Maya Women Organising in the Margins: A Post Decolonial Feminist Approach

Jennifer Manning

Technological University Dublin

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MAYA WOMEN ORGANISING IN THE MARGINS:  
A POST/DECOLONIAL FEMINIST APPROACH

Jennifer Manning, BSc., MSc.

Submitted to  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
For the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Supervisor: Dr Paul Donnelly, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Advisory Supervisor: Dr Miguel Imas, Kingston University

School of Marketing, College of Business  
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ABSTRACT

Maya Women Organising in the Margins: A Post/Decolonial Feminist Approach

The work and lives of marginalised indigenous women in the Global South are located outside of the dominant Western discourse of management and organisation. There is limited empirical engagement with marginalised indigenous women in the Global South within the organisation studies discipline. As a result, we know little about how they construct their identity as women and their organisation/organising experiences in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. My ethnographic research takes us into the lives of Maya women community weaving groups in the rural Highlands of Sololá, Guatemala, and explores the everydayness of their work and lives so to document their contribution to the organisation studies discipline. In so doing, my research provides space for marginalised Maya women to voice their own understanding of gender, identity and work from within the context of their social, cultural and historical location.

Applying the critical lenses of postcolonial theory, decolonial theory and feminist theory to organisation studies, my dissertation builds a post/decolonial feminist theoretical approach to offer an alternative to the field of organisation studies as it currently stands, a discipline dominated by theories that are implicitly male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial. My approach challenges an ontology of modernity and recognises different organising/organisation knowledges produced from the perspective of ‘Otherness’, and, thereby, contributes to the deconstruction of the mechanical transfer of organisation knowledge from the West to the Global South. Equally, my theoretical approach is built into my ethnographic approach to recognise the cultural, social and historical location of the Maya women participants, reflexively examine the self-Other relationship in this context, and address the complexities of positionality and representation.

My three-month ethnography finds that marginalised Maya women working together in community weaving groups have developed working practices that respect their indigenous worldviews and cater to the everydayness of being an indigenous Maya woman. The Maya women have reclaimed the value of community and collective action to address the challenges of living in the socio-economic margins. In sum, my dissertation demonstrates the knowledge and agency of Maya women and their capacity to create and organise.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the DIT's guidelines for ethics in research.

DIT has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Candidate Signature: ________________________________

Date: _______________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.

Paulo Freire¹.

As the journey of my doctoral candidacy comes to an end, I dedicate this dissertation to many people. First and foremost, this dissertation is written with my sincerest gratitude to the Maya women, and their families, in the Sololá Department of Guatemala who participated in this research and to whom I am deeply indebted. You welcomed me into your homes, lives, and work, and your strength of character, culture, and knowledge are the heart of this dissertation. You inspired me each and every day of this academic and personal journey. Muchas gracias.

To Paul Donnelly, my teacher, mentor, advisor, and friend, thank you for your tireless support and encouragement. Your curiosity, tenacity, and intellect have greatly influenced my growth as a teacher and researcher. And to Miguel Imas, thank you for pushing me to continually challenge and critique my thinking. I deeply value the development of my friendship with Paul and Miguel over the years, and equally, value our conversations which are always a source of inspiration for me.

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And finally, my family, to my parents Mary and John, and brothers and sisters (and in-laws), your love and support have shaped the person I am today and helped inspire me throughout this journey. To my husband Ed, without you, this dissertation would not exist, and I wouldn’t have made it to the end of this journey. Thank you for your patience! And, as always, thank you for your love, support, and encouragement in everything I do.
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Photographs are used for illustrative ethnographic purposes and not part of a Western gaze objectifying the Maya women participants, their families, their communities and their locations.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Taking the road less travelled brought me to the Highland region of Sololá, Guatemala, where, some years later, I would undertake my doctoral research. Although I began my doctoral studies in 2012, the story of my study begins in 2009 when I left my job working in the non-profit sector in Ireland and embarked upon a twenty-month journey travelling the world (or as much of the world as I could travel in this time). I travelled through India, taught English to school children in Xi’an, China, travelled around South-East Asia, went island hopping through Oceania, and volunteered for a social foundation in Guatemala while venturing around Central America and the Caribbean.

These formative experiences enabled me to immerse myself in new cultures and challenge myself, my beliefs and my understanding of our world, but, moreover, I came to learn that the people of the Global South / ‘Third World’ / ‘developing countries’ had much to offer. The many people of the many cultures I encountered during my travels required much more than the delivery of aid or being ‘taught’ how to develop by ‘doing business’ according to Western models. I came to an understanding that the Western world needed to listen to, and engage with, them as people in their own right. It is only through dialogue, which requires listening as much as talking, that we can advance mutual understanding.

