

In the city you cannot live without money and to get some you have to work every day. A good thing about the city is the access to school for the children and life is also more comfortable when one has money to have all basic necessities met it makes it much easier unlike in my community where I have to recollect wood to cook and carry water and use candles although that is much better than the mechero or lamp.

However, people in the city are very discriminatory, therefore I cannot work – even worse as I cannot read nor write. I therefore do not want to approach these people. In the city it is my husband who works and who sustains our family economically, working as an assistant mason. I agree that the husband is the one who should sustain the family and we women should dedicate ourselves to household chores. Men and women have different tasks: men do not do household chores like washing or cooking, their task is to bring home money and make sure the children have food to eat.

I have learned through my daily life. Nobody taught me but I can say that I learned a lot from the people who surround me in the city by connecting with them in some way or another. I did not attend school for even a year, and I feel like I was blind or without eyes and cannot see anything because I cannot read and write.

I do not know what sexual and reproductive rights mean. In my community, if you cannot read nor write you do not know many things. I do not know anything, doña Constantina, you ask me in vain. I do not talk about these things [sexuality] with my children. As I don't understand I avoid talking about these things. Anyway, how should I even start talking with my children, no, no, no. Sometimes I think and say yes, it could be, but as soon as I think about talking to my children about these things I change my mind.

Rosa

In my community animals are one's property, and a person who has many sheep, goats, donkeys and cattle is considered somebody with more valuable assets. We children could not attend school, in my case my parents had the idea that women had no reason to attend school. Moreover we lived in a place far away with no vehicular road so no teacher ever got motivated to come and teach and my parents never let me go out accompanied by boys – in these time there were parents who walked for kilometres with their children if they wanted them to learn to read and write, two to three hours approximately to get to school, six hours of walking a day, if it was raining the situation was even worse as crossing rivers became very dangerous.

After marrying I continued living in my community for twenty years. Six of my children were born on my land, my husband used to travel to the city to earn some

money in winter when there was no sowing nor harvesting, and that way I got to know the citylife a little bit.

It was him who suggested moving with the whole family and I accepted because of my children whom I wanted to have something better. When I arrived to the city I did not know the city and even worse, I did not speak Spanish. In the beginning I cried a lot and we came to live in the house of a distant relative on rent, and in total ignorance I did not know how to use the water tap, the light, the gas container and even worse the shower and other devices. In some moment I thought about returning to my place, then my two other children were born in the city, now I am 52 years old and I still don't have a house on my own, I still live in a rented home and my husband does not earn enough to save money in order to buy land or a small house.

In my case, I don't work, I only dedicate myself to taking care of my home. Sometimes I do small temporary jobs, washing clothes, selecting peanuts, for one year I was sweeping the gas station. My husband is the one that works as an assistant mason, but it is not constant work either. As a woman it is my job to take care of my children and my husband has to work. The same thing I tell my sons, that they need to work to support their women and the women need to take care of their husband and children, feeding them and providing them clean clothes. This way we were brought up and this way we do it. However, my husband does not work well and therefore we fight a lot.

I often travel to my land to sow and harvest to help me out, as my husband often forgets that he has many children. Because of this Covid-19 disease sometimes I think about returning to my community.

I did not attend school for even a year, therefore I cannot even sign my name. My parents never thought about putting me into school, all the time they had me with the sheep to take care of them, for that reason I cannot read. Sometimes people make fun of me. I think that education must be the right to attend primary and secondary school and if possible the university, that must be it.

At this time of my life I can't study anymore and I think that I will die like this. Moreover my husband would not let me attend classes and he's right, I am old already and it would be for nothing to try to learn, my head is occupied enough with working and taking care of my children.

I heard about this [sexuality education] for the first time at the health centre where the doctor that attended me talked to me about it. Never before had I been talked about this before, and when I heard it I felt very ashamed that he talked to me about it, as for my parents this would be very prohibited – talk about this is bad education. I do not understand these things [sexuality] as I grew up in the countryside

with all the ignorance. We never mentioned these things with my parents, and neither do I with my children. I also do not know what the word [gender] means.

