Decolonizing Aid

A Comparative Analysis of USAID and Sida's gender equality
strategies in Guatemala

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Abstract

The development aid field has been subject to increased questioning regarding power relations between donors and recipients; some studies shed light on the fact that development aid is an extension of colonial practices. Currently, there have been efforts to 'decolonize aid'. This thesis studied Sweden's and United States' national development agencies' policies, Sida and USAID respectively, regarding women's economic empowerment in Guatemala. Through a critical discourse analysis method, this thesis analyzed the agencies' policies making use of six colonial markers. The colonial markers were constructed as a methodological tool to identify the presence of development, colonial and feminist discourse that reproduce unequal power relations. In this way, the colonial markers represent an optional tool for future research as a starting point to effectively decolonize aid through discourse. In both Sida and USAID policies, presence of colonial markers were found. Even though efforts to decolonize aid have been implemented, there is still much work to be done. Because discourse materializes in everyday practices, this thesis aims to contribute to understanding that decolonizing aid discursively is fundamental to ensure Global South's voices are heard.

Key words: decolonizing aid; discourse; colonial markers; USAID; Sida.
Words: **18367**

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem

Throughout history there has been evidence of humanity providing support for those in need. This 'help' has existed in all levels. We have heard the terms international aid, foreign aid, development aid, humanitarian aid, and all kinds of aid we can imagine. There are even some variations in the term where aid is replaced by assistance or cooperation. However, it has been in the last couple of decades that aid has become institutionalized. Jönsson *et al*. (2012) argue that the Marshall Plan in 1947 represents the first aid package that changed the whole system. After World War II, the United States supported Europe's reconstruction; following this event, the conception of aid included numerous different actors and immense amounts of money (p.111). According to Brown (2014), during the Cold War era, the world donors were divided among those who supported the United States, and those who were on the Soviet Union's side. The main donors from Western countries, considered fully industrialized, were part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); which later created the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The main type of aid provided is known as bilateral, which means government-to-government cooperation. However, there are other types of aid that are provided through international institutions (p.762).

Even though there are different terms to address aid, its definition, in general manners, can be offered by the OECD, *"Official development assistance (ODA) is defined as government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries. The DAC adopted ODA as the "gold standard" of foreign aid in 1969 and it remains the main source of financing for development aid"* (OECD, 2023). Talking about improving countries' economies and its citizens' lives seems like a big project full of good intentions. However, it is necessary to understand how this is achieved and what it represents for those countries receiving such support.

Grants, loans, and any other type of aid may seem like an opportunity for countries to improve their economic and social conditions. But it is fundamental to understand that aid is highly influenced by political, economic and social interests. This can be referred to as 'aid conditionality'. According to Temple (2014), donor entities impose conditions to recipient entities to grant financial or technical support. Those recipients that do not fulfill such requirements are denied the aid. Hence the term, aid conditionality (p.774). Once aid is granted, usually donors assure that in the programmes or projects that they are financing, monitoring and evaluation from their behalf is fundamental (Jönsson *et al*., 2012, p.108). This is problematic because donors impose their conditions and desired outcomes based on their own standards, leaving the recipient entities with no agency and little freedom to pursue development from their own needs.

In the past, aid dialogue was focused on two actors: donors and recipients. In the present there has been a change in terminology to avoid associating power relations between Global North and Global South countries; as a result, new terms were brought into the aid discussion, such as 'development partners'. Aid flow is very diverse, it could represent grants which seem like free money; loans that will need to eventually be paid back and usually there is criteria to be fulfilled before being entitled to it; food, human or technical assistance; remission of debts that could be total or partial, and many others (Mawdsley, 2014, p.769). In general, aid can be divided in three different forms: humanitarian support which is mainly offered in emergencies caused by natural disasters; long-term plans which seek to support social changes that will improve economic and living standards; and aid that seeks to change political conditions (Jönsson *et al*., 2012, p. 108). This thesis is focused on studying discourse of aid for long-term plans that aim to improve economic and living conditions.

Two DAC members that are notable for their development assistance are the United States and Sweden, with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). In 2022, the United States designated 55.3 billion USD as its ODA,

while Sweden offered 5.5 billion USD. Even though Sweden's total amount does not represent the same exorbitant amount as that of the United States, Sweden is well recognized for ensuring more than the United Nations target of 0.7% of the countries' gross national income (GNI), representing 0.9% of its GNI. Only Luxembourg surpassed Sweden last year as the country that gave more ODA as a percent of its GNI in the world, by summing a total of 1%. The United States was the country with the highest amount of ODA in 2022 given in terms of quantity, even though it represents only 0.22% of its GNI (OECD, 2023). When looking at the official website of the mentioned donors, both institutions position themselves as driven by well-intentioned actions. USAID starts its official webpage by stating the following, *"USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience"* (USAID, 2023f). Even though USAID states that it seeks for recipients to achieve self-reliance at some points, it cannot be denied that the organization is aware of the power that it holds in the international community. By praising that 'American generosity' results in world development, is a very big statement to start with. Also, it is fundamental to signal that the United States is well aware that it is the country that offers more money for development purposes. On the other hand, Sida opens up with a friendlier approach, *"Sida is Sweden's government agency for development cooperation. We strive to reduce poverty and oppression around the world. In cooperation with organisations, government agencies and the private sector we invest in sustainable development for all people"* (Sida, 2023a). Sida, differentiating from USAID's opening statement, positions itself as an organization driven by cooperation that seeks global wellbeing in a friendlier way.

Both USAID and SIDA are recognized world donors for the high amounts of money that they designate to development. Even though they have different approaches in how they define their own organizations, both hold power in the areas where they address aid. The way such cooperation is addressed represents power by itself.

Following a comparative case-study research design, this thesis examines the two mentioned countries from the Global North because of the economic power they represent in the development aid world; the United States is the country that gives more financial aid quantity-wise, and Sweden is the second country that offers more economic aid percentage-wise. As Braff and Nelson (2022) state, the Global North is not a geographic reference. The Global North represents the countries that have been benefited by power structures and global wealth, strengthened by former colonialism. Such powerful and rich regions include North America, Europe and Australia. The Global North holds the world's hegemony in economic, political and cultural spheres that have affected life in the Global South (pp.289-293). In this sense, this thesis aims to shed-light in the development aid field to understand that agencies coming from the Global North use certain type of discourse to affect recipient countries.

As an opposition to power relations that aid is tied to, there has recently been efforts to change world dynamics in the subject, and this is known as 'decolonizing aid'. As Hanchey (2020) states, *"international aid often functions as a neocolonial extension of colonial power structures"* (p. 260). It is no surprise that if aid comes with conditions attached, then it represents a new form of control. Hence, the resistance to control portrayed by recipients is fundamental to change power relations in the development aid landscape. According to the report *Time to Decolonise Aid* published by Peace Direct *et al*. (2021), it is important to talk about decoloniality as it exposes the power relations that were formed during the colonial period, and that still endure in the present. Most often, a Eurocentric privileged conception of how the world should be is favored. Hence, there is a need to question how these power structures function in the development world (pp.4-5,15-16). It is relevant to question how aid is being offered by different actors, and how this affects recipients. Through Fairclough's (1992) method of critical discourse analysis (CDA), this thesis discursively analyzed Sida and USAID's strategies for women's economic empowerment in Guatemala. The policies of both agencies were studied from a decolonial perspective having as focus identifying if there were traces of colonial, feminist and development discourse that

enhance unequal historical power relations. The traces of such discourses were analyzed based on the six colonial markers I constructed from the work of Said (1978), Bhahba (1990), Mohanty (2003), Escobar (2012), Ziai (2016), and Mignolo (2018).

USAID mentions that it seeks to ensure a path for recipients to achieve self-reliance at some point. Sida promotes its goal of achieving sustainable development. However, it is important to question, how are they really operating in recipient countries? Are they giving recipients the opportunity to create their own path and take their own decisions? Or are they enhancing historical power structures that promote the belief that the West is best?

1.2 Research questions

This thesis aims to discursively compare through a decolonizing lens USAID and Sida's announced gender equality strategies concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala and how they may differ or coincide with one another. Guatemala has received financial aid from both institutions throughout the years. In 2021, Guatemala received more than 156 million USD from USAID (USAID, 2023g) and more than 187 million SEK from Sida in 2022 (Sida, 2022b) which represents more than 343 million USD. The research questions that this thesis expects to answer are:

- What discursive differences and similarities exist between USAID and Sida's gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala?

- What colonial markers are present and how are they expressed in USAID and Sida's gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala?

- How does USAID and Sida's discourse and potential presence of colonial markers in their gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala shape power relations between donors and recipients?

In general terms, the colonial markers make allusion to the principle of colonial discourse that this thesis follows, which Bhabha (1990) defines as an instrument of power that is used to enhance power over the colonized people by stating what is and what is not knowledge (p.75); as well as of 'Orientalism' offered by Said (1978), meaning that there exists a discourse that privileges those in power (which are highly related to the colonial and imperialist eras) and how discourse is power by itself. Said explains that there exists an unequal exchange of power concerning politics, intellectuals, cultures, and morals, that favors the West (in Williams and Chrisman, 2013, pp.137-138). In Chapter 2, where the theoretical framework is explained, the concept will be developed further.

1.3 Previous research

This thesis aims to contribute to the existing need of decolonizing aid by studying discourse. Being both USAID and Sida donors of the Global South, it is important to research how they affect recipients, such as Guatemala. However, it is first needed to describe what has been previously researched in this field. In this section it will be explained how the Global North is being favored in the development aid field. The section will continue by exposing the lack of representation in decision-making spaces for the Global South programmes. Then it will cover why decolonizing aid is fundamental to successfully represent the Global South in the development field. And, the section will conclude with the existing research regarding decolonizing aid and discourse.

Initially, I would suggest that it is important to shed light on the existing academic research that exposes how the development aid field is highly managed through Western standards and the power position that the Global North still occupies in it. Sisaye (1981) made a study concerning agricultural development in Ethiopia and the role of USAID, Sida, and the World Bank. Even though this study is over 30 years old, it exposes how donor international organizations have input in a country's agenda.

In this specific case, Ethiopia's agricultural sector shifted from industrialization, to commerce, and lastly to small farmer's support, because of donors' support. Bandyopadhyay (2019) argues that colonialism and capitalism are highly connected, which results in institutions favoring the Global North. The author explains how Christianity's sense of superiority is reflected in Western volunteer tourism to 'save' the helpless Global South, reproducing the white man's burden and savior complex. On the other hand, Kilby (2008) presents a connection of aid conditionality between the World Bank's structural adjustment loans and those countries that maintain a 'friendly' relationship with the United States, exposing that those countries that do not have a 'friendly' relationship with the United States experienced higher conditionality for loan disbursements. Also, as it has been stated in the previous section of this chapter, Hanchey (2020) mentions how development aid is an extension of colonialism; as it leaves recipients with high debts for loans they cannot repay, and how paternalistic relationships are enhanced because donors see recipients as agency-less. As a result, the author states that even decolonializing options of aid in media, such as the *Black Panther* movie, result in strengthening concepts of colonialism as increasing economic development and the universal goodness of aid.