With this newfound understanding and worldview, when I returned to Ireland to prepare scholarship applications and ready myself for PhD candidacy, I was confident that my area of research would be exploring the lived experiences of those working and organising in the socio-economic margins of the Global South. It was during the early months of my doctoral studies that my attention was drawn to critical
management studies (CMS) and, on reading more, I understood that, to the benefit of organisation studies, critical management studies encourages the questioning and critiquing of the authority and significance of mainstream thinking and practice. This disciplinary movement motivated me to move forward with my idea for my area of research. However, while critical management studies is gaining increasing attention in organisation studies, I found there to be a dearth in the contribution to CMS from those living and working in the Global South.

Equally, during this early stage, I reconnected with my contacts in Guatemala to explore options for undertaking research in the region where I had worked and became engaged in conversations with local, indigenous social foundations about the work of Maya women’s weaving groups and the impact these women’s groups have on Maya women, their families and their communities. These conversations, and my early engagement with critical management studies, encouraged me to pursue research that could make an original contribution to the discipline through the lived experiences and work of marginalised, indigenous Maya women. Bit by bit, I delved further and deeper into critical management studies and soon I became engaged in ongoing conversations about modernity by way of postcolonial theory and decolonial theory. I was motivated to engage with critical management studies and challenge the universality of our ontology of modernity by calling for the acceptance of different and alternative ontologies, epistemologies and worldviews into organisation studies. Thus, together with the Maya women’s groups, I could make a contribution to this fertile area of research by bringing into the discipline the knowledge and experiences of work from the social, cultural and historical location of marginalised Maya women.

A legacy of colonialism, marginalisation and discrimination has marginalised the indigenous Maya and reduced them to peasants and, in so doing, their knowledge,
authority, economic and, for Maya women, gender powers have been removed (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). My research takes us into the everydayness of life for marginalised, Maya women working together in community weaving groups, where they have developed working practices that respect their indigenous worldviews and cater to the everydayness of being an indigenous Maya woman. The Maya women have reclaimed the value of community and collective action to address the challenges of living in the socio-economic margins. Maya women are keepers and creators of knowledge, yet their history, experiences, culture, ways of working and languages are devalued and omitted from mainstream academic discourse.

Within organisation studies, the voices of marginalised, indigenous women are often ignored, and the full contribution they can make to the discipline is under-theorised and under-researched, hence under-valued. Thus, in this dissertation, I pursue a line of argument that there is a need to create a space in organisation studies, by means of decolonial critical management studies, that recognises the importance of marginalised, indigenous women’s capacity for intellectual autonomy and their own ‘seeing, doing and thinking’.

In this brief introduction, I begin by providing an overview of my research statement and intent, then identify concerns in the extant literature and provide an introduction to my theoretical and methodological approach, and conclude with a brief overview of the chapters to follow. However, before moving forward, I first want to clarify the terminology used throughout this dissertation.

**The Global South, the West, the Indigenous and the Marginalised**

The ‘Global South’ is a highly politically contested and debated discourse. It refers to the geographic, socio-economic and political divide that exists between the wealthy
countries of the economically ‘developed world’, known as the Global North or the West, and the countries that are referred to as ‘Third World’ or ‘developing nations’, primarily former colonies of the Global North that are seen as poor (Prashad, 2012). I use the term Global South throughout this dissertation to refer to the countries that are victims of, first, colonisation and, subsequently, capitalist mal-development, and, as such, they are considered economically developing or underdeveloped. The Global South includes the countries of Latin America and Africa, and much of Asia and the Middle-East. I use the term the West to refer to, primarily, Europe and North America, as opposed to the term the Global North, which includes Japan, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. Mohanty (2003) explains that the terms Global South and the West are used to distinguish between economically and politically marginalised nations and affluent, privileged nations.

The West created and universalised an ontology of modernity that denotes the socio-cultural centrality of European values and knowledge (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Said (1978) explains that the idea of the universality of a Western ontology is based on the displacement of those in the Global South from the effective history of modernity. Thus, history became a product of the West, and modernity became synonymous with the West by displacing the actions, ideas and history of those in the Global South (Said, 1978). In so doing, the West created ‘the Other’, which refers to the people living in the Global South. ‘The Other’ are those who do not fit the profile of modernity, that is, persons, and cultures, that are considered non-modern. Spivak (1988) uses the term subaltern to emphasise the position of the marginalised ‘Other’, which refers to those socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures. Thus, there can be ‘Others’ among ‘the Others’. Within the Global South, there are elite ethnic and social groups that maintain continuity with
the metrics of modernity and colonial privilege to construct ‘the Other’ within ‘the Other’ (Espinosa Miñoso, 2009).

