

# Speaking from the interstices

Latin American Decolonial Feminists Theorizing the State

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# Abstract

Latin American decolonial feminists are concerned with deconstructing the colonial legacies that persist and multiply today albeit formal colonialism has ended. This thesis engages with Latin American decolonial feminism's political project of decolonization in relation to the state, to see whether it follows the state-phobia tendency popular in other emancipatory political discourses. It focuses on the scholarly production of decolonial feminists so as to situate it in a scholarly dialogue with other traditions of critical thinking. A thematic analysis was carried out, which showed that decolonial feminists make use of emancipatory techniques for theorizing, and that they think of the state as context specific rather than universal. Furthermore, they offer a strong critique of the coloniality present in today's Latin American states and a nuanced critique of the plurinational projects advanced by indigenous movements. The thesis shows an incipient theorization of a friendlier state for decolonial feminists and the ways they make use of theory as a liberatory practice to imagine sustainable alternatives and horizons of hope for these troubling times.

*Key words:* decolonial feminism, Latin America, state theory, knowledge production, decolonial theory

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis engages with Latin American decolonial feminism and with its political project of decolonization in relation to the state. Decolonial feminism is a feminist current that is critically engaged with the decolonial theory that emerged in Latin America during the eighties and nineties, which has as its most well-known representatives the members of the Collective Project Modernity-Coloniality- Decoloniality (MCD)<sup>1</sup>. The project's main claim is that the invasion of the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century constituted a new world-system that created modernization at the expense of colonization and that independence from European colonial powers did not end the logic of colonialism, that is, 'coloniality'. In this sense, coloniality is not a set of norms and practices that precedes and opposes modernity, but an integral part of modernity itself and therefore, colonial legacies can persist and multiply even if formal colonialism has ended (Silva, 2018). Decolonial feminists critically engage with this line of thought and offer an important intervention by introducing analysis about the way colonialism structured gender relations and this in turn also had strong implications on the way colonial power operated.

Latin American decolonial feminism's political theorizations have mostly focused on communitarian weavings and the community reproduction of life and, according to my experience participating in feminist groups in Guatemala, is also common to find this approach in several feminist groups. This interest in communities and communitarian practices has resulted in a tendency to move away from theorizations about the state as forms of organizing life in common, which is particularly interesting because of the hype that followed the Pink tide

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<sup>1</sup> Members of MCD are: Aníbal Quijano, Edgardo Lander, Ramón Grosfoguel, Agustín Lao-Montes, Walter Dignolo, Zulma Palermo, Catherine Walsh, Arturo Escobar, Fernando Coronil, Javier Sanjinés, Enrique Dussel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, María Lugones and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

during the first decade of the twenty first century<sup>2</sup>. Decolonial feminists seemed to be critical about the Pink tide and moved away from engagements with these political projects. Instead, decolonial feminists have had as common subjects of interest, indigenous systems of government, communitarian practices and care networks. It is not clear the role of the state within decolonial feminist politics, which raises the question of whether this follows the state-phobia tendency, popular in radical emancipatory discourses in the global North. It is with the theme of the state that this thesis is concerned. This is an exploratory journey about the political project of decolonial feminism, focusing on its relation to the state and the meanings this can have for other alternative projects.

## 1.1 Research problem and research question

It is widely accepted that neoliberalism is the most pervasive ideology globally, critiqued by a large range of scholars and social movements for its exacerbation of inequalities and erosion of democracy (Harvey, 2005; Brown, 2015; Slobodian, 2018). One of the main tenets of neoliberalism is the reduction of the state to its minimum, which systematically dismantles the accountability of the state whilst loosing much of its legitimacy (Dhawan, 2014). In recent decades, progressive movements and scholars have argued that social justice is not about ‘taking the state’ but about everyday acts of resistance and organizing against capitalism (Holloway, 2002). This de-centring of the state can also be observed among progressive groups in Latin America. This raises questions about the effectiveness of these ideas in fundamentally transforming social, political and economic relations in the era of rampant neoliberalism and, whether the de-centring of the state could present a risk that progressive politics might inadvertently follow neoliberal ideas of civil society as inherently good.

The progressive politics I will examine in this thesis is Latin American decolonial feminism. I am particularly interested in its views on the role of the

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<sup>2</sup> Pink tide is the term used to describe the perception of a turn towards left-wing governments in Latin America in the first decade of the twenty first century.

state and whether its focus on communitarian politics represents an agreement with anti-state discourses. This can give some pointers on the potentialities of decolonial feminism for feminists living outside of communitarian forms of government; according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 80% of the Latin American population lives in cities, thus, political theorizations cannot be solely focussed on small communities of people (2012).

Thus, my research question is:

- How do Latin American decolonial feminists theorize the state?

And as sub questions:

- Which recurrent themes constitute their theorizations of the state?
- What meanings do these theorizations have for other alternative emancipatory projects?

## 1.2 Situating the purpose of research

Decolonial feminism has a multiplicity of expressions. A main tenet is that knowledge and theory is produced inside academia as well outside of it e.g. in social movements, in quotidian practices, and by groups of people who have been traditionally excluded from the epistemological terrain (Lugones, 2010). However, I focus on the scholarly production of decolonial feminists so as to situate it in a scholarly dialogue with other traditions of critical thinking within social sciences in different geographical locations. The reason being that this thesis is not concerned with a dichotomous view of researcher/object but a dialogue researcher-researcher, that opens the possibilities of an encounter between the different methodologies of the two fields in which I am writing this thesis: Political Science and Gender Studies. Furthermore, when critically engaging with Latin American decolonial feminism, I intent to contribute to destabilize the notion that does not consider knowledge produced outside of the U.S. and European academic canon as valid.

As a scholar educated in Guatemala, the U.S. and Sweden, my thinking draws from different traditions and thus, presents theoretical and methodological



tensions. However, as generations of feminist writers have pointed out, it is necessary to have a politics of location which allows to think from the point at which one stands, to find orientation from there (Ahmed, 2006). The thesis is also engaged with the immanent tradition that seeks to construct sustainable alternatives and horizons of hope for these troubling times. In this sense, I am also indebted to the work of feminist thinkers of affirmative ethics, such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, that inspire my thinking.

### 1.3 Structure

The broad structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 presents a background to the study, situating decolonial feminism within U.S.-European academia and within Latin American academia. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of the material. Chapter 4 delves into the methodological choices taken to analyse critical literature. Chapter 5 presents a close reading of the selected decolonial feminist literature, in which I begin to outline the recurrent themes that constitute their theorizations on the state. Chapter 6 shows the ways decolonial feminist theorize the state and the meanings it can have for other alternative projects. Finally, I conclude with Chapter 7, which revisits the main premises and arguments of the thesis.

## 2 Background

Decolonial and postcolonial are terms with contending meanings at the basis of a corpus of critical theories that are primarily focused on the colonial condition. An example of this is that in a recent book festival in Mexico City, Aymaran intellectual Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, made a thought-provoking claim: “the Postcolonial is a desire, the Anticolonial is a struggle, the Decolonial is an obnoxious fashionable neologism”. However, although she has publically said the popularity of the term ‘decolonial’ is problematic and she chooses to be separated from it, she is seen as an influential decolonial scholar and many of her texts have been published in edited volumes on decolonial thinking<sup>3</sup>. These contended meanings also have an effect on this thesis and, in order to understand the orientation of decolonial feminists and what separates them from postcolonial feminists, I will situate the former feminist current within the two academic traditions from which this thesis departs: U.S.-European academia and Latin American academia.

### 2.1 Decolonial feminism within U.S.-European academia

Scholars have usually traced the origin of feminism as a theoretical corpus to the revolutionary processes in Europe during the eighteenth century, when bourgeois women questioned the ways in which the liberal principles of equality and liberty were not applied to them, as the universal and natural rights of man excluded women. The nineteenth and twentieth century saw the rise of the women's suffrage movement and by mid-twentieth century, scholarly production and

feminist theories began to spread. Feminism entered universities after World War II and Women Studies courses and programmes -eventually Gender Studies- increasingly begun to appear. The main topics since then have been domestic violence, economic inequality between men and women, social construction of gender roles, among many others (Beltrán and Maquieira, 2001). However, there were many women who argued that their lived experiences of oppression could not be explained only by gender. During the 1970s and 1980s many women that were not white and middle class reclaimed a differentiated space within feminism. This gave rise to the visibility of ‘women of colour feminism’, which does not represent a monolithic nor a single intellectual or political project, neither necessarily entails anticolonial theorization. In the U.S., black women and chicano women raised their voices to call attention to the ways in which their lives were shaped by other factors besides gender. In 1973, the black lesbian organization Combahee River Collective highlighted that the white feminist movement did not address their particular needs and argued that they experienced oppression based on race, gender, class and sexuality; they called for analysis and practices focused on the interlocking of the major systems of oppression (Lutz, Herrera Vivar and Supik, 2011). This call was taken upon in the work of the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term ‘intersectionality’ in 1991, which became increasingly popular and entered mainstream academia and development discourses. Postcolonial and decolonial studies have embraced the concept as useful in understanding interlocking systems of oppression in the colonial conditions (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016).

Although black, chicano, postcolonial and decolonial feminism have at many times been homogenized under the umbrella of women of colour feminism, there are important differences among them. The political project of intersectionality deployed by black U.S. based feminist scholars, often fosters for liberal politics of inclusion drawn from the American Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. These preferred outcomes are different from anticolonial struggles outside the U.S., which offer a critique of coloniality and a particular decolonial project. Postcolonial feminism has gained great prestige among critical U.S.-

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<sup>3</sup> One of her essays is also part of the empirical material of this thesis.

European academia, whilst other forms of anticolonial feminist theorization occupy an unstable position within feminist theory (Mendoza, 2016).

Postcolonial feminists critically engage with postcolonial theorists such as Guha, Bhabha and Chatterjee, that focus on the history of British colonialism and seek to introduce an alternative historiography to create a history from below that would challenge dominant historical analysis in the West (Lewis and Mills, 2003). For Postcolonial theorists, capitalism had a different form in Europe than in the colonial world, mainly because, while on the West capitalism had a modernizing role, in South Asia capitalist domination involved rule without hegemony that resulted in a nation-state grounded on spurious legitimacy; precisely because capitalism differed largely from Europe's, postcolonial theorists argue that Western categories of analysis, and Marxist theory in particular, were inappropriate for understanding colonial capitalism in Southern Asia (Young, 2003). Among these theorists, the work of Gayatri Spivak is especially important because of the questions she raises regarding subaltern's voice and agency. She makes a strong critique against the members of the Subaltern Studies Group<sup>4</sup> for failing to include gender and sexuality in their theories of the postcolonial condition. Spivak has produced sophisticated critiques of post-structuralism, postcolonialism and feminism by using textual analysis and cultural criticism as her analytical tools. She makes poignant interrogations of epistemic production in the West with its inherent eurocentrism (Spivak, 1988, 2009). Another important postcolonial feminist scholar is Chandra Mohanty. Her work has put a strong critique on Western feminist scholarship because of its construction of a binary between first-world and third-world women, homogenizing the latter by imagining them as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, in contrast with first-world women who are imagined to be educated, with control over their bodies and with free will to take decisions of their own (Mohanty, 1988, 2003).

It is within these scholarly productions that decolonial feminism can be situated. However, it has important differences: it is a more marginal theory within feminism and because most of the work produced has been done outside of

the U.S. and not in English, the scholarly production of feminists in the global South is often not deemed worthy of translation and thus, their work is known only after it has been mediated by global North scholars. Furthermore, decolonial feminism has a view of colonialism that extends longer into the past, to the invasion of the Americas in the sixteenth century (Mendoza, 2016).