The actions concerning development that are taken around the world are highly influenced by the Global North's standards; this could be reflected by the lack of representation of the Global South that exists in the decision-making levels of the sector. Hence, it is important to explain who are the decision makers in the development aid field. A contemporary study is *Shifting Power in Humanitarian Nonprofits*, elaborated by Worden and Saez (2021). The authors conducted a study based on 15 NGOs' governing boards from Europe and North America. The study is focused on governing boards as they strategically plan the course of actions, as well as the budget, of the NGOs. The report had three main findings: there is a lack of representation of recipients in the governing boards of international NGOs; there is a prioritization of administrative related-tasks and fundraising in governing boards, leaving expertise in aid programmes and policies neglected; and there is gender parity in the governing

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boards, but there is a lack of representation regarding race, ethnicity and geographic diversity. The authors emphasize that major diversity, as is the proper inclusion of aid recipients, in governing boards increases accountability, decision-making, and effectiveness of NGOs (pp.1-2,3,5-11). Because the directive boards are the ones who take decisions regarding how aid will be provided, it is necessary to have stakeholders' representation in this decision-making process. Khan (2021) argues that in the practice of decolonizing aid there is a lack of representation from the Global South, and hence it is a one-sided and Western notion; she states that the aid sector is heavily paternalistic by the Global North still deciding what and how must be done. Khan *et al*. (2021) discuss that it is necessary to acknowledge that decision makers are not always open for decolonizing options. The authors point out the fact that there will be direct and indirect resistance from those who have been historically favored. As Aloudat and Khan (2021) explain, the problem of power imbalances does not rely on the individuals who work in the sector, but on those power structures that still majorly favor the Global North. As an example, Hickel (2020) exposes how the leaders of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have always been from the United States and Europe, respectively; showing how disproportionate is representation and voting power in these international organizations. This thesis does not aim to analyze specifically who is planning the development aid strategies, but it will reflect how the lack of representation of recipients in policy making of development progammes is noticeable through the presence of colonial markers.

It is fundamental to understand why decolonizing aid must have a major focus in the development field. There is academic research that argues in favor of decolonizing aid, such as that of Bahdi and Kassis (2016), who argue that decolonization is achievable even through development aid. The authors recognize the fact that development aid has favored the Global North as it did during the colonial period. However, stopping aid completely could result in economic crises for some countries, such as Palestine. For this reason, they expose the 'Karamah initiative' which exposes how aid can be institutionally provided with dignity. Another study presented

by Tavernaro-Haidarian (2019) exposes the need of non-Western approaches in education. The author offers *ubuntu* as a decolonized alternative for education discourse and concepts; which means in general manners mutual empowerment, without excluding the historically marginalized (non-Westerners). One more scholar arguing in favor of *ubuntu* is Moyo (2021), who states that it is necessary to have a decolonizing framework that gives space and voice to those who have been historically marginalized. Ubuntu in the author's research is used as an approach to give life to the experiences of the oppressed. Another line of research exposes how harmful the picturing of the Global South is, described by Rideout (2011), who explains how the 'Third World' is negatively portrayed through NGOs advertisements and how difficult it is to escape from the stereotyped image coming from the West. However, the author concludes that some NGOs can be key actors to institutionalize alternative discourses around the 'Third World'. Taking into consideration the fact that stereotypes of the Global South exist, and how harmful they can be, my research will analytically shed light on the remains of colonial markers present in gender policies from the chosen donors.

Research regarding the need of decolonizing aid has not been strictly academic. For this reason, I consider it relevant to describe two non-academic sources that create awareness of what type of aid is being provided in the Global South. There is a development campaign that is no longer active, but that is worth mentioning regarding awareness and the development aid field image of recipients. The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund – SAIH (2023) developed an awareness campaign called 'Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway'. The campaign was created to portray how harmful stereotypes of recipients are in fundraising videos. The campaign's purpose was challenging mainstream perceptions of poverty and development by picturing agency-less Norwegians in need of salvation from Africans; the satirical videos show how harmful representations of the Global South are to people's dignity. The campaign explains how the misinformed debates based on poor representations of the Global South result in inefficient policies.

As it has been previously mentioned, the report *Time to Decolonise Aid* was published by Peace Direct *et al*. (2021). It is a report created in collaboration with African Development Solutions (Adeso), Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (WCAPs). The report was elaborated after hosting a world online consultation to discuss the colonial heritage in the aid field. The purpose of the online consultation was to identify more equitable options and opportunities to shift power relations by decolonizing issues in the development, humanitarian and peacebuilding fields. The consultation lasted three days and had 158 participants; to avoid biased approaches, non-Western and non-White practitioners and academics were prioritized. The findings of the report can be summarized in nine points. First, current aid practices resemble the colonial period and donor countries deny it. Second, decision-making concerning aid is focused in the countries considered as Global North. Third, structural racism is inherent to development aid practices. Fourth, the use of language is highly influenced by racism and discrimination. Fifth, the 'white savior' complex is still present in practitioners. Sixth, development aid is highly beneficial for actors coming from the Global North and for actors of the Global South who know how the system works. Seventh, there is a devaluation of skills and economic compensations for the practitioners coming from the Global South compared to those coming from the Global North. Eighth, Western knowledge is more valued than the local knowledge, creating programmes with Western standards for recipients to fulfill. Ninth and last, challenges increase for practitioners when they come from other marginalized groups, such as women and the LGBTQ* community (pp.4-5,8-9). This report sheds light on the need of decolonizing the development aid field, because the West has been and continues being favored by the system. Hence, it is fundamental to shift power imbalances through a decolonizing lens. This thesis directly aims to contribute to finding number four of the report, that being the use of language. By studying the discourse used in Sida and USAID's policy gender strategies, the presence of colonial markers can be signaled out, and hence it can be worked on through a

decolonial approach. But, by analyzing the use of language, indirectly the rest of the findings of the report are being worked on as well.

To conclude this section, I would like to describe some work done on the line of study that researches decolonization and discourse, which is the line of investigation that this thesis aims to majorly and directly contribute to. Pailey (2019) signals out the lack of diversification in those who control the development field, which results in the control of discourse, practice, and policy-making. The author argues that this lack of representation concludes in a 'white gaze' problem that favors neoliberal values. Rana (2007) contributes to this line of research by stating that the international human rights discourse was created from colonial ideology and practice. The author explains that the foundations of the human rights discourse from the past century lack perspective from the Global South as Asian and African countries were still colonized, and Latin America was heavily influenced by its colonial past. Hence components of the human rights discourse, such as the 'Doctrine of Emergency', are paternalistic and Western (pp.370-373). Also, Anand (2007) sheds light on the fact that othering and essentializing is inherent to both types of Western discourses, colonial and neocolonial. It is a strategy immanent to discourse that picture the Western colonial representation of the 'Other' and how this affects the identity discourse of Non-Western regions. The author's empirical study is focused on Tibet and how discourse materializes into geopolitics.

Another author who works on the same line of research is Ndhlovu (2022), who states an important argument that must be taken into consideration when analyzing discourse with a decolonial lens, that being: not falling into the use of slogans. The author states that for some time now, academically there has been an influx of attempts to decolonize discourse. However, there is a risk to fall into sloganization by using terms that seem fashionable. The purpose of decolonizing discourse is then forgotten because it seems as if it takes a new path of achieving political correctness; rather than solely working on giving and acknowledging voices of the Global South. Also, the author states that decolonization is a methodology that has been used to shed light on

how non-Western cultures use language and how they communicate by recognizing that knowledge is partial, and hence it needs from other components of other cultures to achieve the complete picture. Even though colonial expansion has ceased, it is still present in culture, systems and discourse (pp.240-243,244-245). Chambers *et al.* (2018) also argue in favor of decolonizing research by reviewing methodological literature and how scholars should reflect upon the examination process. Moosavi (2020) refers as the 'decolonial bandwagon' to the use of trendy terms to seem like a decolonizing approach is in practice. The author states that academics from the Global North are claiming use of decolonization because it is a modern trend to claim for social justice. However, if the discussion is solely engaged in a Northern-centric sense, academics from the Global South are ignored, and the purpose of intellectual decolonization is lost. For this reason, engaging with decolonial theory from the Global South is fundamental to achieve decolonization (pp.334-335,350). Adding to this, Bhambra (2014) argues how decoloniality and postcolonialism are more than an opposition to colonialism, they represent a direction that needs to be worked upon for knowledge. The author states that culturally, both decoloniality and postcolonialism present an opportunity for different sources of knowledge to be recognized.

Consequently, this thesis will work with knowledge from Global South academics in the following chapter of theory. This thesis also takes into consideration that just because a decolonial perspective is implemented, it does not mean that the development field is actually being decolonized. The previous research that has been explained lacks analysis of donor's discourse and how it affects recipients. Hence, this thesis recognizes that discourse, as a powerful tool, needs to be studied and targeted to effectively decolonize development aid.

Chapter 2. Theoretical approach

This thesis analyzes the concept of decolonizing aid based on the presence of colonial markers in gender policies in Guatemala. For this reason, the theoretical approach is divided into three different sections unfolding: decoloniality, discourse (development, colonial, feminist), and colonial markers.

2.1 Decoloniality

To understand what decolonizing aid means, it is essential to explain decoloniality. This thesis follows the concept of decoloniality exposed by Walter D. Mignolo. Decolonization and decoloniality can be mistakenly interchanged as synonyms, however they have different meanings. Decolonization originally refers to the action of liberating a former colony into an independent nation-state. The struggle for liberation came from the oppressed, not the former colonizers (Mignolo, 2018, p.121). After the first wave of decolonization (independence of America) and the second wave of decolonization (independence of Asia and Africa), the logic of coloniality remained with no changes. Decoloniality offered explanations that the process of decolonization did not cover. Coloniality, which will be further explained, was still visible in knowledge that was replicated by institutions; hence, in a general manner this term fights to achieve liberation beyond nation-state designs and the financial world from the concept of Western civilization and Eurocentrism (*ibid*, pp.124-125).