The subaltern or marginalised ‘Other’ also includes indigenous persons. Indigenous, or those of the ‘Fourth World’, refers to people who were the original inhabitants of lands and, as a result of colonisation, find themselves politically weak, economically marginalised and culturally stigmatised (Dyck, 1986; Rao and Reddy, 2013). Indigenous ethnicities, communities and cultures inhabit both the Global North, for example, Western Settler Nations such as Canada, and the Global South, for example, the Maya of Guatemala. Smith (1999) argues that persons of the West use the terms indigenous and ‘the Other’ interchangeably, in which the name, face and identity of ‘the Other’ and the indigenous blend into one. The terms indigenous and ‘the Other’ collectivise many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different. Yet, ‘indigenous’ stands for a powerful signifier of oppositional identity, an umbrella term enabling people and communities to come together and transcend their own colonised contexts and experiences. Denied sovereignty and subjected to the colonisation of their lands and culture, indigenous people represent the unfinished business of decolonisation (Smith, 1999). Likewise, the Global South takes a decolonial stance to resist, defy and denounce the loss of dignity and human rights under the false promise of modernity imposed upon the indigenous and marginalised ‘Other’ by the West (Prashad, 2012).

Throughout this thesis, I use the term marginalised to describe the indigenous Maya women participants. Marginality is an elusive term, but, broadly understood, marginality refers to those on the socioeconomic, cultural, political, or geographic margins. Thus, those living in the periphery of society who are removed from the centre, that is, removed from the location where power is exercised (Cullen and Pretes,
2000). To refer to the indigenous Maya women as marginalised recognises the brutality of a history of colonisation, Civil War and subjugation that has determined the women’s socioeconomic position for them, and denied them cultural recognition and political representation. Together with this, the indigenous Maya women participants live in the rural, remote indigenous-inhabited Western Highlands of Sololá, Guatemala, and, thereby, they are physically removed from the centre and geographically marginalised.

Research Statement and Intent: Maya Women Organising

My intention for this dissertation is to facilitate the ‘speaking back’ of marginalised Maya women, such that they can take ownership over their identities and their ways of working and organising, and bring this into organisation studies discourse. To achieve this, I undertake a three-month ethnography in the rural, remote Western Highlands of Sololá, Guatemala. During this time, I immerse myself in indigenous Maya culture by way of: living in a predominately indigenous town; working intimately with the women, and their families, of two weaving groups; exploring the working practices of four additional Maya women’s weaving groups; and interviewing four local, indigenous social foundations that work with the women’s groups, supporting them in a financial and developmental capacity. Table 1.1 (overleaf) provides an overview of the organisation participants of this research.
Table 1.1: Overview of Organisation Participants

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<td>Molaj Ixoqi’ Artesanas Mayas</td>
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<td><strong>Additional Maya Women’s Groups</strong></td>
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<td>Guillermo Toriello Foundation</td>
<td>Sololá town, Sololá</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aj Quen</td>
<td>Chimaltenango town, Chimaltenango</td>
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My ethnographic immersion with two Maya women’s groups and the families of the women of these groups, as well as my engagement with various other women’s groups and local social foundation, enables me to explore the work and lives of marginalised, indigenous Maya women working together in backstrap weaving groups. Thus, this ethnographic research explores how Maya women living in the margins of Guatemala organise together. I seek to understand how their organising together is shaped by their social, cultural and historical location. Broadly understood, the objective of my ethnography is ‘to understand marginalised Maya women’s organising’.
The work and lives of marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South are located outside of the dominant Western discourse of management and organisation. There is limited empirical engagement with marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South within the organisation studies discipline. As a result, we know little about how they construct their identity as women and their organisation/organising experiences in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. My ethnographic research takes us into the lives of Maya women, their families, their groups and their communities, and explores the everydayness of their work and lives so to document their contribution to the discipline. In so doing, this dissertation provides space for marginalised Maya women to voice their own understanding of gender, identity and work from within the context of their social, cultural and historical location.

**Post/Decolonial Feminist Theoretical Justification**

Over two decades ago, Ferguson (1994), and somewhat more recently, Jaya (2001), argued that dominant forms of theorising in organisation studies are implicitly male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial, and called for more voices, politics and perspectives in our discipline. The subsequent decades have seen wider developments in this call, yet there is still a vast space to be filled with further empirical research and theoretical development (Harding, Ford, and Fotaki, 2013; Townsley, 2003). Opposing mainstream, positivist organisation studies traditions, my work is positioned within the critical management studies space of organisation studies. Critical management studies critiques and questions taken-for-granted assumptions to develop an alternative body of knowledge and enable researchers to reflect critically on the idea of progress in organisation studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Taskin and Willmott, 2008). Motivated by the provincialism and universalistic posturing of
management and organisation studies, critical management studies is a political project aiming to unmask power relations around which social and organisational lives are entwined (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Jack, Westwood, Srinivas, and Sardar, 2011). However, it is only with the critical lenses of postcolonial theory and decolonial theory, borrowed from cultural studies and development studies, among others, that the voices of those in the margins of the Global South can be heard, understood and incorporated into organisation studies.