## 2.2 Decolonial feminism within Latin American academia

One of the most well-known theoretical interventions coming from Latin American is dependency theory. Developed first in the 1960s and 1970s by economists working for ECLAC and later by many other Latin American theorists, dependency theory argues that ‘dependency’ is a system funded by a range of relations of domination by which part of the produced surplus of the countries in the periphery was appropriated by the local oligarchies and then transferred to the capitalist groups in the countries at the centre. According to dependency theorists, this creates an unequal design of the world economy that damages countries that have been assigned the role of producers of raw material with very low added value whilst the central countries, in which industrialization takes place, have a high added value (Gunder Frank, 1967; Cardoso and Faletto, 1969; Dos Santos, 1972)

Dependence theory would have a great influence in Immanuel Wallerstein’s formulation of his world-systems theory during the 1970s, which in turn would be at the basis of the early work of the decolonial theorists in Latin America at the beginning of the 1990s (Beigel, 2006). Therefore, decolonial theory can be characterized as a recent arrival on the anticolonial scene, albeit taking a much longer view of colonialism than postcolonial theory.

Not only decolonial theorist ground their analyses in the colonization of the Americas which began in the sixteenth century but they also trace decolonial ideas

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<sup>4</sup> The Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) is a group of South Asian scholars interested in the

to thinkers in the first universities funded in the seventeenth century in the continent, who questioned the justness of empire and colonization and highlighted the strategies of the Amerindians to invert the logic of colonization. Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, a Quechua nobleman and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the descendant of Incan nobility, were among earlier anticolonial thinkers who have inspired contemporary decolonial thinkers to argue that the subaltern can speak, thus making this a distinguishing feature from Postcolonial thinking (Mendoza, 2016).

There are additional ways in which decolonial and postcolonial thinking differ. The MCD scholars insist that capitalism is not an autonomous system imported to the Americas but that it is concomitant to colonialism. Decolonial theorists argue that colonialism is what made capitalism possible. In contrast to the claim that capitalism failed to develop in the colonies due to conditions internal to indigeneity, decolonial theorists insist that capitalism requires the internal conditions of the colony to realize itself. They call this the hidden side of modernity. By doing this, they contest the association of modernity with emancipatory developments in Europe and suggest complex causal relations between colonialism, the age of reason, humanism and the Enlightenment. Decolonial thinkers claim that slavery, forced labour, and the absence of rights for colonized people existed in dialectical relation to liberal notions of liberty, equality, justice and wage labour. The colonized territories with its colonized people were the condition of possibility for the modern Western nation-states and the idea of citizenship (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 1995; Grosfoguel, 2011).

Since decolonial theorists argue that the freedom enjoyed by some presupposes the subordination of others, decolonization is always an unfinished project. The ‘coloniality of power’, a concept introduced by Quijano in the early 1990s, continues to define relations between the global North and the rest of the world long after colonialism ended in most parts of the world. Therefore, coloniality must be distinguished from colonialism. While the latter refers to the historically specific acts through which one nation imposes its sovereignty on another, coloniality refers to patterns of power that emerge in the contexts of

colonialism but extend and are long-standing. These patterns redefine culture, labour, intersubjective relations, knowledge production, language, common sense, self-perceptions in ways that accredit the superiority of the white Europeans. Coloniality survives colonialism and permeates all spheres of social contemporary life (Quijano, 2000).

Decolonial feminists do not only situate within the theoretical corpus of decolonial theory but also within Latin American feminist theoretical interventions. Latin American feminism can be recognized in a subaltern position to European and North American feminisms, but also within Latin American social theory which has neglected the contributions that feminism has made to critical theory (Bard Wigdor and Artazo, 2017).

Latin American feminism has been a political project and a social movement as well as a theoretical corpus capable of pointing out the different sexist bias in social theories and to produce new understanding of social life. The history of Latin American feminist ideas is linked to the political work of its many authors and their predecessors: from women who took part in the Mexican Revolution, passing through the different nationalist projects of mid-twentieth century, from women who opposed military dictatorships, to feminists involved in the forms of democratic government validated by elections, to the critique of hierarchies of traditional politics (Gargallo, 2004). This connection with activism makes it difficult to find a historiography of Latin American feminism that neatly separates scholarly production from activism; ideas and struggles have gone hand in hand.

Using the analytical tool of feminist waves, Alba Carosio (2017) argues that it was by the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century when the first wave of Latin American feminism took place<sup>5</sup>. This first wave had a strong commitment to social reforms with a special focus on femininity and the protection of children. At the same time, working-class women began to organize in unions, catholic and social organizations, and some in anarchist organizations. Activists with a middle-class background became close to socialist and

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<sup>5</sup> Juana Inés de la Cruz in the seventeenth century, Teresa Margarida da Silva e Orta in the eighteenth century, and of Flora Tristán in the nineteenth century were early feminist writers; however, their influence on political and social affairs was not immediate and, it was not until the existence of an organized feminist movement that their ideas were recognized (Gargallo, 2004)

communist parties, eventually giving rise to the second wave of Latin American feminism in the 1970s. By this time, women increasingly gain access to higher education and, surrounded by the revolutionary spirit of the era, many became involved in social organizations opposing the dictatorships that plagued the region during those decades. Pioneer authors were Rosario Castellanos, Isabel Larguía and Julieta Kirkwood. In 1976 the first feminist magazine, “Fem”, appeared in Mexico, funded by Alaíde Foppa, who a few years later was detained and disappeared by the Guatemalan military.

In the 1980s and 1990s feminism finally entered Latin American academia. Women Studies and Gender Studies programmes were established in several countries whilst the different international organizations and international treaties concerned with women began an institutionalization process within feminism and made visible a clear divide between institutional feminists and autonomous feminists. The latter with a more suspicious view of the new governments in the region and the role of development agencies in the new world economy after the Cold War, while the former concerned with pushing policies aiming at gender parity and creating a NGO-zation of the political struggles. By the beginning of the twenty first century, there was an explosion of diversity within Latin American feminism that lead to the recognition of diversity and differences between women. Non-middle class, indigenous, afro-descendant, lesbians and queers, who had always been part of the feminist movement albeit on the margins, started producing scholarly work thus establishing the third wave of Latin American feminism (Carosio, 2017). It is at this point when feminists began to critically engage with the writings of male decolonial thinkers to point out the masculinist view in which they were still engaged, and using the concepts of coloniality to understand the constructions of gender with new analytical lenses.



# 3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a guide for the understanding and analysis of decolonial feminists scholarly work and the ways in which they theorize the state. By putting forth theories on knowledge production, it is possible to comprehend the importance of decolonial feminists theorizing and being recognized by it. The theories presented here inform the thesis as they open up political concerns related to knowledge production. They also represent an eclectic combination of thinking produced in different locations and from different disciplines, thus exploring tensions between different traditions, compelling to put into use ‘border thinking’, that is, a thinking that acknowledges epistemic differences and geographical distances (Anzaldúa, 1987). I will also refer to the different theoretical interventions from anticolonial scholars and from feminist scholars in relation to the state; this will situate the field in which decolonial feminists theorize on the state.

## 3.1 Knowledge production and epistemologies otherwise

For a long time, in western and westernized societies it was common sense to think of knowledge and science as neutral spheres devoid of politics. The work of Michel Foucault famously put that into question by putting forth evidence of the indissoluble link between power and knowledge. By coining the term *savoir-pouvoir* (knowledge-power) he argues that accepted forms of knowledge, science and truth, constitute power (Foucault, 1978). Foucault’s ideas have been influential through many fields of social sciences and have also informed the theorizations of anti-colonial thinkers across the world. Decolonial thinkers use the idea of knowledge-power and broaden it to understand the constitution of

colonial power in the Americas, through the concept of ‘coloniality of knowledge’ (Castro Gómez, 2000). As Harding mentions in her revision of Latin American decolonial thinking: “northern theorists tended to conceptualize the global history of modern Western sciences as a one-way journey of dissemination from North to South. They have failed to recognize how science and technology innovations have travelled from South to North and South to South. Thus, the South is not just a source of raw material and labour for the North or of only data to support northern theory. It has its own distinctive resources for innovating in science and technology practice, theory, and policy” (Harding, 2016, p.1070). In this sense, a crucial part of the decolonization project, of which this thesis is also part of, is to bring forth the epistemic injustice of the coloniality of knowledge whilst highlighting alternative epistemologies. The following sections will present an overview of the expressions of coloniality of knowledge, followed by decolonizing alternatives.

### 3.1.1 Eurocentrism and epistemic violence

MCD theorists argue that one of the principal operations of the colonial/modern system is the universality claims of eurocentrism as the hegemonic representation and form of knowledge; therefore, eurocentrism was constituted as the rationality of colonial domination (Castro Gómez, 2000). It developed from the European ethnocentrism that constructed a particular justification of the world population by classifying people according to race; by doing this, Europeans could justify their supposedly natural superiority in relation to the rest of the world population. Quijano (2000) argues that eurocentrism is based on two main foundational myths: first, that the history of human civilization follows a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans as racial-natural differences and not consequences of a history of power. Both myths can be unequivocally recognized in narratives of evolutionism and dualism, who were imposed as globally hegemonic in the same course that European colonial powers expanded their rule over the world.

The imposition of eurocentrism as the global hegemonic form of knowledge, according to Sousa Santos (2005), produced cognitive injustice as a consequence, that grounds and contaminates all other forms of injustice. By enforcing the idea that there is only one type of knowledge that is valid (the knowledge produced by the global north) a form of violence is created; one that does not recognize the ability to produce knowledge of the majority of the world population. Spivak (Spivak, 1988) uses the term ‘epistemic violence’ to refer to the project of constituting colonized people as the Other and thus obliterating their precarious subjectivity, making them routinely silenced. This carries the effect of disappearing certain knowledge in detriment of the one considered as true knowledge, that is, western knowledge; the knowledge that subaltern people possess is either subjugated or eliminated. As Spivak points out, one method of executing epistemic violence is to damage a given group’s ability to speak and be heard whilst the hegemony of the colonizers stays impermeable. In this sense, the theoretical contributions of Latin American decolonial feminists are a reaction against epistemic violence.

### 3.1.2 Epistemologies of the south

The impervious hegemony of western knowledge has been fractured over the last fifty years and there are many ongoing projects to destabilize eurocentrism in different parts of the world and several scholars involved in this task<sup>6</sup>. Sousa Santos (2009) suggest that the starting point should be ‘epistemologies of the south’, a concept developed in the Social World Forum<sup>7</sup>. Epistemologies of the south depart from the practices of social groups that have been systematically excluded and oppressed by different systems that tried to block emancipatory imagination and alternatives. Epistemologies of the south depart from a south that is not geographic but metaphoric: the anti-imperialist south; they are profoundly

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<sup>6</sup> There is a large literature on the matter, and in many universities across the world courses and programmes on postcolonial and decolonial theory have been initiated. To name an example, Lund University hosts an Advanced Study Group named ‘Moves towards an anticolonial academy: Exploring post and decolonial epistemic options’.

<sup>7</sup> The World Social Forum is an annual meeting of civil society organizations, with the aim of advance counter-hegemonic globalization.

historical, departing from other histories that are not the western universal history. Epistemologies of the south emerge in a period of transition, meaning that they have to dialogue, argue, counter-argue with other epistemologies. Their strength resides in this, in a twofold dialogue: on one side, it is a dialogue, a confrontation, with the hegemonic thinking within the global North and, on the other side it is also a dialogue and confrontation with Eurocentric critical thinking. It can be said that decolonial feminists in Latin America enter into this twofold dialogue when posing a critique of hegemonic thinking whilst using critical theories developed in the global North.