Decoloniality itself comes from the concept of 'coloniality' first introduced by Aníbal Quijano after the end of the Cold War. Quijano related coloniality to the Western concept of 'modernity', as it is the historical time period where the neoliberal era started. In this sense, the concept of coloniality exposes the continuous attempt of control from the West, which is now exercised by the European Union and the United States. For this reason, it is necessary to talk about modernity/coloniality/decoloniality on the same line; each concept is intertwined with one another (Mignolo, 2018, pp.105-109). Modernity was a concept used in the late 20th century to describe projects of

modernization and development in the world. In previous times, the concept of development would be referred to as 'progress', and modernization would be known as 'civilizing mission'; basically, it is the same process of control with different names. By referring to modernity as the 'present times', it was an allusion to promote the European standard of what present really is, as everything else would be considered as going backwards. Modernity is decolonially exposed to be a social construction by those actors, languages, and institutions that have historically benefited from the colonial matrix of power. These power structures are maintained by controlling knowledge and war (*ibid*, pp.110-111). Hence, the concept 'coloniality' emerged from the Third World[1] as a reaction to raise awareness of local histories of coloniality. The creation of the term permitted local histories of coloniality to be raised. In this sense, two sides of the story were created, leaving the motion of only modernity behind, and exposing the modernity/coloniality dimensions (*ibid*, pp.112-113). Decoloniality emerges as one of many options to analytically understand the colonial power that still endures. To make a meaningful change possible, it is necessary to understand from what and how is pursued to make a change, and decoloniality is exposed as one way to go in this process (*ibid*, p.115).

According to Mignolo (2018) the spheres of coloniality involve four major fronts:

1. Racism and sexism, controlled by patriarchal/masculine (backed by Christian cosmology and white ethnicity) knowing, believing, and sensing; 2. Political and economic imperial designs, also controlled by a patriarchal/masculine conception of the world and society; 3. Knowledge and understanding, controlled by a local imaginary that poses as universal, and

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[1] Throughout this thesis I use the term 'Global South' for what was formerly known as the 'Third World' to refer to my own analysis. However, I use the term 'Third World' throughout this chapter because the referenced authors (such as Mignolo, Escobar and Mohanty) used that term. In this sense, whenever the term 'Third World' is being used, it refers to the scholars' work used for this theory chapter.

that includes sciences, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, religion, and, of course, economics and politics (e.g., Eurocentrism); 4. Life in all its aspects, from human life to the life of the planet, controlled also by a patriarchal/masculine imaginary entrenched in politics and economics (pp.126-127).

On this line, it can be explained that decoloniality, as an option for liberation, fights against racism, sexism, and political and economic historical designs perpetuated by patriarchy. Also, it exposes how knowledge revolves around a Eurocentric perception and construction as the only way to follow. Finally, it also questions the standards followed of what life is and how it should be according to patriarchy, which is exercised through politics and economics.

As this thesis aims to contribute to the field of decolonizing aid, it follows the standards previously exposed in these sections of decoloniality. Meaning, that in the process of decolonizing aid, this thesis recognizes that there exist ancient power structures that keep being replicated by the West, that being the United States and the European Union, which have been highly advantaged by this world order. Also, this thesis supports the notion that knowledge is reproduced by Eurocentric values which urges the need to decolonize the existing knowledge and practices in the development field. Even though this thesis follows the concept of decoloniality from Mignolo (2018), it also recognizes that the author lacks a feminist and gender approach in his analysis. This results in a lack of research that explains how decoloniality is reflected in real life for women. There is a gap that needs to be addressed and this thesis aims to study decoloniality of discourse within a feminist perspective.

2.2 Discourse

This thesis analyzed the development aid discourse of Sida and USAID in Guatemala through a decolonial lens. However, it is imperative to first explain what are the development, colonial and feminist discourses, and how they are related.

2.2.1 Development discourse

The notion of development and underdevelopment arose after the Second World War. It became noticeable with President Harry Truman's inaugural speech in 1949 where the term 'underdeveloped areas' was used to establish a world project of massive development for those in need. The project consisted in replicating the 'advancements' of societies considered most progressive at the time: the West. Increasing inequalities, impoverishment, and circles of exploitation were the result of this project. In the process of 'developing' underdeveloped areas, the 'Third World' was produced through the development discourse (Escobar, 2012, pp.3-4). The development discourse was a replacement of the ending discourse of war after World War II, and the Third World debate nourished (*ibid*, p.21). The development discourse exposes why countries started considering themselves as underdeveloped. Also, it points out the obsession and burden for these countries to 'develop' in those areas seen as problematic by the West: poverty and how this implies backwardness. Finally, the development discourse shows how these countries initiated a process to 'un-underdevelop' themselves through Western interventions (*ibid*, p.6). The creation of a discourse over the Third World by the West, in a world system that has been historically promoted and benefited by itself, results in the importance of studying the political, economic and cultural effects that are produced. In a general manner, the development discourse results as a tool for knowledge production about the Third World, as well as exercising power over it (*ibid*, p.9).

The development discourse reproduces a basic premise: it portrays modernization as the only means to development, which would be achieved through industrialization and urbanization. It is explained as the only existing route, and hence, as an inevitable process. The discourse states that the key to achieve modernization is capital investment, as it is the key to economic growth. It is then presented as a process where interventions from the Global North, who portray themselves as experts, are needed and then they transfer 'help', such as capital, technology and knowledge (Ziai,

2016, p.58). Economic growth will then result in social, cultural, and political advances. Because the Third World is described as being constituted by poor nations that cannot overcome poverty and deficient capital by their own, the need of creating international organizations and national and technical planning agencies that can cover this requirement nourishes. Development has to then be understood as the production of discourse that promotes a relation among institutions, elements and practices from the West to the Third World (Escobar, 2012, pp.39-41). In this way, the system of relations creates a discursive practice that establishes: *"who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan"* (*ibid*, p.41). Even though Escobar exposes that the development discourse is unilateral, Ziai (2016) assures that in the last decades as development was exposed as an authoritarian concept, there have been efforts that jeopardizes the Global North's input in the agenda. There have been concepts such as 'participation' added to the development discourse to ensure that local voices are heard; the changes in language occurred as a response to the criticism that development policies follow a top-down structure. However, the author also shows that expert knowledge is still portrayed from the Global North's perspective of what a good society in the Global South should be and how it could be achieved, such as by 'empowering people' (pp.92-93). This demonstrates that the development discourse needs to be further researched as there are gaps to be worked upon. For instance, exposing how the Global South's resistance translates into a change of discourse where they are included in policy-making, rather than keep describing it as an actor that suffers interventions from the Global North's expertise.

If one sets the rules of the game, it is easier for that player to win. In this sense, being the West who came up with the concept of 'underdevelopment' and the need for these world areas 'to develop', with a handful of tasks to accomplish, it results in a game led by the West, which will naturally be easier for it to win. Because the West has been historically advantaged by its power structures that translates into oppressive

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discursive practices, I would say it was easier for the Global South to assume that the West has never been underdeveloped and thus, accept and permit interventions to some extent as legitimate. The standard of development has been completely Westernized, and ironically, the West is majorly responsible for underdevelopment nourishing in the Global South. Hence, the project of developing the underdeveloped areas was not questioned nor resisted at the beginning. As it has been previously explained, because decoloniality emerged from local voices as a result for the desire for liberation, we cannot assume that the Global South is an agency-less actor which is constantly oppressed by the West. It is a fact that power structures exist, and that the West is historically and mainly favored. But this thesis aims to shed light on the fact that the Global South is an actor that is constantly resisting and fighting back the mentioned power structures. Reinforcing the premise that the Global South is an agency-less actor victim of the West reproduces the idea that it must be saved by a powerful being. Hence, as it has been previously mentioned, decoloniality is an example of resistance and fight from the Global South.

2.2.2 Colonial discourse

Homi Bhabha's definition of colonial discourse is more than thirty years old, however, his definition, although complicated, is still very useful and enlightening. For this reason, through this thesis the definition of colonial discourse will be used based on the work of Bhabha (1990):

> *It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a "subject peoples" through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe*

the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. [...] I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a "subject nation," appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity (p.75).

Even though this definition could be a reference of the colonial period, it can still be used in present times because of the argument it entails. First of all, defining colonial discourse as an apparatus is fundamental to understand that it is a tool being used to make differences based on race, culture and history. Second, as a tool to produce knowledge, that production is being controlled and surveilled by its creators. Third, because those who produce it are the same ones who authorize its usage, there is little or no feedback or space for other voices to be raised. Fourth, the objective of using colonial discourse is that of interpreting the colonized entities as in need of guidance, and hence, the establishment of paternalistic processes and systems can be justified. Finally, colonial discourse is a way to govern a state's different political, cultural and social spheres by marking it as a target that needs guidance.

The colonial discourse comes from Western powers. Based on work done by Edward Said, Anand (2007) explains that the creation of Western knowledge and the representation of the Third World is a result of the West's persistence for power and history of imperialism. It cannot be said that colonial discourse was created from ignorance and as a result of a process of blind domination; there has always been a present intention to influence from the West (p.24). For this reason, it is crucial to understand that the colonial discourse, as a tool, has been used intentionally to control the Global South; in this way, the West is able to keep being benefited by ancient historical power structures that are still present.

If it is not West, then what is it? As Said (1978) stated, there exists a dichotomy between 'Orient' and 'Occident'. Hence, the terminology 'Orientalism' to define everything that is not considered West. Both geographical sectors are part of a relationship of power and hegemony, where the West dominates. It is fundamental to

understand that the portrayal of what Orient represents is a product of Western efforts and consciousness. For this reason, the notion of Orient is distorted and inaccurate (in Williams and Chrisman, 2013, pp.132-135). There is a clear geographical distinction made in Orientalism, that being Occident versus Orient. Latin America does not represent part of the geographical East, but because of its colonial history, Western influence is deeply rooted in the area. For this reason, this thesis comprehends that it is important to take Said's concept of what is not-Western and that there exists a power relationship from the West upon what is considered non-Western.