About that topic [homosexuality], one time I heard that a peasant went after men, but that was it, I did not hear more about it – these things are criticised very much in my community.

I think it is good to reunite in a group to listen and to learn. Alone, I feel ashamed to listen, although when I had my last two children the doctor already talked to me a little bit, but it would be better if a woman talked to us who knows about the topic. I would trust a woman more. I liked the sessions a lot, and I learned many things and most importantly, I was able to build relationships with my *compañeras*.

Yolanda

I came to the city when I was eight years old to work as a domestic worker. After my mother was left widowed, I had to help my younger brothers so I started to work for 60 Bolivianos with which I helped to mitigate the hunger of my brothers. I stopped attending school because at that time my employers did not allow me to go to school. With 15 years I started living with the father of my children and I am still married to him until today. For the first six years of our relationship, I returned to my village, after my mother had passed away, and seven years ago we came back to the city. Now I only have my old grandmother left in my community whom I visit regularly. Because of my children I don't think about returning to life in the rural area.

My children are both boys and I would like that one day when they have a partner they are good women who take good care of them like I do in my home and that they do not have to fight about this situation. Every mother would like their sons to be taken good care of by their wifes.

I also agree that men and women have different tasks and obligations, although in the city they say that that is not okay, but I learned since I was young that as women we are to attend the home and the men are those who are supposed to work.

Education is everything that teachers teach and I also understand that it is the education that our parents give to us at home, or at least that's what I think. At school they taught us to say our homeland Bolivia, but since I can think I have always heard talking about Kay pacha. Already our grandparents used this word.

At school I learned very little about sexuality, only that it refers to the relationship between a couple if I am not mistaken. I also learned that gender means man and woman, I think, if I am not mistaken, but in Quechua this word does not exist, so the way you ask us we don't understand, but if you translate it to Quechua I think you mean all that.

I think they mean [by calling us Indigenous] that we are from a determined place, or from a certain village.

The activity was a pleasure, I am very thankful for all the support, and I would like to continue with this activity. You learn a lot. We want to ask you to support us with a small basket at the end of the year. We do not have work and do not receive any benefits or gift baskets like others. Our children wait like many children, we would be very thankful.

Julia

I believe that the man is meant to work and the woman is meant to take care of the house including food and of the children, but as a woman it is also my duty to help save money to equip ourselves with material things. My mother taught me this way that the woman has to attend to the man with food and attention, and I talk to my daughters the same way, so that they won't be mistreated and obliged to work when it is their husband who should be working.

My sons need to work to support their wifes economically and have to be attended to by their wifes. I also tell this to my daughters-in-law who need to be attentive to their husbands and not work.

Albertina

My name is Albertina, I am from Potolo. In my community we have very extreme habits, for example a young woman cannot choose whom to marry, the parents are the ones who chose the partner and oblige them to marry. Another one is that women have to bear children to their spouses until God says it is enough, filling up with children.

Between men and women I think we should have the same responsibility, with our children, something that is not happening in our society. Within most marriages the head of the family is the husband, in my case my husband does not let me work, he says a woman who works will go off the rails, she goes off with other men he thinks, but he doesn't work well either and often we don't have anything to eat. Maybe I should not have married, but I cannot separate because of my children. I need him to support me so my children can study, although the older ones already work and help with their costs.

My mother-in-law is a woman who interferes a lot in our relationship. She thinks that I must not work and earn my own money. She only wants me to dedicate myself to the home without working.

For me family is love, sharing, helping each other, taking care of each other, being together in good and bad times with all my people, having things in common, and that my husband and my sons understand and help me.