### 3.1.3 Methodology of the Oppressed

A usual pitfall of critical theories developed in the global North has been to leave on the margins the contributions of people located in the intersection of systems of oppression. In order to alleviate this pitfall, Chela Sandoval (2000) is concerned with designing a method for emancipation that can connect a plurality of theoretical strategies for a global resistance. She creates a cognitive map in which she locates the ways oppressed people during the twentieth century defied dominant ideology, creating social movements and new ways of politics and resistances. By tracing the different experiences of feminists of colour in the U.S., she argues that these feminists used an ‘oppositional consciousness’ as their principal and most effective tool to move through the topographies of different egalitarian consciousness. Oppositional consciousness refers to the ways in which the oppressed learn to identify ideology and deconstruct it; they counter the effects of dominant ideology by identifying oppositional forms of ideology that can be created and organized by groups of people in search of “affective liberatory stances in relation to the dominant social order” (p. 42). Furthermore, Sandoval argues that these groups can learn ways in which to identify, develop and control the necessary knowledge to break with dominant ideology whilst at the same time speaking in, and from within, ideology. The skills developed by

oppressed groups are what Anzaldúa's calls *la facultad*<sup>8</sup> (1987), which is "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (p.60). She describes that those who are marginalized are more likely to develop *la facultad*, which is a survival tactic latent in people 'caught between the worlds' (p. 61) that creates a permanent and highly aware consciousness.

Decolonial feminist scholars that write within academic settings while questioning them, or that use Spanish or Portuguese when writing in detriment of their mother tongues, or are militants in organizations that at times enact sexist politics, deploy an oppositional consciousness and make use of their *facultad* to advanced decolonial alternatives.

## 3.2 Perspectives of the State

To say that the field of state theory is a large one is the least and albeit it is mostly related to the field of political theory, it expands across disciplines, and traces of it can be found in many social sciences as well as in the humanities. This section then, focuses only in the ways in which the state has been theorized in two perspectives: first, anticolonial perspectives of the state; second, feminist perspectives of the state.

### 3.2.1 Anticolonial perspectives of the State

Postcolonial theory of the State has mainly been locally-centred and it has not formulated a general theory of the state. In this sense, decolonial thinkers in Latin America have theorized about the particular genealogies of the states in the region. Dussel (1995) argues that the invasion of the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century shaped a new global model of power that gave rise to global capitalism that became colonial/modern and eurocentred. Race became a central

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<sup>8</sup> *La facultad* is a term in Spanish that can be translated as 'the skill'. Anzaldúa's style of writing

concept that codified the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans and which continues to organize the global model of power up until now.

Although the vast majority of Latin American countries gained political independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the process of stagnation and recession created a strengthening of the colonial character of social and political domination under formally independent states; the eurocentric perspective remained and the colonial/modern trait of capitalism was decisive for the different destinies of the process of modernity between Europe and the rest of the world (Quijano, 2000). While Latin America possess many European traits in many material and intersubjective aspects it is also profoundly different at the same time. In this sense, analysing Latin American reality through a eurocentric perspective results in a partial and distorted view. The national question ultimately becomes very problematic because the particular interests of a small group of people who possessed European traits, were imposed over the rest of the population (González Casanova, 1965). A necessity of the modern nation-state is that its members need to have something in common, and this entails some form of democratic participation in the distribution of the control of power. This democratic participation in the modern nation-states has historically meant practices of homogenization that consist of the common democratic participation in the institutions of public authority with its specific mechanisms of violence linked to the state. The nation-state as a structure of power implies a very specific process that begins with centralized political power over a territory and its population which then intends to produce a nationalization (Castro Gómez, 2000). In Latin America, according to Quijano (2000) the modern nation-states needed a successful nationalization of societies and for this “a considerable process of democratization of society was the basic condition for the nationalization of that society and of the political organization of a modern nation-state” (p. 560). However, he argues that all of these processes were never properly successful in any of the Latin American countries, despite the different violent mechanisms used to homogenize the population.

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combined Spanish and English to highlight her location in the border of the U.S and Mexico.

### 3.2.2 Feminist perspectives of the State

Feminists have been ambivalent about the need to theorize the state (Kantola, 2006). In the 1960s, when the feminism of the so-called second wave was in a search of political influence through alternative channels, the question of a feminist state theory emerged creating frictions and suspicions among feminists. MacKinnon (1989) and Allen (1990) represented two opposing views on this; the former arguing that such theory was non-existent and deeply needed and the latter arguing that it was unnecessary. The feminist engagement with the concept of the state navigated between two poles, the promise of gains in gender equality or the fear of feminism being co-opted and compromised. This created a paralysis of the debate regarding the State by constituting an 'in' and 'out' dichotomy, integration or autonomy. This division or dichotomy is still haunting feminist perspectives on the state, although there have been efforts directed at deconstructing it (Kantola, 2006).

Kantola (Ibid.) identifies five different feminist perspectives of the state: the neutral state, the patriarchal state, the capitalist state, the women-friendly welfare state, and the post-structural state. Before post-structural theories of the state, feminist perspectives of the state tended to see it as an essentialised object, usually working only in favour of men. However, post-structuralism had two differentiated outcomes on feminist theorizing of the state: first, post structuralism's deconstruction of the state resulted in the rejection of the very category of the state; secondly, for those who did not dismiss it altogether, post structuralism resulted in a more nuanced theorizing of the state. For Connell (1987), the state is not inherently patriarchal as previous feminist scholars had argued, but historically constructed in a political process whose outcome is open, and for Pringle and Watson (1990) a set of arenas lacking coherence is what constitutes the state. For post-structural feminists, the state is a discursive process with differentiated set of institutions and discourses. In recent years, feminist scholars began to explore the power relations in discourses on the state, the femininities and masculinities they rely on and reproduce (Ahmed, 2004), and their differentiated gendered impacts (Yuval-Davis, 1997), to name a few of the subjects that have become point of interest.

### 3.2.3 De-centring of the state in radical politics

By the end of the 1970s, while doing a critique of liberal governmentality, Foucault identified a common feature among liberals, neo-liberals and, some Marxists and ultra-left radicals: a phobia of the state. This feature presupposed an ontology of the state, usually as a repressive entity. Foucault argues the necessity to refrain from a kind of analysis that departs from a supposed essence of the state; first, because according to him, history is not a deductive science and second, the state does not have an essence. For Foucault “the state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities” (Foucault, 2008, p.77).

The phobia of the state described by Foucault, is particularly evident in neoliberal ideology, in which economy is liberalized and the state is reduced to its minimum. Dhawan (2014) argues that the process of globalization accompanied by neoliberalism has systematically dismantled the accountability of the state which has lost much of its legitimacy. This has given international civil society opportunities of action whilst giving it an increased trust with the task of monitoring global issues regarding transnational justice, peace and democracy. Dhawan then points out that a type of duality is established, one in which the “the wickedness of the state is juxtaposed against the inherent goodness of civil society” (p.65) with the aim of shaking off the state, decentring the state and locating radical politics in a space outside of state. For Dhawan, this presents a risk for radical emancipatory politics that have a phobia of the state, because it can inadvertently follow neoliberal ideas of civil society. Instead, she argues that the question for radical politics should be how to reconfigure the state so it does not reproduce the oppressive governmentalities of the current state formations. In this sense, Spivak (2007) argues that it is better to think of the state in the Derridian sense, as a ‘pharmakon’ both poison and medicine.



## 4 Methodology

This chapter presents the steps followed for a feminist reading of decolonial feminist literature and, the list of material to be analysed. Doing a feminist reading is to be orientated; as Sara Ahmed argues “orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward” (2006, p.3). In this sense, I follow a structured path to analyse several texts produced by Latin American decolonial scholars, but I do not claim anything more than a feminist objectivity, that is ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway, 1988), which allows me to do an embodied reading informed by my academic background as well as my experience as a feminist activist. In this sense I can be turned toward certain themes and familiar signs that give me anchoring points. On the following section, I embark to present an account of my methodological trail.

### 4.1 Analysing critical literature

An important inspiration to carry out the analysis of Latin American decolonial feminists’ writings comes from Chandra Mohanty. Her most well-known essay “Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses” (1988) is a close reading of feminist writings in which she identifies three basic analytic principles in, what she calls, western feminism. However, Mohanty’s method is not clearly outlined which led me to resort to the methodology of thematic analysis, which enjoys a remarkable popularity within qualitative analysis in the social sciences and somewhat resembles the more hermeneutical methods of literary studies (Bryman, 2016, p.584). Thematic analysis is not an approach that has an identifiable heritage or a distinctive set of steps to follow every time is carried out; however, as Bryman points out, a theme is a category identified through the data that relates to the research focus and that builds on codes, which

ultimately “provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of [the] data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus” (p. 584). When doing a thematic analysis, it is important for the researcher to put forth how the themes are significant by showing how they relate to other themes or concepts, what their implications are and how they relate to other literature (p. 587). It is important to note that documents and texts are not written in a void, but in a specific context and with an implied readership, meaning that any document or text should be viewed as interconnected to other documents or texts, because they either refer to or are a response to them. We can refer to this interconnectedness as inter-textuality (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011 cited by Bryman, 2016).

Drawing from literary criticism and thematic analysis, my trail thus consists of two readings. In the first reading, I identify within the chosen texts the methods used by decolonial feminist scholars and their principal arguments. In the second reading, using qualitative analysis software, I specifically focus on the theme of the state and politics, creating codes to see the ways in which this theme is connected to other themes within the texts. In this second reading, I also draw from the connections found in each text to see the ways in which they relate to the other texts to identify the intertextuality within the chosen literature.

## 4.2 Selected literature and limitations

The criteria for the selection of the literature to be analysed comes from two approaches. The first one, an intuitive approach that reinforced the second one, a much more structured approach. The former consisted in asking through several Facebook groups of feminist activists and scholars to name the decolonial feminist authors they thought were more influential<sup>9</sup>. This was helpful in identifying new edited volumes and authors that I had no previous knowledge. For the second approach, I followed a more structured path. I began searching through

academic databases, especially through Redalyc, the bibliographic database and digital library of Open Access journals of Latin America, Spain and Portugal. Eventually, I gathered eight edited volumes on decolonial feminism. However, one of these was in English which I decided to exclude since it makes difficult to identify the intertextuality and kept only the volumes in Spanish, the language in which most of Latin American scholarly work is produced<sup>10</sup>. I chose the remaining seven edited volumes as source material, since this type of publication is of interest in academic publishing because it presents different viewpoints on a common theme and thus all the texts included in these volumes can accurately be referred to as decolonial feminist texts. With over 140 different papers in total, I followed three criteria to delimitate the material. The first was to identify repeated authors across the different edited volumes, to see which authors are considered important referents by different editors. The second was to focus on the titles and abstracts of the papers to identify those dealing with more political matters, since not all the texts included in these volumes explicitly deal with politics and the state. After this, I crisscrossed both criteria to see the overlapping authors. This left me with seven authors that were mentioned at least twice and who had written on politics. However, I decided to include five other authors from the edited volumes that also write on politics: two of which were constantly mentioned in the first intuitive approach and who are frequently cited by many scholars writing on decolonial theory; and other three less-known authors but that explicitly write about politics. I also included a collective statement made by different activist groups that was in one of the edited volumes and that explicitly referred to the state. The final list of literature consists of thirteen texts and is as follows:

- **Bidaseca, Karina.** (2011). *Mujeres blancas buscando salvar a las mujeres color café de los hombres color café. Reflexiones sobre desigualdad y colonialismo jurídico desde el feminismo poscolonial* (White women saving brown women from brown men. Postcolonial feminist reflections on inequality and legal colonialism).