2.2.3 Feminist discourse

Another discourse that has been Westernized is the feminist discourse. Because this thesis will study gender policy regarding women in Guatemala, it is necessary to understand what is feminist discourse, how it portrays women, and how this influences policy making. Mohanty (2003) sheds light upon the fact that there is a Western feminist discourse which homogenizes women coming from the Third World; this homogenization represents a form of colonization in discourse. The basic characteristics of Third World women from this discourse are that they are all oppressed, powerless, and exploited. Third World Women, as a universal category that describes a group as a single entity, share the same common goals as well as interests. Along the same line, Third World women are also illustrated as facing the same harsh living conditions. All of these characteristics colonize the feminist discourse which results in a homogenization of Third World women as oppressed creatures. On the other hand, this same discourse portrays Western women as role models. Western women are illustrated as free, educated, modern, and in control of their own lives. This biased conception addresses the erroneous assumption that Third World women strive to be like Western women in the future (pp.17,19-23). In general manners, according to Mohanty (2003), Third World women are described as, *a homogeneous "powerless" group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems. [...]*

Women are defined as victims of male violence [...]; as universal dependents [...]; victims of the colonial process [...]; victims of the Arab familial system [...]; victims of the Islamic code [...]; and, finally, victims of the economic development process" (p.23). It is with this definition that I would like to draw a comparison between the previously described discourses. In the development discourse, there are two stages: the developed versus the underdeveloped (which could be referred to as the West or Global North versus the Global South). In the colonial discourse, there are also two actors: the colonizers and the colonized (which could also be stated as those who produce and control knowledge, and those who consume it). In the feminist discourse there are two groups of women: Western women and the Women from the Global South. There exists an evident dichotomy between discourses, from which the West benefits. The Global North has benefited from these discourses because they created and reproduced it continuously. Just as the underdeveloped areas need the expertise from the developed areas, Global South women need the guidance of Western women to achieve independence and autonomy. It is erroneously assumed that the underdeveloped world areas, the colonized beings in general, and the Global South women yearn to accomplish Western standards to obtain fulfillment in their lives. This assumption comes from the discourses that I summarize as: the West versus the rest. Homogenizing the rest as a single inferior entity differentiating from the Global North, nullifies humanity. For this reason, decoloniality as an analytical lens for this discourse is needed. It represents an option and opportunity to respect Global South people's agency and capacity to fight against power structures that have historically oppressed them.

Programmes and policies from the development aid sector are mainly created in the West. The major world donors are Western. Understanding that discourse materializes in everyday practices, targeting the presence of development, colonial and feminist discourses in donor's guidelines is an optional first step to decolonize the development aid sector. For this motive, it is crucial to study what colonial markers are present and how they are expressed. Decolonizing the development aid discourse is a

step forward to ensure Global South people's voices, resistance, agency, fight and dignity.

2.3 Colonial markers

The 'traces' of development, colonial and feminist discourses in gender policies in Guatemala were studied through six colonial markers with a decolonizing lens, which are further explained throughout Chapter 4 of this thesis. In a general manner, the colonial markers regarding the development discourse were constructed from the theoretical approach presented by Escobar (2012) and Ziai (2016) and they were operationalized in the following way:

- Colonial marker I: Problematizing poverty as the main source of underdevelopment.
- Colonial marker II: Economic growth as the main strategy to overcome underdevelopment.

The colonial markers regarding the colonial discourse were constructed from the definition by Bhabha (1990) and the work of Said (1978), and they were operationalized in the following way:

- Colonial marker III: Monitoring and evaluation as a means of surveillance.
- Colonial marker IV: Western knowledge as the only legitimate source of information (this specific marker intertwines with Ziai's (2016) work).

Finally, the colonial markers regarding the feminist discourse were constructed from the work presented by Mohanty (2003) and they were operationalized in the following way:

- Colonial marker V: Homogenization of Global South women as one single category.
- Colonial marker VI: Global South women portrayed as victims.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This section explains what primary sources were used as the data collection method. It also mentions that this thesis represents a comparative case-study type of research design with abductive analysis. As an analytical method, Fairclough's (1992) work was chosen to elaborate critical discourse analysis. The section then describes what challenges were present in this thesis and how they were dealt with. Finally, my ethical considerations are presented.

3.1 Data collection method

This thesis embraces a multimethod qualitative approach. For the collection and analysis of data, this research made use of primary sources, that being all the official publicly available organizational documents and webpages from USAID and Sida regarding their general gender policy, their concrete policy regarding women's economic empowerment and their policies regarding Guatemala from 2020 to 2023. According to Halperin and Heath (2017), content analysis of written documents permits the researcher to explore *"the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of actors"* (p.160). For this reason, the official documents concerning gender policies in Guatemala from USAID and Sida were analyzed to search for the presence of colonial markers that can influence public policies and turn them into paternalistic interventions.

3.2 Research design

This research is built on a comparative research design, a type of research model that is one of the most popular methods in political studies as it permits to analyze a wide range of political aspects. It is a design used to explain similarities and differences among selected cases (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p.211). Case study research is used to understand in-depth complex entities (della Porta, 2008, p.198). By analyzing the

discourses used in gender policies from both agencies, this thesis draws comparisons made on its differences and similarities.

Case study research is appropriate for both theory testing and theory building because of its detailed analytical approach (della Porta, 2008, p.211). This thesis takes on an abductive research approach because it created an analytical framework consisting of 'colonial markers', which were mentioned in Chapter 2 and which will be further developed in Chapter 4. According to Timmermans and Tavory (2012), abduction is a process of creating new research hypotheses and theories as a result of research material that is not covered by 'old' theoretical insights. It usually occurs when there are unexpected findings when theory and data are being analyzed. In this way, new concepts are created as a product of confusing empirical materials. Abductive analysis produces theoretical innovations based on existing theory and its interplay with methodology (pp.170,179-181). This thesis does not aim to create a new theory in any way, but it seeks to contribute to an innovative methodological tool for future analysis regarding discourse, namely, the instrumentalization of what I call colonial markers. What I understand as colonial markers are those words or concepts around the colonial, development and feminist discourse that positions the Global North as a superior entity over the Global South; the colonial markers were constructed based on the presented theory in Chapter 2. The markers aim to serve as a reference for what to look up when analyzing discourse in the future. Because there are no specific markers in existing theory, through a feminist decolonizing aid perspective, this thesis classified the different aspects of colonialism that are still present in discourse through the colonial markers.

3.3 Data analysis method: Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

The method used to analyze the gender policies from both institutions was critical discourse analysis (CDA). Van Dijk (2001) defines CDA as, *"a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and*

inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p.352). This thesis used CDA as a method to expose the power relations that are inherent to the different types of discourses that exist around the development aid field, from the donor's side of USAID and Sida. Because I aim to contribute to the field of decolonizing aid through discourse, CDA was a good choice of method as it uncovers how discourse maintains unequal power relations, by taking oppressed groups' side (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.64). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) state that discourse is studied through social practices. For the authors, social practices include verbal and nonverbal communication, and visual images (p.38). The chosen CDA methodological framework used in this thesis was that presented by Fairclough (1992), who analyzes discourse in three different levels: text, discursive practice (as in production, distribution and consumption) and social practice (in relation to ideology and power) (pp.72-87).

The analysis of text and discursive practice level of discourse, covered the first two research question that this thesis aim to answer:

- What discursive differences and similarities exist between USAID and Sida's gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala?

- What colonial markers are present and how are they expressed in USAID and Sida's gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala?

In CDA the analysis of text includes the following: interactional control (as in who controls the text and how many different voices are visible), cohesion, politeness (could be negative, positive or off record), ethos, grammar, transitivity (as in agency, causality and attributed responsibility), theme, modality (how is reality being represented), word meaning, wording and metaphors (Fairclough, 1992, pp.234-237). The analysis of the discursive practice level that this method entails covers: interdiscursivity and

intertextuality to analyze what different genres and texts are present in the production of the text, and coherence to analyze consumption of the text (*ibid*, pp.232-234).

Due to the nature of this thesis, there was only one analysis of the text regarding interactional control, transitivity and modality. Studying interactional control was fundamental to understand the social relations in social practice. Interactional control is studied by analyzing turn-taking in conversations, exchange structure between people, control of the topic, setting and policing agendas, and formulation of the discourse which seeks to earn acceptance from others for what is being said (Fairclough, 1992, pp.152-158). In this sense, this thesis studied the interactional control of gender policies from USAID and Sida for Guatemala by analyzing how the topic is being portrayed, how the agenda is being set based on the description of the topic, and how the formulation of discourse is like in general. I could not include an analysis of turn-taking and exchange structure of conversations because the gender policies are not formulated as a dialogue between donors and recipients; they are strictly institutional documents and information from their respective websites. Regarding transitivity, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) state that analyzing it is about focusing *"on how events and processes are connected (or not connected) with subjects and objects"* (p.83); and nominalization is a common feature of transitivity, which is the process of backgrounding an event in a way *"that who is doing what to whom is left implicit"* (Fairclough, 1992, p.179). In this thesis, transitivity was studied by analyzing how both agencies connect themselves to Guatemalan women, focusing on economic empowerment. Finally, modality is a discursive tool that helps analyze how reality is being represented. In modality, affinity is important to study because it exposes how events are represented; they could be described as 'the truth' or in objective manners that leave no space for subjectivity and tends to universalize (Fairclough, 1992, pp.159-161). In this way, this thesis studied modality to understand what reality are the donors portraying through their different gender policies.

Concerning the discursive practice, this thesis only focused on text production by analyzing interdiscursivity and intertextuality. Because this thesis is not concerned

with how the text is being consumed by other people, this level of analysis was not included in this research. Interdiscursivity is a process that occurs when distinct discourses and genres are put together, resulting in the production of new articulations (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.73), and *"interdiscursivity is a form of intertextuality"* (*ibidem*). Fairclough (1992) explains that it is possible to study history through intertextuality because it analyzes how texts transform the past. Through discursive practice, different texts can become naturalized and they are still present in different types of discourses (p.85). Following the principles of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, this thesis analyzed the gender policies regarding economic empowerment of Guatemala from USAID and Sida looking for traces of development, colonial and feminist discourses and classifying them in the different colonial markers, which have been explained theoretically in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Finally, the analysis of social practice level of discourse answered the last question of this thesis:

- How does USAID and Sida's discourse and potential presence of colonial markers in their gender equality strategy concerning women's economic empowerment in Guatemala shape power relations between donors and recipients?

The last step of this method served to answer how the presence of colonial markers promotes power relations of USAID and Sida over Guatemala. Fairclough (1992) states that in the analysis of this level, it becomes clear what is the effect of discourse in the social aspects of life (p.237). In CDA, at this level it is useful to analyze the social matrix of discourse to expose hegemonic relations, order of discourse (to expose how a certain discourse contributes to others), and the ideological and political aspects (*ibid*, pp.237-238). The author states that ideology is inherent to discourse, which results in maintaining or reshaping power relations. The power relations result in constructions of reality that dominate. In this way, power relations are affected by discourse, which is itself shaped by ideology (*ibid*, pp.86-91). Also, it is important to emphasize that

power relations are relations that are being fought over; power is not just practiced from one actor upon another, power is actively fought over through discourse. In this way, the mixture of different discourses concerning different genres is a strategy used when fighting for power, discursively speaking (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, pp.62-63). Because power is being fought over in discourse, this thesis analyzes power relations from the donor countries, over the recipient countries through discourse. This thesis understands that there are historic power structures inherent to discourse, which unfold in practice. Hence, by analyzing the presence of colonial markers, it can be determined what type of power and ideological structures are present between the donor agencies and the recipient country.