In my family we don't talk about this topic [sexuality], it is very private for each couple, this is the first time I hear talking about this. My parents never talked about

this in my family where it is prohibited to talk about the relations between a couple. To talk about these things influences the children, it is like opening the eyes of the innocent. I did not know that sexuality could mean other things, I always thought that sexuality refers to the sexual relationships of a couple.

I want to thank you for the collaboration and providing us the aguayos. We have learned a lot through this activity and I liked it a lot. Listening to my companions I noticed that I am not the only one suffering as a woman and a mother. I missed listening to my peers from my community.

Tomasa

My name is Tomasa, I came to the city of Sucre when I was twelve, and I started living with my partner at a very young age. I have three children, and I would like you to continue helping us; as women and mothers we want to learn much more.

In my family, my mother passed away when I was very young, leaving me in the custody of my father and my older brothers. My father was never with us, I spent more time with my brothers. They had no experience teaching good manners, but anyway I learned them growing up. First I learned that children always need to respect and greet older people, always respect the family and the community which is also family. I think that that is education, respecting others, like I teach my children so that they will grow up to be people who know how to respect and are respected.

I did not attend school in my community, because my mother passed away. My father dedicated himself to work to feed us, until I was 14 then I left to the city to work as a domestic worker, and could start school. I did two years and left school again when I got to know my partner who today is my husband. I returned to my community to get married and lived there for many years. After that we migrated to the city with two children and settled in Villa Armonía close to the office of CEMVA, that's how I got to know the women's group that organizes adult literacy and crafting classes. For two years I have been attending literacy classes and I am at level 4th of primary school now. I have learned a lot and am still learning. I can already summate and subtract, only that it's not like for children anymore and I forget a lot. Each time I return to clases I have to remember again, and it's not helping that I only attend once a week. For my age I do not want to attend regular evening classes anymore and moreover I have a lot of responsibilities in my home and feel too tired for it.

For mi buen vivir means living well with your family, in harmony, without fighting, get along well with everybody. I believe that it does guide us, because we all are striving to live well, if we did not know the meaning of vivir bien maybe we would live like it pleased us.

Our parents taught us that girls should leave their home married, if not we are not respected. Moreover, a man should sustain his woman.

With my family I still say kay pachay, this is my land. In my village a woman without aguayo is viewed as a woman without principles nor belongings.

Placida

My name is Placida, I am from Potosí, I have four children and I am married.

I lived with my parents in the countryside in the community Yaretas where parents have a very conservative ideology in any aspect. For example, as a child, my parents never let me play with boys, not even with my cousins. We girls had to stay with our mothers at home and help them to prepare food from a young age on while the boys were allowed to play with their friends. I grew up like this until I became a teenager and later on a young woman.

I attended school in my community until the third grade, while my younger brothers attended until 5th and 6th grade. Besides school, I had to take care of the sheep and goats – my parents were not interested in my education. For that reason I left for the city where I got to know my partner. There I started to attend an adult literacy course where I continue learning.

At first, marriage is beautiful, but later problems come up and we women are the ones who carry the worst part of them with our children. At the same time we cannot separate anymore as our children would suffer.

My hope is that my children will have a good education so that they won't be like me or their father. As parents we want them to study. I'd really wish for my community to have everything so I'd be able to move back and live there in tranquillity. I return to my community regularly with my children as my parents are still alive, so my children can live and share our customs with their family.

I identify as a mujer del campo [literally woman from the countryside] or a peasant, I almost do not understand the word Indigenous. We do not use this word in my community, instead they call us people from the countryside. Vivir bien, I understand, tells us that we all should get along well, all people, and help us one another. I always aim to get along with everybody, starting in my home, where I talk this way with my children.

I am interested in talking about this topic [sexuality] but what will my companions say.. In Quechua nobody talks to us about this topic, but we say munanakuy what means to like or love each other between two persons, and we also can say yachakuna, uqunchismanta, which means to learn or know more about our body. Nevertheless, I can say that in the countryside we are totally ignorant about this topic. For me it [sexuality] means the difference between men and women, how we dress, moreover I think it also refers to the sexual relations that couples have. About such things [homosexuality] I do not know anything; in my community, which is very conservative these things would be considered bad and prohibited.