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<sup>9</sup> I posted in Facebook groups of feminist collectives in Guatemala in which I frequently interact; I also posted on Facebook groups where decolonial scholars from different Latin American countries share content.

<sup>10</sup> Some of these volumes also included texts in Portuguese, which can be readable for a native speaker of Spanish. However, none of those texts were related to the topic of the state.

- **Cumes**, Aura. (2014). *Multiculturalismo, género y feminismos: mujeres diversas, luchas complejas* (Multiculturalism, gender and feminisms: diverse women, complex struggles).
- **Curiel**, Ochy. (2011). *El régimen heterosexual y la nación. Aportes del lesbianismo feminista a la Antropología* (The heterosexual regime and the nation. Lesbian feminist contributions to Anthropology).
- **Gutiérrez Aguilar**, Raquel. (2014). *Políticas en femenino. Reflexiones acerca de lo femenino moderno y del significado de sus políticas* (Politics in feminine. Reflections on modern femininity and the meaning of its politics).
- **Hernández**, Rosalva Aída. (2014). *Las mujeres indígenas y sus demandas de género* (Indigenous women and their demands on gender).
- **Mendoza**, Breny. (2014). *Los 'fundamentos no-democráticos' de la democracia: un enunciado desde Latinoamérica postoccidental* (The 'undemocratic foundations' of democracy: a statement from post-western Latin America).
- **Mora**, Mariana. (2014). *Repensando la política y la descolonización en minúscula: Reflexiones sobre la praxis feminista desde el Zapatismo* (Rethinking politics and decolonization in lowercase: Reflections on feminist praxis from Zapatismo)
- **Paredes**, Julieta. (2017). *Hilando fino desde el feminismo comunitario*. (Fine knitting from a communitarian feminist perspective)
- **Quiroga**, Natalia. (2014). *Economía y cuidado. Retos para un feminismo Decolonial* (Economy and care. Challenges for a decolonial feminism)
- **Rivera Cusicanqui**, Silvia. (2014). *La noción de 'derecho' o las paradojas de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia* (The notion of 'rights' or the paradoxes of postcolonial modernity: indigenous people and women in Bolivia).
- **Segato**, Rita Laura. (2014). *Colonialidad y patriarcado moderno: expansión del frente estatal, modernización, y la vida de las mujeres*. (Coloniality and modern patriarchy: expansion of the State, modernization and lives of women).

- **Tzul**, Gladys. (2010). *Mujeres, gubernamentalidad y autonomía. Una lectura desde Guatemala* (Women, governmentality and autonomy. A reading from Guatemala).
- *Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe*. (Regional Conference on Latin and Caribbean Women) (2014). “¿Qué Estado para qué igualdad?” Declaración de las mujeres indígenas y afrodescendientes de América Latina, el Caribe y la diáspora ("What State for what equality?" Declaration of indigenous and Afro-descendant women of Latin America, the Caribbean and the diaspora).

## 5 Decolonial feminists' tool box for theorizing

The authors I selected for this thesis are an eclectic mix of scholars that share similarities whilst having different backgrounds and divergent places of enunciation; to acknowledge this is a necessary and important step in doing feminist research. To begin with, the nationalities represented by the authors are diverse: Mexico, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina, Honduras and Ecuador. This is not a minor matter, since much of each authors' discussions is related to the particularities in the formations and developments of each country. The authors' ethnicities are also diverse; albeit some are ambiguous about it others make it explicit in their writing and thus it is possible to identify among them Mayans, Aymaras Afro-descendants and mestizas. All the authors are active within social movements which is something that is visible in their writings; however, the generational difference makes the experiences of activism diverse. Both Segato and Rivera Cusicanqui share the experience of exile whilst Gutiérrez experienced imprisonment for five years; these experiences have undoubtedly impacted their thinking and speak of the production of knowledge from an embodied militant position. Despite the differences abovementioned, there are similarities within these authors beyond sharing the epistemological umbrella of decolonial feminism: working with disenfranchised groups in society, pursuing academic careers despite the machismo present in most Latin American countries, subverting the influence of a Eurocentric educational perspective and the use of Spanish in their writings.

The previous contextualization serves the purpose of introducing what follows next, which is a presentation of the methodological and theoretical points of departure of decolonial feminists. This is followed by the outline of the recurrent themes that constitute decolonial feminists' theorizations on the state that I will characterize further and in more detail on Chapter 6. The quotes presented were

carefully chosen to exemplify the arguments as well as to bring the authors' voices to the foreground by keeping the original quote in Spanish with its respective translation.

## 5.1 Decolonial feminists' methodological points of departure

In the literature selected, there is a clear preference for participatory action research (PAR); this is even clearer in the texts of Rivera Cusicanqui, Paredes, Hernández and Moya. Although not explicitly, it is noted that their reflections come from experiences in the struggles of social movements, e.g. the Kataristas in Bolivia and the Zapatistas in Mexico. PAR refers to a particular method of research developed in Latin America during the 1970s inspired by the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Fals Borda (1979). This type of research simultaneously emphasizes a rigorous search for knowledge and, it is described as an open process of life and work, an experience, a progressive evolution towards a total and structural transformation of society and culture with successive and partially coincident objectives (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991). In this sense, decolonial feminists are successors of the many emancipatory theories that emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, e.g. popular education, liberation theology, alternative communication and liberation philosophy. These theories had a precise political intentionality to strengthen the subaltern social groups capacities to generate social transformations.

Gutiérrez Aguilar's and Mendoza's approach is somewhat different; their method is closest to normative political theory. Although some of their previous work is done in the tradition of PAR, the texts chosen are sophisticated pieces of political theory in which they discuss a wide range of subjects. Making use of her training in mathematics, Gutiérrez Aguilar uses mathematical logic to theorize the duality particular/universal in difference feminism. She argues that one is not just an individual within society but that one is a part of something else that conforms a communality. This line of thinking that dissolves the duality, according to Gutiérrez Aguilar, puts forth the necessity to reflect and produce renewed ways of

common production. On the other hand, Mendoza makes use of historical secondary sources regarding the invasion of the Americas to theorize about the colonial foundations of today's democracies that allow for the alarming numbers of femicides in the region. Mendoza puts forth the importance of the moral debates of the sixteenth century, particularly the Valladolid Controversy held in 1550 in which the humanity of the Amerindians was discussed. For Mendoza, this is one of the most important events in world history since it gave the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown a normative notion of humanity that justified colonization whilst recognizing Europeans and Christians as the only truly humans in detriment of inferior races. These ideas were later spread by other European powers in their colonies. Mendoza links these ideas with the violence experienced by women in Mexico and Central America, whom are not really seen as humans:

*“Las noticias sobre los cuerpos violados y mutilados que abundan en las primeras páginas de los diarios locales en México y Centroamérica, son testimonio de la distorsionada ética ‘humanista’ del siglo XVI que persiste en la lógica contemporánea de la democracia y economía neoliberal”.*  
(The abundant news about the violated and mutilated bodies in the front pages of local newspapers in Mexico and Central America are testimony to the distorted ‘humanistic’ ethic of the sixteenth century that persists in the contemporary logic of democracy and neoliberal economics)  
(Mendoza, 2014, p.141)

Another method, used by Hernández, Bidaseca and Curiel is that of historiography and analysis of documents and text, particularly legal documents and media outlets. By using secondary historical sources, Hernández creates a historiography of the struggles of indigenous women in Mexico. She analysis the histories of both the indigenous movement and the feminist movement in Mexico and the ways in which indigenous women were caught in the interstices of both movements. Neither the demands of agrarian justice nor the demands for sexual and reproductive rights addressed the particular demands of indigenous women who were concerned with a recognition of reproductive work, a critique of indigenous essentialism and a critique of the racism of liberal feminists that only saw them as victims. Although Bidaseca and Curiel also make use of historical secondary sources, both of them do discourse analysis of the law in Argentina and



Colombia respectively. Bidaseca traces the different moments in the trial of a Wichí man<sup>11</sup> accused of raping his 10-year old partner's daughter who eventually gave birth. This case was highly controversial in Argentina and put forth debates about the differential notions of sexual consent, the differential understanding of law and who gets to have a say on it and who does not. Bidaseca analyses the ways in which the legal system and the media created hegemonic voices and ignored the voices of the 10-year old and her mother, thus arguing that there is a need to think of legal pluralism. Curiel, on the other hand, makes a close examination of the articles in the Colombian constitution that establish the nuclear heterosexual family as the grounds of society and reflects on the consequences this has had for LGBTQ demands.

## 5.2 Decolonial feminists' theoretical points of departure

Although the authors of the texts analysed are all decolonial feminists, they draw on different theoretical frameworks for the understanding of reality, thus following an oppositional consciousness (Sandoval, 2000). All the authors are critical towards liberalism, which is expected since, as mentioned before, one of the main tenets of decolonial theory is the critique of modernity and its eurocentrism. Decolonial feminists particularly take an issue with the political subject of liberalism, that is the individual. Not only is this individual understood in liberalism as the focus and its interests should have precedence over the social group but, the individual has mostly been embodied by white heterosexual males. Instead, decolonial feminists are more interested in communities and social groups as political subjects whilst also broadening the understanding of who counts as right-holders.

This preference for social groups entails a suggestion that the authors might be closer to Marxism; however, this is not the case. Many of the authors are very

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<sup>11</sup> The Wichí are indigenous people of South America that live in tribes in Argentina and Bolivia.

critical of traditional Marxism, especially the strands that were developed by Latin American guerrilla groups in the 1970s and 1980s. The only author who directly reference a Marxist scholar is Gutiérrez Aguilar; she draws from Silvia Federici to argue that capitalist modernity is primarily based on the destruction of the commons and in the separation of the practices and knowledge necessary for the general reproduction of material life from those of the production of commodities. Decolonial feminists are more interested in post-structuralist ideas of power. This is the case for Tzul, who uses Foucault's notion of governmentality; she argues that the politics of entrepreneurship and micro-credits aimed at indigenous women in rural areas of Southern Mexico and Northern Guatemala are a technology of government that transforms rural societies from an economy of auto consumption to an economy of productivity:

*“[...]tanto el desplazamiento del territorio como la fundación de un determinado ethos empresarial constituyen un entramado de técnicas de gobierno que fundan nuevos ordenes dentro de las sociedades: un orden gestor de las poblaciones”*. “[...] the local territorial dislocation and the consolidation of a particular entrepreneurial ethos, constitute a thread of governmental techniques that creates new orders within societies: an order that manages and control populations” (Tzul, 2010, p.45)

But Foucault is not the only inspiration. Mohanty, Spivak and Chakrabarty, who are themselves postcolonial scholars, become interlocutors with whom to think about the relations between academic feminism and indigenous women, development practitioners and beneficiaries, liberal law and communitarian law. Bidaseca, for example, uses Spivak's analytical frame to understand the ways in which the voices of a 10-year old Wichí girl and her mother are silenced by the leaders of the indigenous community where they live as well as by the mestizo prosecutors that claim to have their best interest in mind. Mora draws from Mohanty to put an emphasis in the interconnection between oppressions of the colonized peoples that impact their struggles both outside their communities as within them; this allows Mora to create a connection with the everyday practices of Zapatista women and how this practices of resistance can help in the building of bridges between what she calls Third-world feminisms. Another important theoretical framework is that of second-wave Anglo feminism; it plays an important role in Curiel's discursive analysis of the Colombian constitution. By

resorting to authors such as Pateman, Rich and Wittig, she goes on to claim that the constitution embodies a discursive legitimation of a heterosexual construction of the nation. Despite the use of lesbian feminism by Curiel, there is an absence in the other texts of such theoretical interventions and of queer theory. This does not necessarily mean that queer theory is excluded from the overall corpus of decolonial feminism, especially since there were different texts related to queer theory on the edited volumes gathered (González Gómez, 2014; Althaus-Reid, 2017; Mogrovejo, 2017). However, none of those texts engaged explicitly with the state and thus, were not selected for this thesis. This might point to a disinterest of decolonial queer theorists in relation to the state and thus diverging from other queer theorists in the U.S. and Europe, such as Butler who has been publishing on issues related to state violence for many years now (Butler and Spivak, 2007; Butler, 2009).