3.4 Challenges and how to deal with them

Because this thesis is a comparative study, there are some aspects that must be taken into consideration. Even though this type of study entails the particular and the general of both institutions because the small number of cases permits in-depth analysis, the researcher must be careful of not committing selection bias (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p.218). I have previously explained in Chapter 1 the motives for choosing both USAID and Sida, that being that they represent major world donors and both destine development aid to Guatemala. Also, neither of the countries which these institutions come from had Guatemala as a former colony. Because this thesis examines the presence of colonial markers in gender policies, I believe that it is important to investigate how major world donors could be shaping ancient power relations through discourse. For this reason, as both agencies are considered major world donors, a selection bias is prevented. Also, it would be important to mention that, as this type of research design explains, an in-depth comparative analysis can be made because there are only two cases from which to carefully make a study from. I understand that one major criticism towards case study research is that it cannot be generalizable. However, having as an intention to purely describe and shed light on a phenomenon that is present

on the chosen case, is still considered to be valuable and can lead to a scientific innovative pathway (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.227). After all, case study research allows complexity to be addressed (della Porta, 2008, p.207).

I intend for this thesis to serve as a comparative case-study that contributes to the existing need of decolonizing aid through discourse with a construction of a methodological tool which I have named 'colonial markers'. As Hassen (2015) states, discourse is fundamental to understand society, as it is a projection of what they believe and how they live (p.119). Because discourse unfolds in practice, it is fundamental to shift power relations that are still present in the development aid sector to achieve recipients' agency and dignity; an innovative methodological tool could serve this purpose for future research.

Regarding the data analysis method, Fairclough (1992) offers some general guidelines that can be used during the research process; however, he understands that depending on the study, the researcher can have a different approach (p.225). For this reason, this thesis will just cover some general aspects of the text level in the CDA, but will go in depth regarding the discursive and social practice levels of discourse. After all, the three levels intertwine empirically and they cannot be separated (*ibid*, p.231).

3.5 Ethical considerations

This thesis does not involve any type of participation from other people, hence, there are no ethical considerations regarding consent, privacy or ensuring confidentiality. However, this thesis used critical discourse analysis as its research method, hence, Gorup (2020) states that ethically, the researcher must be reflexive and clear about its work and critics. Researchers who use this method often study topics they are familiar with, and their line of study can be overlapped by their own political statements. For this reason, the researcher should state their positionality (pp.523-525). Coming myself from Mexico, I decided not to work on gender policies pertaining to my country to avoid being biased by the sociopolitical situation I was raised with. I did however

choose a Latin American country to study policies that are funded by USAID and Sida; I used my Spanish native speaking skills as an advantage to study the agencies' websites and own projects. Finally, as Israel (2014) states, research ethics is not only about avoiding harming other people, it is also about acting to benefit others (p.134). This thesis recognizes that there are inherent power structures that have and continue benefiting the Global North. The power structures are reproduced and perpetuated in various ways, including discourse. This thesis aims to contribute to the need of decolonizing aid by studying the donors' discourse, and how this affects recipients, like Guatemalans, in gender policies. The present study is an effort to ensure agency and dignity to locals of the Global South that have historically struggled and resisted power relations.

Chapter 4. Operationalizing colonial markers

This chapter concerns the empirical analysis. Initially, the first section of this chapter describes the general gender overview of both donor agencies' strategies to compare them. Followed by the general description offered by both agencies, this chapter puts into practice the colonial markers by explaining them in a detailed manner and by exposing if and in what way they are present in USAID and Sida's gender policies regarding women's economic empowerment in Guatemala.

4.1 General overview of Sida and USAID's gender strategies

Initiating with how the topic of gender equality is addressed, both agencies have a common ground in the basic principles of the definition. Both USAID and Sida agree that gender equality is a right to be fulfilled for every person in this world, as well as a key characteristic to achieve sustainable development. Overall, both agencies agree that ensuring gender equality means improving all people's life quality (Sida, 2022a; USAID, 2023f). However, USAID goes further in its definition immediately, rather than maintaining it general as Sida, by mentioning that people's agency and social support are key for societies to be successful. Also, USAID states that there is a need for structures and access to resources to support individuals to make their own choices, ensure equal opportunities and to live peaceful lives with no violence or abuse (USAID, 2023a). Both definitions are given with simple vocabulary making it accessible to different audiences. On the one hand, Sida initially offers a short and broad definition that is easy to understand by most readers, and once the text continues to be read, it starts adding elements to its definition; such as ensuring political participation for women (Sida, 2022a). On the other hand, USAID immediately assures that gender equality will be achieved through a multidimensional approach that includes social support, institutions and agency with a long and detailed definition since the beginning.

In their general policy documents regarding gender equality, both agencies address what their agenda is by mentioning their main general approaches. USAID

prioritizes economic competitiveness for women, entrepreneurship promotion for women, prevention of gender-based violence, women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, protection of rights of the LGBTQI+ community, and prevention of child marriage, as well as supporting those children who are already married (USAID, 2023b, p.9). On the other hand, Sida explains that it works with gender equality by covering this perspective in most of its strategies. Such thematic strategies are implemented globally, regionally and bilaterally, approaching human rights of all women and girls, economic participation of women, political participation of women, ending gender-based violence, promotion of education for girls, and enhancing sexual and reproductive health rights (Sida, 2021a, p.1). The approaches that are mentioned are those that are classified as main approaches or areas of support for each respective agency in their policy documents addressing gender equality. Sida does not mention specifically the protection of LGBTQI+ people rights as a main area of support in its portfolio overview, even though it does work for the community and it is mentioned several times in the official webpage. The USAID policy document is extensive and is full of pictures with women from the Global South. On the other hand, Sida has a shorter document with no pictures, making it easier to read and find key information that the reader may be interested in.

Regarding Guatemala and their gender policy, Sida states that the main thematic areas include: gender equality for the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights as the government is trying to criminalize women for practicing abortions; increasing women's participation in politics; economic empowerment for women in rural areas; and entrepreneurship promotion for women and youth (Sida, 2022b). On the other hand, USAID states that Guatemalan women's empowerment would be achieved by increasing women's political participation, increasing women's economic opportunities, and increasing the quality of education and health services (USAID, 2023h). Because this thesis cannot go in depth in every aspect both agencies mention, as well as due to policy availability, the thematic area that was chosen to work upon in this study is economic empowerment for women.

It is fundamental to understand what are the root causes that each agency explains are needed to address to achieve economic empowerment for Guatemalan women. Sida states that women's economic empowerment is vital to be able to make their own decisions, ensure their sexual reproductive health and rights, increase their income to obtain economic independence, ensure their access to food, and avoid violence from men (Sida, 2022a; Sida, 2022b). On the other hand, USAID states that it is necessary to expand the access of women to business and the formal economy to address the high levels of internal and external migration. USAID refers to it as economic security and as economic empowerment. In this way, USAID's main programmes in Guatemala (Creating Economic Opportunities Project, Puentes Project and Nexos Locales Project) explicitly and non-explicitly address that the agency seeks to reduce irregular migration (USAID, 2023c; USAID, 2023d; USAID, 2023e; USAID, 2023h). Both agencies' agendas differ in their main reason to promote economic empowerment for women. Sida seems to have a more integral human approach where violence prevention and ensuring agency are the main motifs for promoting women's economic empowerment. As a contrast, USAID seems more concerned about decreasing the wave of migrants to its country, rather than ensuring basic human rights for women's overall wellbeing. It can be suggested that USAID sees Guatemala as a source of uncontrolled migration.

USAID states that the main reasons the Guatemalan population emigrates is due to high poverty indexes with no opportunities to improve it (USAID, 2023c), violence and lack of access to land and education (USAID, 2023e). However, USAID is not stating what are the root causes of why the Guatemalan population faces these harsh socio-economic conditions. In their action policy, USAID is just describing what difficult problems the citizens face, and how *"the challenges are even greater for females and indigenous youth, who have lower school attendance rates and limited economic opportunities locally"* (USAID, 2023e). This could be interpreted as migration being managed in a way as if it was a natural phenomenon that occurred spontaneously when people are seeking for economic opportunities. However, one

must not forget that Guatemala faces a long history of civil war that has been present since 1954, when the United States backed up a coup against Jacobo Árbenz, a democratically elected president (Borger, 2018). The high insecurity rate is one of the main reasons why people seek to leave the country. People do not migrate to only focus on seeking economic opportunities, but it is a decision they make to survive. Also, Pineo (2020) states that due to high flows of migration, about one of every three Guatemalan families live from migrant relatives' money sent from the United States; the migrants that are sent from Guatemala are mostly farmers from the highlands of Guatemala who earn around 4 USD for a day shift (p.14). Even though insecurity and high poverty levels in Guatemala cannot be entirely blamed on the United States' former interventions, it does hold a big responsibility for the social, economic and political conditions of the recipient country. To effectively decolonize aid, USAID would need to hold itself accountable for its past actions. Guatemala should not be portrayed as a country that faces harsh socioeconomic conditions just because it happened. Donor countries that have a privileged position within world power structures should start recognizing how their power has affected other world areas.

It is important to conclude this section by stating that neither agency manages a discourse that is a dialogue with stakeholders. As Ziai (2016) states, the concept of participation in the development discourse originated from the premise to involve those who will be benefited by development and avoid top-down interventions (p.78). However, neither in USAID nor Sida's policies, there are traces of participation from those who are being supported. The strategies, as not being a dialogue among stakeholders, could imply that donors have a colonial discourse where they state their perception as facts, and they are just deciding how gender equality must be seen as. There is no space for interpretation or dialogue, it is their version of the world put in paper and practice.

4.2 Colonial marker I: Problematizing poverty as the main source of underdevelopment

The colonial marker I: Problematizing poverty as the main source of underdevelopment comes from the work of Escobar (2012) and Ziai (2016). The premise of constructing this colonial marker is that the development discourse states that the causes of underdevelopment in the Third World can be overcome by alleviating poverty; poverty not only affects the Third World, it also affects the West. In the development discourse, poverty implies backwardness, and this affects the West (Escobar, 2012, pp.6-9). As Ziai (2016) points out, the development discourse makes emphasis on poverty because this allows the Global North to monitor and manage poverty so that the capitalist system does not become affected (pp.32-33). Taking into consideration the work from these two authors, this colonial marker served the purpose of highlighting the pieces of text in USAID and Sida's policies regarding economic empowerment of women that describe women's poverty as the main source of underdevelopment.

