

## **“World”-travelling with professional Indigenous women of Mexico: Collective weavings**

### ABSTRACT

This thesis emerges from personal and collective journeys through several contexts, lives, and times. It represents a living process that started before the academic exercise and will continue beyond it. The thesis is a point of encounters, of arrivals and departures, of changes and permanences, of synergies, coalitions, and disagreements among the many participants who helped me to craft it. It is formed by a series of plural narratives based on my listening, learning, and discussing with a group of Indigenous women from Mexico about how graduate education has informed their professional trajectories and how they are positioning themselves as political actors.

The empirical and theoretical research uses various feminist perspectives (Ahmed, 2014, 2017; Cabnal, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Harcourt et al., 2022; Hernández Castillo, 2014; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015; Icaza, 2019; Lugones, 2016, 2010; Méndez Torres et al., 2013; Paredes, 2008)–, as well as decolonial (Jong et al., 2018; Lugones, 2010, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2012) and indigenous (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) approaches through a series of collaborative, collective and relational practices. Following these theoretical pathways, I employ different grammars from those traditionally used in critical development studies. I use concepts such as “world”-travelling ((Lugones, 2003), “enunciations” (Walsh, 2013), “cultivation of knowledge” (Shilliam, 2015), “enfleshed experiences” (Ahmed, 2014; Leyva Solano, 2021; Lugones, 2003; Motta, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Motta & Bermudez, 2019) as living and vibrant conceptualizations from where to look for other ways to create knowledge and to foster the relationships within.

Therefore, this research is about personal and collective “world”-travellings and enfleshed experiences from where I/we have theorised, reflected, and narrated while weaving deep coalitions (Lugones, 2003) as loving and empathetic understandings, active listening, and building collective actions across differences. By “world”-travelling I have dialogued with diverse women beyond and within racial and cultural boundaries. “World”-travelling to “enunciate” epistemic, political, and ethical places from where to till, grow, ground knowledge. Personal, political enunciations that arise from our corporality, our situated contexts, our trajectories, and reflective processes as living, enfleshed practice.

Using decolonial and various feminist –Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial* (body-territory), descolonial, decolonial, and Black intersectional– frameworks, I critically examine the historical,

cultural, and political legacies of colonialism, illuminating the power imbalances and systemic oppression of Indigenous communities. The thesis acknowledges and centres Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives, and experiences, thereby challenging dominant Eurocentric paradigms. In this way I aim to facilitate more inclusive and equitable understandings of the academic and professional trajectories of Indigenous women. My approach promotes a transformative and intercultural dialogue that disrupts the colonial hegemony and offers pathways for the decolonisation of educational structures, policies, and practices.

Within my main objective to acknowledge and make visible the contributions of professional Indigenous women as political actors the thesis has three further purposes. First, to generate spaces where diverse Mexican women involved in indigenous education can reflect together and strengthen coalitions. Second, to cultivate enlashed knowledge and share it in various spaces – books, journals, seminars, in Indigenous communities, in academia, with relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances, at local, national and international levels. Third to generate intercultural dialogues and dynamics to weave and intertwine conceptual and methodological perspectives that challenge conventional academic ways to produce knowledge in critical development studies.

My approach of allowing the thesis to emerge over time and through a plurality of voices is ethically and politically important because it recognises diverse experiences in knowledge cultivation. In this way the thesis challenges the historical marginalisation and erasures that Indigenous women face in academia and other political spaces. The thesis aims to promote inclusivity, social justice, and gender equality by providing examples of how Indigenous women's experiences can influence decision-making processes. The approach challenges prevailing stereotypes and narratives that undermine Indigenous women's expertise, and instead fosters respect and understanding of different perspectives and knowledges.

The thesis is a 'hybrid' one rather than a linear individual story. It is made up of various enlashed and contextual experiences that emerged, shared, and discussed for years among diverse women. It is also hybrid because its structure is made up of three published texts -two of which are coauthored-, and three chapters that help to explain the journeys, contexts, conceptual and methodological frames and the final reflexions. The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter I is a broad introduction which includes my personal story and motivation to do a doctorate and the context in which I met the 17 Indigenous women with whom I worked. Chapter II presents the context, some general data and information about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women in Mexico, particularly in higher education. Chapter III sets out the theoretical foundations, specific

conceptualisations, methodological principles and ethical decisions of the thesis. Chapter IV is a concrete example of how the methodological principles and the methods took place. Chapter V is about the experiences of racism in higher education and the strategies to confront it – including proposals to revert it. It is co-written by seven Indigenous and two *mestiza* women and will be published at the end of 2023 as part of the book *Mujeres indígenas, mujeres diversas. Nombrando el racismo en la educación superior*. The chapter illustrates the intercultural and collective process of working, thinking, and writing together. Chapter VI presents the epistemic contributions of two Indigenous women professors at intercultural universities (IU) in Mexico as an example of the pluriverse (Escobar, 2012, 2014). The text was also cowritten with a Nahua and a Ch’ol women and published in the international journal *Globalizations*. It is a grounding example of how professional Indigenous women actively nurture post-development practices and conceptualisations. Finally, in Chapter VII, I reflect on the overall contributions of this thesis for advancing critical development studies. I argue for more grounded, feminist, decolonial perspectives on how to reflect and construct our daily lives as we cultivate relations and produce knowledge in a process of weaving rather than extracting.

The theoretical contributions of this thesis link various feminisms (Indigenous/communitarian/*territorial*, descolonial, decolonial, and Black intersectional) to critical development studies, aiming to challenge the dominant narratives and power dynamics. By incorporating these frameworks, I point to the complex interplay among gender, race, class, colonialism, and development processes. The decolonial and intersectional theoretical foundations of the thesis highlight the specific experiences and struggles of Indigenous women within higher education, shedding light on how they confront structural inequalities and marginalisation. I conclude by suggesting that the diverse knowledge systems, practices, and strategies of resistance I employed in the thesis offer valuable alternatives to conventional development studies and thereby suggest pathways for the decolonisation of educational structures, policies and practices.