The eclectic mix of theories found in the writings of decolonial feminist reflects the tension implicit in most anticolonial literature, which is the trade-off between U.S-European theory and non U.S-European theory. This tension is perhaps unsolvable and it might be better to acknowledge the transferences that occur between the global South and the ‘south of the global North’. For example, the influence of chicano feminism and black feminism from the U.S. on Latin American decolonial feminism is fundamentally different from the historical imperial influence of the U.S. over Latin America.

### 5.3 Decolonial feminism’s recurrent themes

Although the texts analysed were chosen because they deal with matters of the state and politics, these are not the only arguments present in each text. The first reading of decolonial feminism’s literature pointed out recurrent themes across the texts. So before going into a more detailed exploration of the ways in which decolonial feminists theorize the state, this section outlines other arguments found in the chosen literature. By doing a feminist reading of the texts, the principal argument of each was extracted and then compared with the arguments of the other texts, allowing the identification of clustered argumentative lines.

### 5.3.1 Patriarchy and gender relations before and after colonization

Whether it is possible to talk about gender relations before colonization or not is an ongoing debate within decolonial feminism. Maria Lugones' "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (2007) is one of the most influential works within decolonial feminism. There, she presents a critique of Quijano's theory of coloniality of power from a feminist perspective to conclude that gender was a colonial imposition that did not exist in the Americas before Spanish invasion. By drawing on historical examples of pre-colonial people, Lugones argues that gender is a colonial classification system that was differentially applied to people depending in their class and race.

Although many decolonial feminists agree with Lugones, others do not. Segato, Rivera Cusicanqui and Paredes criticize Lugones by arguing that gender relations were present before colonization and continue to be nowadays in all social groups, including indigenous communities, albeit in different ways. Segato heavily criticizes Lugones' methods of recurring to only a few secondary historical sources; she argues from her own ethnographic work and from a large production of anthropological and historical work in Latin America, that gender and patriarchy did exist before colonization. Segato claims that it is possible to recognize structures of difference in precolonial societies, similar to what modernity calls gender relations, that have clear hierarchies of prestige between masculinity and femininity. However, despite these hierarchies, openness to the transit and circulation between the different gender positions was much more common in precolonial societies than in their modern counterpart. For Paredes, who describes herself as a communitarian feminist of Aymara descent, there is an ahistorical narrative in the classical *indigenista* movement. This movement, which gained momentum in Latin America in the final decades of the twentieth century promoted the idea that men and women exist in complementary ways. Paredes sees this as a patriarchal figure already present before colonization, but that grew and became stronger when the patriarchal ideas of Spanish men arrived in the Americas creating a new system, that she calls *entronque de patriarcados* (patriarchal junction). This junction is the encounter between two patriarchal systems that, according to Paredes, continue to operate in Bolivian society, even amongst indigenous communities. Rivera Cusicanqui, has a somewhat similar

view which originates from her work in Aymara *ayllus*<sup>12</sup>; however, according to her the transformation in the gender system of the ayllus did not occur during colonial rule but until the emergence of the newly formed Bolivian republic after the revolution of 1952. For Rivera Cusicanqui, it was the republican government, well entered into the twentieth century what changed the gender relations in the ayllus turning the more egalitarian relations between men and women expressed by duality into oppressive relations of dichotomous nature:

*“Se ha documentado en los Andes un sistema de género en el que las mujeres tenían derechos públicos y familiares más equilibrados con sus pares varones, los que comienzan a ser trastrocados tan solo en décadas recientes. [...] la ‘modernidad’ [...] contribuyó a crear una imagen maternalizada de las mujeres, en la que resultaban desvalorizados sus saberse como pastoras, tejedoras y ritualistas. [...] occidentalización y patriarcalización de los sistemas de género, pueden leerse en los Andes como dos procesos paralelos.”* (It has been documented in the Andes a gender system in which women had more balanced public and family rights with their male counterparts; this system changed only in recent decades. [...] 'modernity' [...] contributed to create a maternalized image of women, which resulted in the devaluation of their knowledge as shepherdesses, weavers and ritualists. [...] westernization and patriarchalisation of gender systems can be read in the Andes as two parallel processes) (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2014, p.123).

Although there are similarities within these three abovementioned authors, it is also important to notice that gender relations within indigenous communities vary largely across ethnicities and locations and thus, makes it difficult to arrive to an accurate and general description of the existence or not of gender relations in the Americas before colonization.

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<sup>12</sup> The *ayllu* is the traditional form of a community in the Andes, especially among Quechuas and Aymaras. It is an indigenous local government model across the Andes region of South America, particularly in Bolivia and Peru.

### 5.3.2 Colonial governmentality

As said before, the separation of colonial rule from independent nations has less analytical importance for Latin American decolonial theorists than it has for postcolonial scholars in other geographical locations. Although formal independence processes are important and have a crucial role in the national narratives constructed, they did not get rid of the colonial narratives nor the admiration for conquistadors. It is possible to find in several Latin American countries evidence of the ways in which the lineages of conquistadors have held political and economic power for over five centuries. To say this is not an exaggeration. Marta Casaús (1992) traced the genealogies of the conquistador's families in Guatemala, their marriage alliances and the public offices they held from the sixteenth century up until the decade of 1990 when she published her study. This history and the survival of these lineages and colonial-oligarchic structures is present in the works of Rivera Cusicanqui, Curiel, Tzul, Bidaseca and Segato, who theorize around the notion of 'colonial governmentality'.

Bidaseca analyses the challenges faced by the Argentinian judiciary system when it is presented with cases that are understood differently outside of the liberal republican system. These challenges create complexities not only for the judiciary system but also for liberal feminists who fail to acknowledge the complexity in cases of interlocking systems of oppression that question liberal notions such as responsibility, freedom or children's rights. For Bidaseca, this can be referred to as 'juridical colonialism'. In Tzul's work, the intertwining of religion with neoliberalism becomes evident through the governmental strategies of micro-credits and entrepreneurship programs given to indigenous women. Drawing on Weber and Foucault, Tzul argues that governmental strategies abovementioned are part of a larger neoliberal governmentality that creates a type of recolonization with the entrance of neo-Pentecostal churches in regions where there had been basic-ecclesial-communities established by progressive priests and laity of the Catholic church. These newly established neo-Pentecostal churches have tried to impose an ideology of prosperity, thus tied to the same neoliberal governmentality Tzul describes. By involving women in the organizations of the neo-Pentecostal churches, the productive process of rural development increased whilst also increasing deforestation, with the justification that monocultures are

necessary to produce more food and reduce hunger. The argument of coloniality is strengthened by the work of these feminists, who do not only signal the ways in which coloniality is maintained but, most importantly, the ways in which transmutes depending on different factors, most recently its imbrication with a neoliberal global governmentality.

### 5.3.3 Reproduction of life and communities

Thinking about quotidian resistances to power is important for decolonial feminists. Feminist scholars from different traditions and in different geographical locations are concerned with every-day practices of resistance. Inspired by U.S second-wave feminism's slogan "the personal is political", this epistemological preoccupation highlights the connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures. In this sense, by paying attention to quotidian resistances it is possible to understand the larger systems of oppression whilst also think in new ways to oppose those very systems.

Inspired by her work with Zapatistas in the south of Mexico, Mora argues for "politics in lower case" and highlights the ways in which Zapatista women learn politics by enacting them. They do so by bringing children to the communitarian assemblies who then grow up within this environment and can then become part of the local government at a very young age. Mora narrates the story of Aurelia, a 17-year old Zapatista girl capable of waking up an entire audience with her presence and her discourse. Aurelia speaks about how women take care of the gardens, the animals and learn embroidery whilst reflecting on their own lives, especially advising young women in ways to defend their rights against the "bad government" and against men. Aurelia reflected how the meetings of men were boring because all they did was talk, while the meetings of the women were entertaining and had taught her autonomous politics by playing, dancing and moving her body. The everyday practices of reproduction of life usually done by women have historically been relegated as less important in relation to the productive work of men. Because of this, feminist economists have reflected on this devaluation and have come up with concepts such as care work and emotional labour. Quiroga, having a background on economics, argues that it is necessary to

understand issues surrounding care work beyond Eurocentric ideas. She claims that feminist economics has failed in working in a more contextual theoretical production; it is still the U.S and Europe where theory is done, thus creating a centre-periphery relation where Latin America is but a terrain where to apply the concepts theorized elsewhere. Quiroga is concerned about the ways that some Latin American states during the Pink tide tried to enact public policies around care work. She offers a critique of the ways in which these policies never took into account the differential experiences as well as the knowledge produced by women, especially indigenous women, who have historically occupied these works. She argues for a decolonial feminist perspective to imagine and build a more just economy, thinking of the notion of *Buen Vivir* (Good Living) present in many indigenous communities in the continent:

*“Es necesario cuestionar las implicaciones teóricas que tendría una economía del cuidado, pensada desde los fundamentos del Buen Vivir, en donde hay un desplazamiento del antropocentrismo que permite considerar a la tierra también cómo Sujeta y Objeto de cuidado. A la vez, la dimensión comunitaria y su relación con el cuidado no está contenida en la relación entre familia y sociedad civil [...]”* (“It is necessary to question the theoretical implications of an economy of care, thought from the foundations of Good Living, where there is a displacement of anthropocentrism that allows us to consider the earth as subject and object of care. At the same time, the community dimension and its relationship with care is not contained in the relationship between family and civil society [...]”) (Quiroga, 2014, p.173)

#### 5.3.4 Critique of liberal feminism

Decolonial feminism is both a critique of liberal feminism as well as a broadening of feminism. What is important to note here is that, when decolonial feminists critique hegemonic liberal feminism they refer specifically to the dominant streams of feminism in Latin America that tend to homogenise women whilst prescribing solutions. There is a critique of liberal feminism in all the texts, sometimes implicit, other times more explicit.



Hernández and Paredes give interesting examples of the estrangement between liberal feminism and decolonial feminism. Hernández points out that the Mexican feminist movement around the urban areas, especially in Mexico City, had as priorities for many years the demands for voluntary motherhood, recognition of reproductive rights, struggle against sexual and domestic violence and (to a lesser extent) the rights for the LGBTQ community. This agenda was set as *the* agenda of the Mexican feminist movement, thus leaving no room for other demands and increasing the gap between urban mestiza feminists and indigenous rural women. A clear example of this, according to Hernández, was the strong critique that urban mestiza feminists did to the Second Revolutionary Law of Women, in which the Zapatista women included an article prohibiting infidelity. Urban mestiza feminists thought of this alteration to the previous law as a conservative measure influenced by religion. However, Hernández points out that these critiques should contextualize this demand by indigenous women in a frame of reference where male infidelity, bigamy and domestic violence are culturally justified for the sake of tradition. In this sense, while urban mestiza women see the prohibition of infidelity as moralist and conservative, indigenous women see it as a way to reject the tradition that renders them vulnerable within the domestic unit and the community. The estrangement between liberal feminists and indigenous women has had the effect that many indigenous women reject the term ‘feminist’ for themselves because they equate feminism with liberal feminism. Paredes prefers to use the name ‘communitarian feminism’ to describe the work of *Mujeres Creando* (Women Creating), a well-known collective of lesbian feminists in Bolivia that she co-founded. One of the aims of communitarian feminism has been to question an elite group of women who they consider privileged. Paredes critiques the ways that NGO’s during the 1990s negotiated especial laws for domestic workers that had no effect in reducing the levels of exploitation for most women. She observes that many of the women working for those NGO’s had racialized domestic workers themselves, and calls them to reflect on it. Paredes argues that class and race had a greater weight for white upper middle class feminist who began to de-politicize the term ‘gender’ by substituting it with ‘gender equality’. For her, gender is a term that describes the oppressive relation between masculinity and femininity and thus, gender equality is not really attainable.