The main approach for USAID's policy to assure women's economic empowerment is stopping migration; at the same time, migration is portrayed as a response to poverty. Hence, it could be deduced that poverty in USAID's policy is represented as a threat to the United States for resulting in a wave of 'irregular migration', suggesting that it could be managed by alleviating poverty through economic incentives. There is a relation of economic dependency of Guatemala in relation to the United States. This dependency was created in part by decisions taken in the United States as it has been previously described. It is clear that migration is a result of numerous factors, but it is imperative for big donors to change the narrative around it. People should not be forced to leave their country due to insecurity or lack of economic opportunities. It is necessary for those responsible to hold accountability and change the discourse used to present the problem. USAID still perpetuated the negative use of the term 'illegal migration', until 2021 that the term was changed to 'irregular migration' (USAID, 2021, p.I). Root causes of poverty, inequality and

insecurity cannot be portrayed as random conditions that suddenly appeared and that could criminalize people. To successfully decolonize aid, agents that hold powerful positions in historical structures must show accountability and assume responsibility in their chosen discourse and actions that have thrived on issues, such as migration. After all, the reason that the Guatemalan population face these harsh living conditions did not appear suddenly. These conditions were created as a result of the decisions taken by agents in power structures that are still favored.

Poverty is also addressed as underdevelopment because it does not assure economic growth in USAID's policy. The agency states that the reason a gender approach is necessary for USAID's programmes is that, *"gender norms also result in women's time poverty [...] which is a cross-cutting barrier that not only inhibits the well-being of women and girls but also impedes equitable economic growth, agricultural productivity, and inclusive democracies"* (USAID, 2023b, p.29). This excerpt refers to the problematization of poverty as the main source of underdevelopment. It could be inferred that USAID is stating that poverty is the main reason why women have not achieved economic growth, have low productivity rates in agriculture and do not have inclusive democracies. Ziai (2016) explains that the development discourse associates wellbeing with progress of industrial and scientific nature. Progress is then explained as high productivity and in this way economic growth is achieved. Agriculture considered traditional is highly associated with low productivity, and hence, poverty (pp.30-31). USAID's statement could then be interpreted as, if poverty is overcome, women could finally achieve economic growth, high productivity rates in agriculture and be part of inclusive democracies.

After comparing discourses, it is clear that Sida has a different approach from that of USAID. Sida says that, *"WEE [Women's Economic Empowerment] is strictly interlinked with poverty reduction and is a Human Right issue; empowering women (generally and economically) is a poverty reduction measure as well as a safeguard of human rights and the principle of 'do no harm'"* (Sida, 2023b, p.9). Sida does not problematize poverty as a source of underdevelopment. Poverty is being described as

a problem that is faced and that needs to be eliminated to ensure women's human rights. This can be linked to Sida's approach of supporting women to achieve economic independence in a more integral way, *"among indigenous women in rural Guatemala, violence is part of everyday life. Sida supports the organisation Helvetas, which gives women the tools to make a living from farming and get away from violence and economic dependence on men"* (Sida, 2022a). Sida understands that there is a 'macho' culture that extends violence to women, and in this sense, their approach is focused on achieving economic freedom to avoid violent treatments. Also, as it has been stated before, the majority of migrants that go to the United States are farmers. Thus, I believe that supporting organizations that seek to strengthen the farming economy is one way to locally empower women and one step ahead to achieve economic independence. Also, Sida is recognizing that women can individually work for their own economic freedom; they indirectly understand that Guatemalan indigenous women have the necessary skills to make a living of farming, but they need support in getting the necessary tools. Sida does not problematize poverty as a source of development. Their approach portrays women in a strong and independent way that is necessary to change the mainstream discourse of women as victims.

The way each agency is presenting poverty is fundamental to understanding how aid can be successfully decolonized, and this can be done by studying policies with colonial marker I in mind. On the one hand, USAID is still perpetuating the negative discourse of associating poverty with high migration rates and as an obstacle for economic growth which results in underdevelopment. On the other hand, Sida has a more human approach where poverty is presented as a problem to be worked on to ensure women's human rights and not as an impediment to development, which successfully empower women as beings experiencing poverty and not being the cause of poverty itself.

4.3 Colonial marker II: Economic growth as the main strategy to overcome underdevelopment

The colonial marker II which states that economic growth is the main plan of action to achieve development also comes from the work of Escobar (2012) and Ziai (2016). This colonial marker was constructed by understanding that the development discourse portrays development as something to be achieved to assure social and economic wellbeing. However, Ziai (2016) signals that the strategies to overcome underdevelopment are predominantly economically led. The development discourse praises that economic growth is the key to achieve poverty reduction and assure social wellbeing. Even though the economic focus in the development discourse has been shifted to 'economic and social progress' in the last few decades, the approach is still highly and mainly influenced by the economic factor (pp.49-51). The development discourse guarantees that once economic growth is achieved, positive changes in the social, cultural and political spheres will be acquired (Escobar, 2012, pp.39-41). This thesis understands that in the development discourse there are several strategies that are proposed to ensure development, however, it recognizes that economic growth is still present as a main basis, if not the most important aspect, to achieve development. Hence, this marker was useful to study what traces of discourse portray economic growth, and in what way, as the main strategy to ensure women's economic empowerment. Understanding that there are other factors that ensure development, such as social wellbeing, I focused on analyzing when economic growth is mentioned as being the most important aspect to fulfill women's needs in Sida and USAID's policies.

Initially, Sida states that the goal to achieve women's economic empowerment is, *"to promote women's and girls' equal access to, and control over critical economic resources, to enable them to exercise individual and collective forms of agency in the different spheres of their lives"* (Sida, 2023b, p.5). In this way, it could be interpreted that Sida states that by achieving economic empowerment, women will have control

over their own lives in different aspects. It is not stating that economic empowerment is the only way to achieve gender equality, but it could be said that it assures that economic freedom will empower women to be able to take their own decisions as it impacts other domains of their lives. It could then be said that Sida is stating that in real life, women need economic empowerment and other tools to have agency over their own lives. Also, when Sida addresses why women's economic empowerment is necessary, it links it to an increase in sexual and reproductive health and rights. However, the focus in this sense is not straightly linked to women's overall wellbeing and assurance of basic human rights, the focus is strictly financial, *"harmful practices such as gender discrimination and school-related sexual violence and child, early, and forced marriage often prevent adolescent girls from completing their education or learning essential skills to enter the workforce or increase their earnings"* (Sida, 2023b, p.8). Women are indirectly depicted as agents that will achieve economic empowerment to increase economic growth. This could shed light on the fact that the focus for women and economic empowerment associated with sexual and reproductive health and rights for Sida is focused on the market economy, rather than their own personal wellbeing. Sida does not mention what happens in the personal level of women who achieve their education and who do not experience threat to their sexual and reproductive health rights; they will obtain the necessary skills to have a job. Even though Sida does not address the economic growth approach directly, it still is not enforcing why an integral human approach is necessary to assure wellbeing. Hence, it could be inferred that there is still a reproduction of the development discourse that intertwines development strictly with economic growth.

On the other hand, USAID has a completely different version of reality as it assures that, *"gender equality improves the well-being of women and their families and advances inclusive economic growth. The most significant source of untapped economic growth potential is unemployed and underemployed women. […] gender inequality drives poverty and impedes economic growth"* (USAID, 2023b, p.45). As it has been stated before, the United States is concerned about an increasing wave of

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migration. For this reason, it could be suggested that economic 'opportunities' are mainly driven by economic factors, rather than human-integral approaches. In this small excerpt of their gender equality policy, USAID is portraying women as a workforce that has to be 'tapped into it'. Ironically, this could be interpreted as women needing to be active in the market force to benefit from the capitalist system that has oppressed them. And by assuring that gender inequality is a reason why poverty is still present, it is controversial as it is putting blame on people who are in a system that has historically not favored women. Women are not being portrayed as worthy of equal human rights and opportunities, they are depicted as a labor force that remains untouched and waiting to be exploited. Also, drawing arguments based on economic growth and linking it to poverty is the reason this thesis draws on a decolonizing approach. As Mignolo (2018) states, there is still a sphere of coloniality that involves the current political and economic designs, which are driven by a masculine and patriarchal conception of what the world is and how society is. As well as a sphere of coloniality that states what is considered knowledge and understanding, which favors the West (pp.126-127). USAID is suggesting that the only way to benefit women is to introduce them to the capitalist system that has negatively affected them, and in this way the system continues being favored. The only conception of reality suggested by USAID is that of economic growth and women's complete inclusion to the labor market.

Even though Sida does not use a similar language regarding 'untapping economic growth', Sida also states that it is 'smart' to increase women's participation in the economy as it would increase global GDP by $28 trillion USD in 2025. However, it makes emphasis on working in gender inequalities reproduced in the private and public spheres of life to ensure their wellbeing (USAID, 2023b, p.6), suggesting that the reality is about more than just about being part of the capitalist system we live in. For instance, Sida is supporting a programme for 7,000 women in rural areas of Guatemala (Proyecto de Empoderamiento Económico de Mujeres Indígenas Rurales – PODEEIR), and it assures that supporting their economic opportunities, *"increase their*

incomes and improve their access to food" (Sida, 2022b). Once again, Sida is associating economic opportunities to access to food, not exclusively to women being a workforce.

In the policies of both USAID and Sida, traces of colonial marker II were found, by stating that economic growth is key to achieve development. Having as a reference the work of Escobar (2012), poverty, which implies backwardness, has to be tackled through economic growth (pp.6,39-41). In this way, the documents were analyzed to see how much importance does economic growth have in women's economic empowerment; USAID directly associates economic growth to women's development. On the other hand, Sida understands there are more aspects to be fulfilled, however, economic growth is still presented as a major source of development. The difference in discourse is that USAID associates women strictly as an economic workforce to be used, while Sida understands that the economic sphere of life is important to fulfill other social and personal spheres. To effectively decolonize discourse of aid focused on economy and women, it is necessary to ensure that women are perceived as future financial independent beings, rather than a workforce that contribute to the capitalist system we all are part of, as the development discourse usually portrays them as.

4.4 Colonial marker III: Monitoring and evaluation as a means of surveillance

The colonial marker III which states that donor countries should be monitored and evaluated to ensure their development, was constructed based on the work of Said (1978) and Bhabha (1990). This colonial marker was created by understanding that the development aid programmes and policies of world donors enhance paternalistic practices of monitoring and evaluating progress of what they are funding. As Bhabha (1990) states, the colonial discourse's main function *is the creation of a space for a "subject peoples" through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised"* (p.75). It is fundamental to the colonial discourse that there exists

surveillance of what is being produced and what results are being thrown. The basic premise of why the Global South needs to be monitored is explained by Said (1978) who states that everything that is different from the West is commonly desired to be controlled or manipulated. This control and manipulation are exercised through discourse which is unevenly exchanged through power relations (in Williams and Chrisman, 2013, pp.137-138). There exists the false assumption that the Global South needs to be directed for its own being. However, this does not ensure people's freedom nor dignity. For this reason, to study this colonial marker I focused on how monitoring and evaluation are addressed in the different policies of USAID and Sida; as if it is a fundamental programmatic feature to control recipients or to actually ensure that programmes are working in benefit for them. I put the focus in monitoring and evaluation as the word surveillance is not used throughout the policies. Such words, in present times, can be associated with negative connotations, and hence, to study the presence of this colonial marker, the emphasis was on monitoring and evaluation.