For me personally the aguayo means a lot, it is my traditions, my custom, since my grandparents or great-grandparents it is our traditional clothing which we used to make yarning sheep wool, apart from being part of our clothing it is a tool for work, because we use it to carry whatever thing to transport, whatever we carry on our backs and moreover we charge our donkeys with aguayos. Moreover we women use it to carry our children on our back and they are also used for decoration. The more aguayos one has in their home it is better, because the whole family can use it in some moment. It is good that you help us with the aguayos; they help us to charge our children – therefore we do the crocheting – and it also serves us to carry other things.

Martina

My name is Martina and I am from Ravelo. I did not attend school, my mother passed away when I was very little, for that reason I could not study. We were left with my brothers, my older brother had to take care of us. My father also passed away a year after my mother, and the school was located far away from my village and my brothers did not let me go out. I grew up without even knowing how to sign my name. When I arrived in the city I didn't even know how to count money. Therefore, my husband discriminated against me a lot – for being illiterate.

I teach my children what I learned from my parents, first of all respect towards others, and I think that this is our main responsibility as parents. I always tell them to not forget where they come from, but in the city I notice that we have to push our children to study, only that way will they have a good life. I came to the city with this thought, to give my children a better education, so that being illiterate stays only in me.

My children also still go to my lands for its anniversary. For example, there is a festivity which my children like to attend and like that they don't forget about our customs. My sons still sow using a plough and they like it.

For me it is very important to have aguayos in my home, if I don't it is almost like having nothing, it is a very important tool that even helps us to foster our children because we carry them from when they are born until they are three years old or more, moreover on the countryside we use them to carry or move things. This comes from my grandparents/ancestors?, we mothers carry our children in our aguayo, we envejecemos [grow old] up to two aguayos until the girl or boy is independent and walks alone.

In my community, we learn about respect towards others, but not about rights, maybe therefore our parents did to us what they wanted. Only here in the city do they talk about respect for rights. In the countryside you do what your parents and husbands tell you. I got married when I was very young, I filled up with children and obeyed, but now I realize that it is better to not marry very young. I would not want

my daughters to suffer like me – my husband is very jealous. But I do not get separated because people and the family talk.

My children do not need to know or talk about these things [sexuality]. Talking about this would only awaken their disquietude, moreover what would my husband say, he thinks in a bad way about these things.

However, I would like somebody to talk to my daughters so that they do not commit the same errors as me – I don't think it is good to get married very young.

To have this [sexuality education] work, I think that the willingness of each one is the most important thing when one wants to learn and if there is none, there's nothing, and second, having a person who knows the topic well, who understands us and explains things calmly so we can understand everything.

I would like you to help us in capacity building to enable us to learn about topics like how to prevent pregnancies, and to teach our children so they do not get pregnant unplanned like it used to happen before, to help our children.

Claudia

I remember that in my community they taught us using a blackboard, they made us repeat many times until we would not forget. They also told us stories with which we could imagine many interesting things. It would be nice if they would teach like that in the city; here they work directly in notebooks and books which I don't like. Moreover, we older people do not capture well and forget much.

I am 20 years old and think that it is not good to have children at a very young age. Nobody told me when I was younger that it was not good and now I regret that I had children very young, and I want that this does not happens to anybody anymore.

Sonia

My first learning experience was at home where I learned about our customs, and we had rules from our parents. Then, fortunately I could start attending school to learn to read and write in my village. In my school they only taught until 5th grade of primary school after which I finished, and after that I could not continue attending school anymore. How much I would have liked to continue with my studies, but my parents did not have the head for that, they said that only rich people who have a lot of money study, but now I am aware that it is not like that.

I would not have suffered like that, working as a domestic worker as I have until now, had I continued school. The people in the city notice that I don't even know how to speak Spanish well and they humiliate me.