# 6 Decolonial feminists theorizing the state

The previous chapter specified the methodological and theoretical points of departure, and recurrent themes present in decolonial feminism's literature. Those elements have an impact on the theorizations on the state, which is the main topic of this chapter. In order to understand how decolonial feminists theorize the state and what meanings those theorizations have for alternative imaginaries of social transformation, this chapter is divided in two main sections. The first one is about the state: Latin American historical experiences with it and the normative suggestions to build a less predatory state. The second section is about feminist politics for the future, the strategies chosen and used, and the ways they can enter in dialogues with other alternative imaginaries across different geographical locations.

## 6.1 The State

The second reading of the texts had the particular aim of extracting the specific arguments of decolonial feminists on the state. This allowed for a close and careful reading that permitted to connect the different arguments across texts and authors, thus giving a sense of the intertextuality present within the literature. None of the texts exist in a void and the fact that they are part of edited volumes creates a larger sense of intertextuality. Although the empirical material of this thesis is documents, when treated in their intertextual character they become somewhat alive. By looking at the connections across the texts as well as the theoretical framework and field in which this thesis is, it was possible to group the theorizations on the state in three sections. The first section is concerned with coloniality of power and state violence; the second section is concerned with the

demands of Plurinational states and the evaluation of the already existing ones; the third section is concerned with outlining what a decolonial feminist friendly state could be.

### 6.1.1 State coloniality and state violence

The Latin American states have different historical trajectories and it is not possible to homogenise them. However, it is possible to find common traits and similar trends in the political and economic processes in the region. An important one has to do with the democratization process, what Huntington (1991) popularly referred to as the ‘third wave of democratization’. The 1980s saw a resurgence of democracy in many countries in the form of free elections and alternation of power, after many years of authoritarian governments. Countries that had ongoing civil wars began their respective peace process and historical memory commissions were established. The formal democracies in the region continue to exist and most countries periodically hold elections and there is formal alternation of power. A part of western media has claimed that democracy is absent in the cases of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba and they are frequently referred to as dictatorships. There is no point in taking issue with this, since none of the authors chosen come from either of those countries nor discuss them. However, it is important to recognize that elections have been held periodically in those countries although with questionable procedures and with demonstrations of authoritarianism and violence. This is not exclusive of these countries as similar practices occur in other countries without much international media coverage. The case of Honduras is notable: the country suffered in 2009 a *coup d'état* supported by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and in 2017 an evident electoral fraud was committed; the fraud was called out by the Organization of American States with no results whilst the fraudulent president has continued to enjoy the same prerogatives as the other leaders of the region.

The weak democratic regimes of today are heirs to another common trend amongst Latin American countries, that is the military authoritarian regimes in the period of the Cold War. These regimes became the epitome of state violence in the region. There is a large scholarly production on the logics of these states, their

strategies to terrorize and exterminate populations and their connections to the anti-communist discourse as a legitimization of state violence (Figueroa Ibarra, 1991; Dinges, 2005; Cavallo, Salazar and Sepúlveda, 2013). None of the texts chosen for this thesis directly relate to the time of the military dictatorships and its particular *terrorismo de estado* (state terrorism); nevertheless, it is important to note that the recent experience of this extreme violence can be present even in subtle ways. The same goes for the more recent violence provoked by the U.S.'s war on drugs, especially in the countries that are the primary route where drugs are transported: Central American countries and Mexico.

Decolonial feminists have a more general and historical take on state violence instead of focusing on specific historical events. For example, Mendoza traces the actual Latin American democracies to their colonial past to highlight and demonstrate the ways in which the current states were built, and the ways in which the sixteenth century ideas about the statute of humanity survived the end of colonialism and are withstanding even now. Mendoza argues that the Valladolid debate in the middle of the sixteenth century between De Las Casas and De Sepúlveda is one of the most important events in world history. This is so because the discussion in this debate was about the status of humanity of the Amerindias living in the west territories not known by Europeans before the fifteenth century. The results of the Valladolid Debate set the ground, according to Mendoza, to create moral hierarchical relations between the Spaniards and the Amerindians based on the supposed inferior humanity of the latter, a humanity worth converting to Christianity but never fully human on the same level as the Europeans; these ideas were later spread by other European colonial powers to their colonies in Asia and Africa. Mendoza argues that the idea of considering groups of people as not fully human was kept after independence and constitute the undemocratic basis of today's democracies. She gives the example of the large number of women being killed every day in Latin America, especially the well-known case of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez, and the increasing number of femicides in Central America; the statute of humanity is not really applied to these women, making them unworthy of recognition whilst their bodies are inscribed with the violence of the 'undemocratic democracy'.

For Segato, the Brazilian state performs violence in a double move: by first taking and then giving back what it took. By this, Segato means that the more

balanced relations between men and women in indigenous communities were transformed by coloniality in a way that created a super charged patriarchy that had violent effects on women. In this sense, the subordination of women and the increase in domestic violence in communities in the Amazonas was a result of the infiltration of the state's coloniality. This was done because in the village-world, men were the ones usually in charge of hunting expeditions, contact with other villages and exchange, so the colonial administrators entered into dialogues and negotiation with the men; the ancestral masculine positions were transformed by this relational role with the colonial agencies. The new masculinity that returns to the village-world then transforms the lives of women whose practices are relegated to the private sphere. It is within the domestic space that the value and the political strength of women is weakened by severing the relations with other women and thus making them more vulnerable to masculine violence. According to Segato, the femicides as mechanical practices of the extermination of women are a modern invention. She concludes by saying that when the Brazilian state goes back to these communities with new laws on domestic violence and workshops on how to eradicate it, it is possible to observe a double move: giving what it had previously taken:

*“En suma y recapitulando, cuando, en un gesto que pretende la universalización de la ciudadanía, pensamos que se trata de substituir la jerarquía que ordenaba la relación de hombres y mujeres por una relación igualitaria, lo que estamos realmente haciendo es remediando los males que la modernidad ya introdujo con soluciones también modernas: el estado entrega con una mano lo que ya retiró con la otra.”* (In short and recapitulating, when, in a gesture that seeks the universalization of citizenship, we think that the hierarchy that ordered the relationship of men and women is replaced for an egalitarian relationship, what we are really doing is remedying with modern solutions the ills that modernity already introduced: the state delivers with one hand what it has already taken with the other.) (Segato, 2014, p.87)

On another account, Mora draws on her auto-ethnographic work with the Zapatista women in the south of Mexico. She calls into attention the ways in which the Mexican government historically and constantly has left in abandonment the indigenous people from the southern states. Mora then goes into

focusing in the ways that the government responded to the 1994 insurgence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). The Mexican government responded with a spectacular demonstration of force and killed several dozens of people. The following dialogues between the EZLN and the Mexican government have resulted in continuous breaches by the government on the agreements signed. At the same time, the policies implemented in accordance to the North American Free Trade Agreement have had impacts on the Zapatista communities who have seen how their crops were deeply impacted by the introduction of several GMO crops in nearby places.

Decolonial theorists are interested in the ways economic relations have been configured within Latin American societies. The influence of Dependency theory is palpable when understanding the global dynamics of capitalism that divides industrialized economies from agrarian economies. A global logic that is locally sustained by oligarchic elites that have used the state apparatus to maintain colonial economic structures on their benefit (Escobar, 1996). Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the emergence of *fincas* or *haciendas* in several countries. These were large estates usually owned by the descendants of colonizers; with the transformation of global economy these states were enlarged which prompted the need for more manual labour. Many indigenous communities that suffered little influence of colonial power and enjoyed somewhat autonomous governments, began to be infiltrated by these landowners to gather cheap labour in their estates. Rivera Cusicanqui mentions that the Andean ayllus had managed to stay virtually untouched during colonial period, but because of these transformations in the economy the contact with the republican government of Bolivia became usual. She mentions that during the 1950s in Bolivia, there was an imposition of a citizenship model that was male, mestizo, Spanish-speaking, property-owner and western-dressed. During this time, large extensions of former communal land were grabbed by estate-owners, the army and its militias, and some paramilitary groups. Therefore, the law declared the ayllus extinct and prohibited its representation by caciques or other ethnic authorities whilst forming the figure of the representative (a literate Spanish speaking mestizo) of the indigenous world (Aymara-speaking). According to Rivera Cusicanqui:

*“Traducción y traición se combinaron [...] para el despojo de casi dos terceras partes del territorio poseído por las comunidades originarias*

*andinas*”. (Translation and betrayal were combined [...] for the dispossession of almost two thirds of the territory owned by the original Andean communities.) (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2014, p.124)

Other authors see the importance of coloniality in the ways it informed a gendered process of nation building, creating heteronormative nations. Curiel is the one who does the heaviest work in analysing how nations reproduce heterosexuality. Her close examination of the 1991 Colombian constitution is an important contribution to Latin American studies on nation building and the ways that neoliberalism and heterosexuality intertwined and were imposed. During the redaction of the Constitution, Curiel mentions that there were no representatives of the LGBTQ community. The text consolidated the idea of heterosexuality as not only the normal but also the only type of family. This is evident when the Constitution legitimates the nuclear family formed by a man and a woman as the basis of society whilst proclaiming that women will have the protection and support of the State during pregnancy and the first months after delivering the baby. Curiel says that it is assumed that all women are to become mothers thus creating an essential biologization of the role of women and making motherhood discursively obligatory. One of the main mechanism of this heterosexual regime described by Curiel is to maintain sexual difference as an ontological base and thus thinking the heterosexual kinship as a natural fact connected to the nation:

*“Aunque la nacionalidad se tenga por derecho, la ciudadanía se ve limitada cuando el régimen de la heterosexualidad actúa como demarcador de derechos. [...] En ese sentido, la nacionalidad y la ciudadanía son afectadas directamente por el régimen heterosexual.”*

(Although nationality is considered a right, citizenship is limited when the heterosexual regime acts as a demarcation of rights. [...] In that sense, nationality and citizenship are directly affected by the heterosexual regime.) (Curiel, 2011, p.87)

Although the example of the Colombian constitution is striking in the ways the state imposes heterosexuality, let us not forget what Segato, Paredes and Rivera Cusicanqui pointed out about the gender relations in indigenous communities being permeated by these gendered ideas. The strict rules of heteronormativity also have negative effects for non-heterosexual indigenous people who can encounter violence within their communities, especially the

communities more permeated by the mainstream discourse of the nuclear family as the basis of society. In this sense, to be outside of the heterosexual norm or to be a woman who does not comply with the compulsory motherhood is to be outside of society.