Initially, Sida just states that as a recommendation for itself and its partners to, *"ensure monitoring and evaluation of contributions are carried out systematically for improved contributions, learning and development of best practices"* (Sida, 2023b, p.11). Throughout Sida's economic empowerment for women policy there is not another reference for work to be supervised or evaluated. In this direct quotation from its policy, it could be suggested that Sida enhances monitoring and evaluation as a way to better their own work and that of their partners. Just by stating that this recommendation is for Sida itself, and its partners, suggests that this agency positions itself on the same line as its partners and stakeholders. Sida is congruent in this statement throughout its different publications. For instance, in its policy to mainstream gender equality throughout its different progammes, it states that, *"women, men, girls and boys have different needs, experience, interest and ideas – efficient solutions to development problems are consequently best found by involving diverse groups in decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. […] Monitoring is an ongoing exercise to see if intended changes are being achieved, what works and what*

does not, what can be learned and what kind of adaptations might be needed. […] The perspective of different groups should be included" (Sida, 2020, pp.3,5). Along the same line, Sida states that dialogue with partners is fundamental to design programmes, as well as to monitor them (*ibid*, p.5). Also, the agency stresses out that, *"Sida's partner is responsible for monitoring and implementation of ongoing initiatives. Sida will also follow-up"* (Sida, 2021b). Hence, it becomes evident that Sida recognizes that there is a need to monitor and evaluate programmes to make them better for beneficiaries, not to enforce control over recipients. It is important to emphasize that Sida recurrently highlights the need to have partners and stakeholders' perspective in the construction of programmes and projects, as well as in its monitoring and evaluation. Sida positions itself on the same level, and it gives its partners the freedom to decide their own monitoring techniques; it could be suggested that Sida describes itself as a support, rather than a boss who gives orders that need to be followed. For this reason, it could be said that Sida does not have a negative outcome in this colonial marker.

USAID has a similar approach to its strategy for monitoring and evaluating. USAID states that its gender strategies are integrated with different actors. The agency assures that it is necessary to revise their own policies and strategies with stakeholders, as well as to carry out monitoring and evaluation with their participation (USAID, 2023b, p.13). Also, USAID mentions that their partners should state how they are monitoring their own work to ensure that gender equality is being addressed; their own policies should address their own monitoring plans as part of their practices (*ibid*, pp.23-25) The agency states that when women and girls, *"are prioritized in strategies and approaches, their specific needs and potential vulnerabilities are understood and supported"* (*ibid*, p.64). Even though USAID does not point out recurrently the participation of different actors and partners, it does not have a negative outcome on this colonial marker either. USAID recognizes in its discourse that stakeholders know what they need, and hence their participation to construct policies is crucial, as well as for them to be part of the process of monitoring and evaluation. In this way, it could be

inferred that USAID is not addressing this aspect of policies as a means of control, but it suggests that the agency is trying to make its own actions better.

Even though neither donor agency addresses monitoring and evaluation in specific regarding Guatemala and women's economic empowerment, their basic premises of why monitoring and evaluation are necessary for their gender strategies coincide that it's for a better good of stakeholders, and their partners are actively participating in this process. According to Ziai (2016), *"the meaning of participation of course depends on the question who participates in what"* (p.78). Both USAID and Sida recognize that partners and stakeholders are the actors that know what is best for them. Hence, this colonial marker served to understand that as long as monitoring and evaluation include those who will be benefited by different programmes, it is directing development aid in a fruitful way. Neither agency is addressing itself as the boss who constructs and directs monitoring techniques exclusively. Decolonizing aid effectively means promoting and ensuring Global South voices with their participation. Hence, by including beneficiaries in the process of monitoring and evaluation of programmes from the Global North, a decolonizing approach is being promoted by both agencies.

4.5 Colonial marker IV: Western knowledge as the only legitimate source of information

The colonial marker IV which states that Western knowledge is the only reliable source of information, was constructed based on the work of Said (1978), Bhabha (1990), and Ziai (2016). This colonial marker was elaborated with the premise that there is a distinction between the West and the rest of the world. Also, there is an assumption from the West that the knowledge that they produce is, *"nonpolitical, that is, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief"* (Said in Williams and Chrisman, 2013, p.136). This positionality of their knowledge production can be easily deceived as 'what it should be'. However, this thesis recognizes that knowledge in practice is strongly political and not impartial at all. Also, this colonial

marker was made up by having in mind that the production of knowledge comes from the 'colonizer' who never goes under evaluation itself (Bhabha, 1990, p.75), creating the false assumption that the only truth can come from those who are benefited from power structures. Finally, in the development practice, what is considered to be true comes mainly from the production of knowledge of Western institutions and its experts. Everything that positions itself differently is discursively excluded because it seems useless (Ziai, 2016, pp.42-43). Having this in mind, to study this colonial marker I was searching for how Global South knowledge is considered and taken into consideration to achieve women's economic empowerment in Guatemala. Also, I analyzed how Western knowledge and practices are present in the policies and how they are being discursively portrayed.

It would be fundamental to initiate the analysis of this colonial marker by stating that neither agency presents its policies as a dialogue with partners or stakeholders. Even though they are mentioned as being part of the monitoring and evaluation steps of their policies, there are no voices taken into consideration for the construction of their general women's economic empowerment policies or Guatemala's programmes neither from USAID nor Sida. Recognizing that there are inherent power structures that state what is considered knowledge, both USAID and Sida have a Western conception of it. In both agencies' reports, the evidence that they draw from to suggest economic empowerment or security are based on indexes from Western Institutions. Some examples to name a few would be the United Nations (used in Sida, 2023b, pp.6,14; USAID, 2023b, p.45), the World Bank (used in Sida, 2023b, pp.14,15,16; USAID, 2023b, pp.43,45), and McKinsey and Company (used in Sida, 2023b, pp.6,14; USAID, 2023b, p.45). Even though these indexes are helpful, it is necessary to take into consideration knowledge and information from the Global South to effectively contribute to the field of decolonizing aid. It is fundamental for donors to strengthen their discourse of ensuring agency by raising voices from the Global South. As Moosavi (2020) explains, the decolonial bandwagon can be prevented by engaging with knowledge coming from the Global South.

It is imperative for actors of the Global South to be present in the policy construction to offer inputs of what their reality is and how they aim to make it better for themselves. It cannot all revolve around the marketization of people in the workforce to benefit the capitalist system that has oppressed them. For instance, USAID describes itself as, *"committed to being a leading investor, partner, and advocate to achieve this goal [gender equality] across societies"* (USAID, 2023b, p.5). It could be inferred that USAID describes itself as a knowledgeable expert that can lead the Global South to achieve development. The focus to achieve gender equality should be on those people affected by gender inequalities, not USAID's own suggested leadership for a better future. In this way, agency could actually be ensured for recipients and they would be able to make their own decisions regarding what they need.

Even though Sida does not portray itself as a world leader for the sake of women's economic empowerment, it still also manages a discursive approach where the central character is usually the organization and its actions; as an example, in their 'Gender Tool Book', dialogue is presented as an approach to change, stating that, *"dialogue is part of advocating for Swedish values, priorities and universal norms"* (Sida, 2020, p.5) To effectively decolonize aid and ensure people's agency and dignity, the centre of attention must be on partners and stakeholders, not in the promotion of donor's values or sense of what is needed. Even though the policy does not make any direct reference to what 'Swedish values' are, the emphasis on advocating for their own values in the Global South could indirectly reproduce a discourse of assuring that Western knowledge is superior. Hence, for this colonial marker, it could be said that both agencies would need to engage with more knowledge from the Global South to effectively decolonize aid. USAID has a stronger assumption of its knowledge being more valuable than others by presenting itself as a leader; but in the same vein, Sida is still, in a humbler way, advocating for its own values which could be interpreted that Swedish values are more valuable than others. I am not stating, in any way, that

Western knowledge should be eradicated, the only purpose of the construction of this colonial marker is to ensure that there is space given for all world's knowledges.

4.6 Colonial marker V: Homogenization of Global South women as one single category

The colonial marker V which states that Global South women are usually categorized in a homogenous unit with the same needs and goals, was constructed based on the work of Mohanty (2003). This colonial marker was elaborated with the premise that the Western discourses of feminism usually constitute the homogeneous category of 'Third World difference'; where women are pictured as a single group, and all of the complex situations and struggles that characterize the lives of women from the Global South are explained in the same uniform way. This results in the colonization of discourse (Mohanty, 2003, pp.19-20), and it does not give validation to women's individual struggles and circumstances. In this sense, this colonial marker was studied by analyzing how the policies of USAID and Sida represent women from the Global South.

In Sida's women's economic empowerment policy, at the beginning it states that, *"references to 'women' throughout this Overview signifies women in all their diversity"* (Sida, 2023b, p.3). As the policy continues, it just mentions that gender inequalities affect all women, but it is even more harmful for, *"women of colour, disabled women, indigenous women, and migrant women"* (*ibid*, p.27). However, there is no specific information or policy addressed to these vulnerable women's groups. Sida limits itself to mention that there exist bigger disparities for these women, but then it does not put its focus on each category to explain how each group experiences discriminatory gender norms when working for women's economic empowerment. However, when addressing Guatemala specifically, Sida does mention the different categories of women where programmes are being implemented. For instance, when Sida describes one of its programmes that trains gender equality it mentions that it has

supported, *"3,000 women, including teenagers, trans women and traditional midwives"* (Sida, 2022b). Also, when referring to women that have had their sexual and reproductive rights violated by being raped by men, Sida specifies that, *"36 women from the indigenous Maya Achi community succeeded in achieving justice when five men were sentenced to 30 years in prison. […] The verdict is a historic victory for indigenous rights"* (*ibidem*). By distinguishing that there exist women, teenage women, trans women, and indigenous women, the struggles of each category can be represented. Taking as a concrete example the women from the Maya Achi community, by mentioning the specific indigenous community and associating it to the victory for indigenous rights, Sida ensures Mayan women's fight and voice are being recognized and placed in a specific category for its own recognition. Separating women's categories does not create disruptions among women. Instead, it ensures recognition of the different struggles and harsh living conditions that different groups face.