I learned many things here in Sucre when I entered to work as a domestic worker. In the countryside I did not learn much, only to sow and harvest food and take care of the animals, this was my daily work. When I came to the city for the first

time I felt very bad as I could not speak Spanish well. With time I learned many things from the people of the city, by watching how they succeed and strive for a good education for their children.

Back then nobody talked about this [preventing pregnancies] and the women had like 12 children or more. In my family for example we are 9 children from my mother's side and from my father's side four. Here in the city I even hear about ways to protect yourself from diseases and prevent pregnancies.

You [Constantina] have also talked about this topic to us sometimes, and told us to talk with our children, but my husband says that my children should not hear anything like that. According to him girls get pregnant if they are talked to about these things.

Ana

I learned a lot from my husband when I married. I was very young, 15 years old and an orphan, and therefore I did not know anything – he even taught me how to cook. I think it is good to marry young because those who do not get married are viewed badly in my village. After coming to the city I noticed that I was useless and did not know anything, but thanks to God I found CEMVA and the adult illiteracy course and now I am in third grade of primary school, although I am already old, almost a senior. Back then I wanted my children to learn to speak Spanish so that they could work to help me as I cannot work anymore, but now my older children tell me that I should not only pursue money but also support them in getting an education, at least my youngest children.

I never visited a doctor, I had all my children at home, with the help of my husband, I feel very ashamed of that. It's like that that I do not hear anybody talk about this [sexuality], especially not my parents – in my family this is prohibited. I also never talk about this with my children, I think that it is not good to talk about it. I cannot talk about this, I feel ashamed.

To have this [sexuality education], we would need a place where to gather, a person that explains to us, preferably in Quechua as we almost don't understand Spanish. Thank you a lot for the patience and for all the support you give us, sometimes we do not have a lot of patience, we are older people with children and little time, but in one way or another we want to continue learning, even a little bit. I liked working in a group and sharing like in a family, I am very thankful for the activity. We never talked about the topics we talked about in these reunions in my family, but I learned to lose my fear and shame, and I'd like to continue assisting.

I walk with my aguayo everywhere, even to the market I go with my aguayo, when I buy my food I carry it in my aguayo. Mujer de pollera [women dressed in

traditional clothing] without an aguayo and without manta [other part of the traditional clothing] is seen as unfeminine.

In Quechua we say *Kay pacha*, this land, *Kay Pachapi tiyacunchis*, we live on this land.

Luisa

My name is Luisa and we would like you to support us to open a club of mothers, to help each other.

I talk to my children, I tell them like a story the things that I have lived and things I used to do when I was a child or an adolescent, but sometimes I also bring them to the land of my husband where we sow and harvest potatoes, corn and beans, and in that way my children in some way get to know our culture.

I heard that at school they teach children about this [sexuality]. My children are still small, but personally I feel very ashamed because children ask a lot of questions which at times you cannot respond to.

However, I think that it is good for my children to learn, they should be better educated in the sense that they are better prepared, and I think I will think more about them and therefore try to learn more myself, to help them. I think that it is good to learn in groups with one person that has the knowledge to explain who also listens, because sometimes the doctors and nurses scold us. When they are professionals or people that know a lot they treat us badly. When we are in a group, when I am with my people, I feel better.

In my community there exists nothing like that [homosexuality]. There are single men and also woman who grow old alone, but you never hear about men or women who live together, who want to be the opposite of what they are.

When they call us Indigenous, they mean campesina, at least that is what I think.

Catalina

On the countryside we lived like animals, without knowing many things, now I do know a little bit already.

My children are still very small, too young to talk to them about these things [sexuality]. Maybe when they are older, but until then I think that the teachers at school will talk to them about this [sexuality].

Gabriela

We are not used to talking about these things [sexuality] – why do we have to talk about these things doña Constantina...even worse with our children! If it becomes necessary at some point, I'd like another person to talk to them about this.