The rigid gender norms above mentioned relate to the key issue of decolonial theory, that coloniality persists albeit formal colonialism ended. Paredes points that out and observes the ways that exclusion, sexism and racism persist in Bolivian society; she calls this 'internal colonialism'. This type of colonialism does not need a white invader but operates through the white heirs, neo-colonizers that have grown up in Bolivian territory. Those new colonizers, according to Paredes, have built structures of privilege in the name of modernizing the state; in addition to economically nurturing transnational companies of neo-colonizers with the cheap labour of young indigenous men and women, internal colonialism has subsidized their daily lives with the low cost of agricultural products from rural communities. In this sense, the state is reduced to a biased referee of transnational interests. Paredes argues that the myth of sustainable development means that development occurs only in the first world and it is the task of the peoples of the South to sustain it.

The history of the Latin American states and the state violence in its many forms albeit has been the norm it is not the only experience of state building. Over the last fifteen years, governments with a discursively different idea of the state proposed new state building processes. The most prominent examples are Ecuador and Bolivia who reformed their constitutions and were declared Plurinational states. This promise of Plurinationality is popular among indigenous and peasants' communities in other Latin American countries.

### 6.1.2 The decolonial and Plurinational state

The relations between the different ethnicities present in the territories constructed different state formations after independence. In the Southern Cone, the Amerindians were never integrated into colonial society and their experience resembled that of the Amerindians in Canada and the U.S. Chile, Argentina and Uruguay had millions of European migrants in the late nineteenth century,



solidifying in appearance the whiteness of these societies that would expand their territories to the lands occupied by Amerindians with the purpose of extermination, in order to homogenize the national population in the image of a European modern nation state. The Mexican case is exceptional in the sense that the narrative of miscegenation was the basis of the Mexican state; acknowledging that the population of the country was mestizo (descendants of Spanish and Mexicas) a national narrative was created and supported, especially after the 1910 revolution when the state apparatus through education and culture advanced these ideas. However, this narrative forgot that indigenous communities with their own languages and traditions still existed, especially in the southern states, thus neglecting them for generations. The societies of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Guatemala were particularly different: the majority of the population was of indigenous descent but without any economic or political power. In these countries, the white minority had the control of the state and their interests were explicitly antagonistic in respect to those of indigenous people and afro-descendants who were needed to maintain the economic labour in relations of servitude. In this sense, indigenous people and afro-descendants were incorporated into the national society but in terms of exploitative labour (Quijano, 2000). It was not until the 1980s for the case of Guatemala, where an extermination campaign was put in place to get rid of the indigenous people that the powerful white minority found more problematic.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite the efforts of segregation, homogenization and extermination of many indigenous people, they still exist nowadays with their traditions and languages. The latest available census data shows that in 2010 there were about 42 million indigenous people in Latin America. Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia had the largest populations. Bolivia and Guatemala have the largest populations in relation to the national population: 60% and 40% respectively (World Bank, 2015). During the 1970s and 1980s, indigenous people in different countries began to organize and became one of the biggest social

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13 The Commission for Historical Clarification found that those killed or disappeared during the Guatemalan civil war were as high as 200,000. In terms of demographics, they found that 83% of "fully identified" victims were of Mayan descent and that genocidal campaigns against them were carried out by the military.

movements in the continent; the recognition of plurinationalism has been one of the most important demands (Walsh, 2009). The probability of this demand being fulfilled increased during the first decade of this century, when left wing forces gained access to government in different countries and international media referred to this phenomenon as 'Pink tide'. This was extraordinary in the sense that very few governments before had been progressive and those who were did not stay in power for long. The structural adjustments in the 1990s, the influential Third-way politics driven by the Clinton and Blair administrations in the U.S. and U.K respectively, made the Pink tide look promising. Bolivia elected its first indigenous president in 2006: Evo Morales; and by 2009 a new constitution was introduced declaring Bolivia as a unitary, plurinational and secular state. Ecuador also changed its constitution and in 2008 became the first in the world to recognize legally enforceable Rights of Nature, with a whole section of the constitution devoted to the Good Living idea.

It is within this context that decolonial feminists have been writing. Many of the authors militate within the indigenous movement or are very familiar with it. In such capacity, they offer important critiques to the movement as well as the governments that have taken up its demands. Cumes is concerned with analysing the ways in which multiculturalism (a central part of the plurinationalist demand) and feminism have met around the struggles of indigenous women. These are women in the margins of the demands of both multiculturalism and feminism. She does a critique of hegemonic feminism before turning to the critique of multiculturalism. Cumes points out that multiculturalism assumes gender neutrality; it does not have any guiding lines concerning gender equality. Because of this, indigenous and afro-descendant women have made evident the androcentric perspective of indigenous organizations despite having women in their ranks. This has caused that these women are usually signalled as divisive, westernized, or even traitors, especially if they adopt the categories of gender and feminism. Indigenous men concerned with protecting the indigenous movements tend to question the work of women around themes such as gender equality and feminism. However, since hegemonic feminism discriminated indigenous women for a long time, Cumes points out that it is difficult to find an organization of indigenous women that assumes a feminist position; however, there are several indigenous feminists in different organizations but they tend to be stigmatized as

having been assimilated by western culture. The essentializations made by hegemonic feminism and multiculturalist discourses can have negative effects:

*“De modo que cuando se toman posiciones extremas, el feminismo esencialista ve al patriarcado indígena como el único responsable de la situación de las mujeres indígenas; o, el esencialismo indígena justifica el machismo y el sexismo como productos exclusivos de la colonia. Así, ambas visiones se ubican en un mismo lugar: ocultan su posición de poder y fraccionan las opresiones, dándole mayor importancia a las luchas identitarias particularizadas.”* (So when extreme positions are taken, essentialist feminism sees indigenous patriarchy as the sole responsible for the situation of indigenous women; or, indigenous essentialism justifies machismo and sexism as exclusive products of colonialism. Thus, both visions are located in the same place: they hide their position of power and divide the oppressions, giving greater importance to particularized identity struggles) (Cumes, 2014, p.248)

Cumes sees the essentialism of multiculturalism as a threat to the decolonial project of the Plurinational state. She points out that the indigenous movements seek to create policies that are counterhegemonic of the colonial state but that it is necessary to conduct a gendered analysis to visualize whether pluri-nationalism is reproducing the same mistakes of that state. Placing indigenous women as a key symbol of political identity and neutralizing the social inequalities that are inscribed on their bodies, could legitimize the effects of the colonial, patriarchal, and racially constructed system, whilst repeating the exclusion and reification of women. Although essentialism as a fighting strategy has been crucial against a profoundly racist society, tradition cannot be more important than the oppression of women. It does not make sense to challenge an oppression that leads to the reinforcement of another.

Paredes and Curiel make similar arguments to Cumes'. However, none of the authors reject the idea of multiculturalism nor the Plurinational state. Rivera Cusicanqui, a well-known fierce critic of Evo Morales's government because of its corruption scandals and negotiations with the economic elite, states that the implicit reasoning in the double critique of hegemonic feminism and essential multiculturalism is that there must be a simultaneous effort of decolonizing gender and decolonizing culture; all through a theory and a practice that combines

the emancipatory traits of feminism and pluralism in legislation and public policies as well as in the every-day practices of people. This effort is the basis of an incipient theorization of the state by decolonial feminists. The ideas of the Good Living and the influence of multiple feminisms are of the utmost importance when outlining the traits of a friendlier state.

### 6.1.3 Outlining a decolonial feminist friendly state

The analysis of decolonial feminist literature has showed the multiple ways in which they do a critique of the already existing Latin American states. Although it is difficult to claim that there is a comprehensive theory of the state in the texts nor a reference to a decolonial feminist theory of the state, it can be said that there is basis for an incipient theorization of the state. In this sense, I will outline some of the key arguments in constructing a friendlier state for decolonial feminists.

When thinking about possibilities of a new type of state, no text is more explicit than the Declaration text produced within the activities of the Eleventh Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Brasilia, between July 13 and 16, 2010. This text is included in the edited volume *Tejiendo de otro modo: feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala* (Weaving in a different way: feminism, epistemology and decolonial approaches in Abya Yala), which shows a concern on theorizing the state among decolonial feminists. The declaration is titled “¿Qué Estado para qué igualdad?” *Declaración de las mujeres indígenas y afrodescendientes de América Latina, el Caribe y la diáspora* (“What kind of state? What kind of equality?” Declaration of indigenous and Afro-descendant women of Latin America, the Caribbean and the diaspora). During the events of the conference, a Forum of Feminists Organizations was established in which the discussions produced a declaration of twenty demands that were presented during the inaugural session of the conference. However, indigenous and afro-descendant women called for greater visibility by publishing their own declaration.

The purpose of this declaration is to influence governmental and intergovernmental institutions in the formulation and implementation processes of public policies that can guarantee new development paradigms that are sustainable

and that recognize and respect ethnic and gender identities. The declaration refers to the international agreements that protect indigenous people and to the international agreements that protect women, to base their claims within this frame. However, their striking demand is to be considered right holders:

*“Reafirmamos que las mujeres indígenas y afrodescendientes no somos grupos vulnerables, sino sujetas de derechos”* (We reaffirm that we, indigenous and Afro-descendant women, are not vulnerable groups but rights-holders).

After highlighting a lack of public policies with the active participation of indigenous and afro-descendant women in decision making positions and the different socio-economic problems that they struggle with e.g. violence, racism, sex-trafficking, land-grabbing, pollution, unemployment; they proceed to make their recommendations: a) build a secular, democratic, plurinational, pluricultural, antiracist and inclusive state, concerned with the relation between human beings and the environment; a state in which women are not mere productive units but right holders; b) respect sexual and reproductive rights without discrimination; health services need to be intercultural and contraceptives and sexual education should be available for everyone; maternal mortality should be reduced and HIV should be prevented, diagnosed and treated; c) incorporate in the population census variables such as sex, ethnicity and race, with auto-identification as main criteria; d) design and implement public policies in which indigenous and afro descendant women participate; e) recognize that the large majority of the labour market is composed by young people and it is the labour of indigenous and afro descendants the most undervalued; states should guarantee public policies to address this issue; f) guarantee access to mass media for indigenous and afro descendant women, through spaces that incorporate their languages and cultural identities in communitarian radios and television stations; racist and sexist messages or images should be eliminated. The declaration concludes with the demand of a state that is committed to the incorporation of women, particularly indigenous and Afro-descendant women, in a model of development that is inclusive, respectful of the environment and that acknowledges human rights.

Within these demands and the outlining of a different state, it is possible to recognize different traditions or experiences of state. It is striking the resemblance with the welfare state, a model in which the state protects and promotes the

economic and social well-being of its citizens. But this is not the only influence that can be perceived; the notions of Good Living albeit not explicit seem to impact some demands, especially those concerned with sustainable development and the environment. Multiculturalism and plurinationalism are important concepts within the declaration, meaning that it takes up the principal demands of indigenous movements in Latin America. The declaration also points to the specific demands of women, such as their subjectivity and the rejection of the victimhood historically placed upon them, or the demand for an integral sexual education and the full enjoyment of their sexual and reproductive rights. There is not a specific demand for LGBTQ rights, which is important to consider. The declaration does not exclude this group of people but does not make them visible either. This declaration shows different rationalities coming together: the idea of a welfare state –critically viewed- that takes into account the pluralism of humans and the needs of the environment and that enables the members of that state to enjoy sexual emancipation; a somewhat feminist decolonial social-democratic state.

Decolonial feminists' critique of the colonial state and the current formal democratic governments does not mean a total separation from the state close to an anarchist position. Although the examples of communal government in indigenous territories, such as the autonomous municipalities of the Zapatistas, are important, the participation and the demands to the state are still relevant. As Hernández points out, indigenous women demand a recognition of the multicultural nature of the Mexican nation based on a broader definition of culture, with the diversity of voices and the contradictory processes that give sense to the life of human collectives. Paredes argues that it is the task of women to translate the knowledge of the Good Living into public policies, and this process starts in the communities and then reaches the national government.