USAID introduces its gender equality policy by stating that it *"includes women and girls in all their diversity – including those of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, plus (LGBTQI+) community, as well as women and girls of every age, caste, disability, race or ethnic origin, religion, or belief"* (USAID, 2023b, p.6). Different from Sida, USAID actually does refer to different categories of women when addressing different problems. For example, when addressing maternal mortality, USAID mentions women from indigenous origins and minorities of race and ethnicity experiencing it at higher rates (*ibid*, p.13). Also, when discussing gender-based violence, the agency mentions that indigenous women, LGBTQI+ people, workers from the informal sector, migrants and people with disabilities are more vulnerable (*ibid*, p.18). It happens the same when USAID is addressing its programmes in Guatemala for women. USAID makes mention that its programmes will contribute to women's overall economic security, and it recognizes that indigenous youth and indigenous women are more vulnerable (USAID, 2023c; USAID, 2023e). In this sense, it could be inferred that USAID recognizes that there are different struggles faced by different groups in women, worldwide, and in specific scenarios such as Guatemala.

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Even though the agency does not make a distinction of the different indigenous groups that exist in the country, it still recognizes that there are more struggles faced by marginalized women from indigenous communities. This itself makes a distinction of how Global South women experience different circumstances.

To effectively decolonize aid, it is fundamental to address women in vulnerable conditions in different groups. With this colonial marker, it is possible to suggest that both Sida and USAID effectively address women in Guatemala in different categories by pointing out the different struggles they face. In this sense, there is not a global reference to 'Third world women' such as Mohanty (2003) states that is characteristic of the Western feminist discourse that colonizes women. However, there is work to be done when Sida is presenting its overall strategy. Even though the agency details what women in Guatemala face in different conditions, it is fundamental to have a more detailed emphasis when addressing its general policy regarding women's economic empowerment. But it could be deduced that Sida, when referring to Guatemalan women, has a more decolonial approach by naming a specific indigenous group and by mentioning trans women, compared to USAID that just states indigenous women and youth. Overall, it is important for donor agencies to ensure that different women's categories are addressed in their strategies so that problems can be tackled in the different ways that they are experienced.

4.7 Colonial marker VI: Global South women portrayed as victims

Finally, the colonial marker VI which states that Global South women are pictured as victims was also constructed based on the work of Mohanty (2003). This colonial marker was elaborated under the theory that it is common to portray women as victims of men's violence. Even though women do experience male violence, and this does affect their position in society, describing them exclusively as victims is highly harmful. When women are depicted exclusively as victims, they are perceived as

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objects that want to defend themselves, and it makes men be thought of as subjects who practice and perpetuate violence. This concludes in women being seen as powerless objects (pp.23-24). Even though 'macho' culture does affect Guatemalan women and their social position, it does not mean that they are powerless and passive beings that experience violence with no resistance. For this reason, this colonial marker was studied by seeing how women in Guatemala are portrayed by USAID and Sida regarding economic empowerment.

When analyzing how gender equality and Guatemala are connected, the topic is initially addressed in a similar fashion by USAID and Sida. Both agencies have a discourse deeply rooted in negative aspects of Guatemalan society. USAID and Sida both classify Guatemalan society as following a 'macho' structure, where women are strongly affected by gender disparities (Sida, 2022b; USAID, 2023h). USAID states, *"Gender gaps remain in nearly all areas of Guatemalan life, impacting women's participation in the formal economy, their exercise of political and social leadership, and their access to goods, resources, and services. [...] Guatemala society can be characterized as having a patriarchal and "machista" structure that often excludes women and other marginalized groups"* (USAID, 2023h). In this excerpt it could be inferred that USAID is stating that women face harsh living conditions because of 'macho' culture that is enhanced by men. USAID is explaining that because of 'machismo', women's participation and social leadership is affected. Also, women are excluded from society as a result of being victims of this practice.

Sida, in turn, explains that, "*Guatemalan society is characterised by a macho culture. Influential actors openly question sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR), especially for girls, women and LGBTQI people. [...] Women and indigenous peoples face discrimination and have little influence over the country's politics"* (Sida, 2022b). Sida is also stating that women, as victims of 'macho' culture, face discrimination and that their political agency cannot be practiced. The discourse that both agencies use addresses women and the social inequalities they face as victims of the 'macho' culture that is present in Guatemala; this suggests that it results in feminization of poverty and

it could be deduced that Guatemala is portrayed as a source of 'machismo' culture. In this sense, other social interventions by the agencies can be justified because there is a false assumption that women are powerless objects that face male violence, and hence, it could be interpreted as if they need to be saved. Also, this influences the negative connotation that the Global South has in discourse, because just as Guatemala is a source of uncontrolled migration as it has been previously explained, it is at the same time a source of perpetuating women as victims of 'macho' culture. Even though this thesis recognizes that women are in fact affected by 'macho' structures, it is necessary that, *"male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies in order both to understand it better and to organize effectively to change it"* (Mohanty, 2003, p.24). In Sida and USAID's policies there is no political or historical context of why this society has 'macho' structures. They just present the phenomenon as being intrinsic to Guatemalan lifestyle and which women suffer on a daily basis.

Even though 'macho' societies do have a negative influence on women's social life, managing only victim-related discourses makes interventions from foreign actors easier to be accepted. It is necessary to dignify women in the process, rather than empower donor countries' actions. After describing the 'macho' structure in Guatemalan society, both agencies offer what actions they are doing to support women: USAID (2023h) encourages social inclusion of women in political processes, while Sida (2022b) collaborates with civil society actors to strengthen their political participation. Both agencies present how their policies will promote women's inclusion and social and political participation, but they do not actively mention what women's actions regarding their own economic empowerment are. Sida does mention women's actions in Guatemala by stating that *"250 women have organised seed banks to preserve indigenous plants that can withstand climate change"* (Sida, 2022b), as well as with the legal case involving the Maya Achí community. However, there is no reference to women's active work to ensure their own economic empowerment. In this way, neither agency mentions how Guatemalan women are currently and actively working to ensure their own economic empowerment. The formulation of how women

are victims of 'macho' structures and how the institutions are intervening, suggests that both agencies' actions are justified for a greater good.

To effectively decolonize aid, it is fundamental to offer context of the living conditions that women face, how different groups of women face it, and what are their actions of resistance. Even though it must be acknowledged that women's position in society is affected by male violence, it cannot be presented as the only factor to describe it. With this colonial marker, it is possible to suggest that both USAID and Sida present Guatemalan women as victims of 'macho' culture with little or no agency. Even though Sida does address some actions done by women in other domains different from economic empowerment, most of its discourse, like USAID's, is heavily negative and concentrated on the agency-less assumption that Guatemalan women are victims of 'machismo'. Decolonizing aid in this sense means dignifying women by presenting them as more than mere objects that suffer violence from men and by acknowledging that they are human beings that resist and fight power structures.

Conclusions

Development aid has been provided for a long period of time. However, it is necessary to question *how* aid is being provided and *how* it can affect recipient entities. Even though international agencies like USAID and Sida have been destinating millions for the purpose of development, the reality is that development aid is intertwined with colonial practices. This thesis has concentrated in studying discourse because it understands that discourse entails unequal historic power relations and structures that are reshaped and reproduced through time in practice.

Using a feminist decolonizing lens, this thesis has argued that some discourse still used in women's economic empowerment from both USAID and Sida in Guatemala has the presence of colonial markers. Colonial marker I, which studies the problematization of poverty as the main source of underdevelopment, illustrated that USAID relates poverty with high flows of irregular migration. On the other hand, Sida has a more integral approach by recognizing that poverty is one problem to tackle, but not the strict source of underdevelopment. This suggests that women's economic empowerment policies can be shaped into migration policies by managing a discourse where poverty is blamed for people's reasons to seek economic opportunities elsewhere; in this sense, power relations of donors are strengthen over recipients by disguising real intentions of what problems the donors are actually trying to work on. Regarding colonial marker II, both agencies still heavily rely on economic growth as the main strategy to overcome underdevelopment, which suggests that the colonial marker is present. Even though Sida's discourse encompasses other aspects to fulfill, it still, as USAID, describes economic growth as a main aspect to achieve in the name of development.

On a positive outcome, with regards to colonial marker III, neither agency shows the presence of monitoring and evaluating their policy as a means of surveillance. Both agencies discursively take into consideration partners and stakeholders' participation to make their own policies better. However, the presence of

colonial marker IV, indicated that both agencies do use Western knowledge as a principal source of information. Sida positioned itself on the same level as its partners, but by stating that it advocates for its Swedish values, it makes this thesis ponder why some values should be promoted over others if aid is being provided in another country. Similarily, USAID positions itself as a leader that can achieve development, which makes this thesis shed light on the fact that the attention should be put in the Global South to effectively decolonize aid, not on the efforts of the Global North. When donors advocate for their own leadership or values, it could be suggested that power relations over recipients are maintained unequal as the West keeps portraying itself as the global standard of development.

This thesis also found that there was no presence of colonial marker V, which searches for the homogenization of Global South women. Both agencies acknowledge and mention different groups of women. Finally, colonial marker VI, which studies women portrayed as victims, was found in both agencies by picturing Guatemalan women as victims of 'macho' violence. On the same line, this illustration of women pictures Guatemala as a source of 'machismo' culture that must be intervened. Just as Guatemala has been portrayed as an uncontrolled source of migration, the discourse of Guatemalan society enhances a negative discourse of power where Guatemalan society is described as a source of 'macho' culture. More than seeking women's economic empowerment, these policies from USAID and Sida can materialize in anti-migration and cultural policies that justify interventions in foreign countries.

This thesis only covered the discourse used in policies to effectively decolonize aid through a feminist perspective. However, there is future research to be done. On the discursive level, it would be suggested to study all policies that are implemented in Guatemala to make connections between discourses and interventions from the different agencies. Also, it would be fruitful to make a comparative study with the same agencies on different countries from other world areas. Guatemala has a colonial history that is not shared in other countries from the Global South. It would therefore be important to understand how the discourse is expressed in other countries. Also,

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while the focus of this thesis was not on the stakeholders and partners' point of view, a final recommendation would be to study how policies are being interpreted and reflected by the different audiences that they are directed to. In this way, it could be studied how discourse unfolds in practice.

Decolonizing aid is fundamental to raise up Global South people's voices and ensure their dignity. By decolonizing aid, all realities and necessities are being covered and there is an acknowledgment that different perceptions exist and are equally important. I believe knowledge complements itself from different sources and voices. As I stated before, this thesis is an effort to recognize that there is resistance from the Global South that has been present through time. This work is by no means a product to 'cancel' the West, but it seeks to put the attention and focus on the Global South which has been historically unfavored by power structures. Those favored by ancient power structures need to recognize how they have been privileged by the system. Problematizing poverty, focusing on economic growth, monitoring and evaluating policies as a source of control, legitimizing only or mainly Western knowledge, homogenizing Global South women as a single category and portraying them as victims nullifies history, culture and dignity from their resistance. The development aid field should not portray itself as a mission to be accomplished, it should shift its focus to ensure that every person on this planet receives what they deserve. Discourse seems like a good starting point. In this way, it can be ensured that voices that have been historically silenced and ignored may finally be powerfully heard.

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