It is Quiroga who makes an extensive reflection on what a feminist decolonial state entails. Taking as departure point the Eurocentric perspective of feminist economics, and having the notion of care as central in her thinking, she argues that it is necessary to question the theoretical implications of an economy of care. This means thinking from the perspective of the Good Living, in which there is a displacement of anthropocentrism, that considers Earth as subject and object of care. At the same time, the liberal conception between family and civil society

cannot contain the community dimension and its relationship with care. The ideas of autonomy, collective self-organization to which the community alludes to, make visible other dimensions of care previously ignored. According to Quiroga, decolonial theory of care can contribute to the emergence of new questions that can broaden the understanding of the causes that in each context produce female subordination. The decolonial perspective contributes to feminist economics in the construction of a more porous field of knowledge, more willing to situate itself and discuss its presuppositions.

Ideas on pluralism, the recognition of different legal systems, the importance of care work, the traditions in the Good Living, and the freedom to enjoy a fulfilling sexuality, are useful guidelines when imagining new rationalities that can counteract the neoliberal rationalities that perpetuate oppression. While in some countries there are talks about ‘refunding the state’, the conversation is still ongoing and women are raising their voices in public spaces whilst doing politics in the private space, thus connecting both spaces and enacting politics in a different way. Paredes claims that women have the right to self-representation and to say what they want with a voice of their own; many women have very important things to say. Cumes addresses the relations between indigenous women and men:

*“Las mujeres indígenas también tenemos que realizar pactos con los hombres indígenas. Pero no desde posiciones de jerarquía, como hasta ahora ha ocurrido, sino de construcción paralela. No nos conformaremos con ser el símbolo de las nuevas naciones indígenas, sino sujetas y constructoras de esas nuevas naciones.”* (Indigenous women must also pact with indigenous men. But not from hierarchical positions, as has been the case up to now, but from a parallel construction. We will not be satisfied with being the symbol of the new indigenous nations but subject and constructors of those new nations.) (Cumes, 2014, p.249)

The different perspectives and the situated knowledge produced by and with indigenous women and afro-descendant women of Latin America, enrich the perspective of the Plurinational governmentalities whilst challenging them to let go of their patriarchal manners. In this sense, the state is no longer an ontological entity but more of the potential effect of the different rationalities operating in society. To have a better sense of this rationalities, it is useful to take a look at the

way decolonial feminists do politics; politics that not necessarily fall into the theorizations of the state as such, but that offer ways of thinking politics in plural ways that can enter in a dialogue with other emancipatory politics.

## 6.2 Decolonial feminist politics for the future

Thinking with Haraway (1988), let us not forget that subjugation is not grounds for an ontology but it might be a visual clue; critical positioning produces science, objectivity. This is enriched with Mohanty's (2003) ideas when she argues that an analysis from the lives from marginalized communities of women "provides the most inclusive paradigm for thinking about social justice. This particularized viewing allows for a more concrete and expansive vision of universal justice" (p.231). Uniting the ideas of Haraway and Mohanty permits an objective position from where to think social justice without risking essentialization or folklorization. In this sense, the writings of the decolonial feminist authors in this thesis provide a visual key that is useful to imagine, not only strategies of resistance, but decolonial feminist horizons.

### 6.2.1 Strategies of resistance

To think of theory not as work done to gain prestige but as liberatory practice (Anzaldúa, 1987; Sandoval, 2000; Sousa Santos, 2009) is the first strategy of resistance that can be drawn from the writings of decolonial feminists. Theory can be a location for healing, a location for struggle and a location to name close experiences. And theory is seldom done in isolation; it is done in conversation and with others.

This is what Mora points out as the key aspects in the emerging production of decolonial feminist politics: first, a number of practices relegated by masculinist theorists who considered the micro-dynamics of power as irrelevant, but that point to the need of turning the view around to take quotidian life as point of departure; second, the importance to reconfigure and rethink the masculine contributions to broaden them in the emancipatory struggles of all genders; and third, to maintain a



political commitment of building dialogues and bridges across the feminisms of the global South, because it is from the specificities of each struggle, in broad conversations, that it is possible to transcend the current conditions of social injustice. These aspects talk of a history of thinking together, in community, something that can be perceived in Paredes words too. For her, the notion of long memory is important because it speaks about the pride and dignity of being part of peoples with ancient cultures, but that nonetheless need to be de-patriarchalized. Gutiérrez Aguilar points out that in order to create different relations between women and men, it is important to refer to a systematic activity of producing that which is common, that creates community.

This different theorizations, combined with the already specific demands made by indigenous women across the continent, points to a new type of feminism that convergences in some points with the urban hegemonic feminism whilst diverging substantially from it. Hernández writes that the specific forms of struggle of indigenous women are marked by the economic and cultural context in which they have built their gender identities; this also informs their conceptions about the ‘dignity of women’ and their ways of proposing political alliances. Indigenous women have chosen to join the broader struggles of their peoples, but have also created reflective spaces on their experiences of exclusion regarding gender and race; they have pointed out, in various spaces, the dangers of essentialist discourses whilst choosing to vindicate the historical and changing nature of their cultures and rejecting the traditions they consider as an attempt against their dignity. Hernández also points out that indigenous women are guiding the ways in which to rethink multiculturalism and autonomy from a dynamic perspective of culture that thinks of identity as a historical construction that reformulates daily, whilst claiming a right to self-determination. Cumes makes a similar argument: she brings forth the proposals of the women who, in border-like situations, have seen the need to question the hegemonic perspectives of both feminism and multiculturalism thus creating new and valuable political arguments and analysis of reality.

## 6.2.2 Decolonial horizons

It is a difficult task that of imagining new horizons, or as the Zapatistas say: *otros mundos posibles* (other possible worlds); however, in the writings of decolonial feminists there are some clues that allow to begin with this task. Mora calls ‘politics and decolonization in lowercase’ to the dialogues and material exchanges in pedagogical practices that cross borders. She refers to everyday counter narratives that Zapatista women enact: joyous creations in the face of death; inseparability of production and reflection; collective solidarity instead of individualism; plural self-reflection as an impetus for action. Mora especially acknowledges the politicization of the Zapatista youth; their bodies already bear traces of a learned theorization. To situate the topic of care, as Quiroga argues, from the perspective of the women who have been marginalized can give rise to alternatives and other possibilities. Cumes refers to ideas that need to be vindicated; the concepts of complementarity and duality need to be understood in a dialogue with reality and political propositions that question the existing relations of oppression. She argues that constructions that depart from diversity and difference are complex and contradictory; hegemonic political ideas defend that there can only be progress from homogeneity, assimilation and the imposition of the strongest. This creates a perception of diversity as chaotic, thus creating despair, but diversity is a fact and must propel to a building of reality between everyone. How to transfer those theorizations to a practice of decolonization is what interests Paredes. She makes a case for a decolonization of gender; she means several things with this: decolonize gender means recovering the memory of the struggles of previous generations against a patriarchy established before colonization that was present in pre-colonial cultures and societies, that merged with the colonial perspective of gender thus creating a patriarchal juncture; in order to both decolonize and de-neoliberalize gender there must be a questioning of the women of the rich North and their complicity with transnational patriarchy. Paredes makes the case from communitarian feminism and its five fields of action (body, space, time, movement, memory). From these fields, she calls to lay the foundations of a life of love, pleasure and fulfilment for all living beings on the planet. She argues that it can be the beginning of another stage and invites all feminist women and men to disobey; to disobey the patriarchal order that limits

and repress the bodies, spaces, times and contaminates the social movements and organizations with machismo. To think collectively, new vocabularies, alternative knowledge is how Mora envisions a transformation of society:

*“Yo estoy convencida de que el inicio empieza ubicándonos en estos imaginarios políticos, en los aprendizajes que ofrece cada lucha en su determinado momento histórico.”* (I am convinced that it starts by placing us in these political imaginaries, in the learnings that each struggle offers in its particular historical moment.) (Mora, 2014, p.158)

The theoretical contributions of Latin American decolonial politics can be thought as epistemologies of the south that seek to enter into dialogues with other emancipatory politics that oppose oppressive ideologies and that are engaged with affirmative ethics and politics. In this sense, other more liveable futures are possible.

## 7 Conclusions

The main concern of this thesis has been to examine knowledge production on the state; specifically, the ways in which Latin American decolonial feminists theorize the state and the meanings that their contributions have for other alternative emancipatory projects.

This thesis has shown the multiple interstices from which decolonial feminists theorize. On the one hand in a constant conversation between academia and activism. On the other hand, in a tense relation with indigenous and decolonizing projects, as well as in a tense relation with those strands of feminism that are liberal and/or oblivious of the differences between women. At the same time, it has shown the ways in which embodied research is done in the global South and the ways knowledge is produced in different settings.

Decolonial feminist theorize the state in diverse ways. They do so by first offering a strong critique of the coloniality of power still present in Latin American states, taking into account the ways in which gender relations configured the societies and the nation-states after they gained independence from European colonial powers. With this, Decolonial feminists are writing a new historiography of Latin America, one that is still far from being recognized by mainstream Latin American academia that has barely paid attention to the ways gender and nation have been connected.

Second, they do a nuanced critique of multiculturalism and the Plurinational states that were created in the past decade in Ecuador and Bolivia. Decolonial feminists support many of the demands of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, but reject any essentialized vision that would support unequal and oppressive gender relations. They argue for a practice that combines the emancipatory traits of feminism and pluralism in legislation and public policies as well as in the every-day practices of people.

Third, an incipient theorization of a decolonial feminist friendly state can be drawn from the analysis of decolonial feminists' writings. This state can be

characterized by constituting rationales or governmentalities that can be recognized as welfare, plurinational, multicultural and intersectional feminist. Special areas of concern are reproduction of life and communities, recognition of the rights of nature, autonomy of women's bodies and enjoyment of their sexuality, and a greater attention to the economics of care.

This thesis has shown that decolonial feminism is critical of the historical Latin American state formations, but it does not have a phobia of the state. It does not have a state theory, nor does it seem to want it. What it has is a context specific rather than a universal theorization of the state. It is not clear whether it is possible to think of a decolonial feminist state, but the thesis has shown that it is possible to think of a friendlier state. In this sense, decolonial feminism has a poststructural view of the state.

Further research needs to be done by finding the lines and the dialogues already existing between Decolonial feminists and other emancipatory alternative projects in Latin America, as well as in other parts of the world. Another possible line of research is to see the ways that the emergence of a renewed feminist movement in Latin America is taking up on Decolonial feminism and the tensions created in this juncture.

Decolonial feminists, both scholars and activists, are producing and rendering visible different epistemologies of the south. They employ an oppositional consciousness to expand the fields where they act. To do research in Latin America is not easy, and to do it from a socially-engaged position is in itself a political struggle; academic work tends to be precarious and availability of funds to carry out research is usually a great feat, especially in those countries where there are not well-established research councils. In this sense, to carry out research, to write and to do it from a social-justice perspective, as is the case of decolonial feminism, denotes an understanding of thinking and theory as liberatory practices (bell hooks, 1991) that are vital. As Segato recently said in the feminist podcast "El deseo de pandora": "*siempre defiando el campo de la teoría, el campo de pensar y poner palabras a lo que pensamos y ofrecer palabras al mundo. Mi trabajo consiste en nombrar experiencias nuestras, de aquí, próximas, vitalmente próximas*" (I always defend theory and thinking, putting into words what we think and thus offering words to the world. My job is to name our experiences, from here, close, vitally close).

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