In this dissertation, I position organisation studies within the critical lenses of postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theory to offer an alternative to mainstream organisation theorising. Postcolonial theory critiques Western representations of the Global South and reveals how knowledge is produced in and by the West and layered with imperialist and colonial power, referred to as the geopolitics of knowledge. In so doing, the West creates and sustains a politics of Western knowledge dominance and renders ‘the Other’ an object of knowledge for Western powers (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006; Ghandhi, 1998; Jack et al. 2011; Loomba, 1998; Prasad, 2003; Said, 1978; Westwood, 2006; Young 2001). Similarly, decolonial theory critiques Eurocentric hegemonic patterns of knowledge and its claims of universality. Decolonial theorists argue that coloniality, the legacy of colonialism, is an explicit strategy of epistemological control and domination, and that the world, and all knowledges constructed on the basis of an ontology of modernity, has become a universal ontology (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Escobar, 2007; 2010; Mignolo, 2007; 2009; 2011; and Quijano, 2000; 2007). Coloniality is the force of oppression and exploitation that dismantles ‘Other’ knowledges, social organisation and ways of life, and, thus, contributes to the creation of the cultural, socio-economic and politically marginalised ‘Other’ in the Global South (Mignolo, 2007). Both the
decolonial and postcolonial perspectives demand the acceptance of marginalised, different and alternative ontologies, epistemologies and worldviews, and ultimately call for the de-colonisation of knowledge. As explained by Bhambra (2014, p. 120):

\[\text{Postcolonial and decolonial theories are only made necessary as a consequence of the depredations of colonialism, but in their intellectual resistance to associated forms of epistemological dominance they offer more than simple opposition. They offer ... the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge.}\]

In sum, postcolonial and decolonial theorising in organisation studies seek to critique the representation and objectification of ‘the Other’ and facilitate space for those located outside of the geographic and epistemological ideology of Western centred discourse to craft new critical organisation theories and alternative understandings of organisation/organising. Thus, this theoretical perspective provides the space for marginalised, Maya women to voice their experiences of work and organisation/organising based on their worldviews and in the context of their social and cultural experiences, and, in so doing, contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by producing alternative organisational knowledge.

I add further depth and complexity to my theoretical approach by incorporating feminist theories, specifically, I integrate postcolonial feminist and decolonial feminist theories. Most feminist theories ‘explain’ women as if the reality of white, Western, middle-class women applied to all women from all cultures, classes, races and religions of the world (Mohanty, 1988; 2003; Parpart, 1993). Thus, Western feminist theorists seem to ignore the possibility of differences among women themselves. As such, the writings of feminist theorists in organisation studies have become generalised on the grounds of white Western women’s own experiences. Prominent postcolonial feminist theorists Spivak (1985; 1988; 1990) and Mohanty (1988; 1991; 2003) argue that Western feminist research has authority over the representations of Global South
women by categorising them as a universal subject without reference to the specific historical, socio-economic and geo-political realities encountered by non-Western women in the Global South. In such representations, Global South women are assumed as a coherent homogenous group of women characterised by their feminine gender (sexually constrained) and their being ‘Third World’, that is, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised, etc. Equally, decolonial feminism centres postcolonial feminism in a Latin American cultural, social and historical context. Decolonial feminism incorporates the voices, experiences and knowledge of indigenous women in the margins by engaging in debates about coloniality, indigenous identity and gender (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Schiwy, 2007). Lugones (2010) argues that the epistemology and ontology of colonised women need to be recognised, their discourses acknowledged, and their practices respected.

Approaching organisation studies from a post/decolonial feminist theoretical lens offers an alternative to mainstream organisation theorisation by challenging an ontology of modernity and providing space for a different organising/organisation knowledge from the perspective of ‘Otherness’. However, this dissertation cannot ignore that I am a white European woman engaging in research with marginalised Maya women in rural Guatemala. To ensure I can undertake this research effectively and facilitate the ‘speaking back’ of marginalised Maya women through a post/decolonial feminist theoretical lens, I need an ethnographic approach that enables me to engage with the Maya women without perpetuating their ‘Otherness’ and encourages me at all times to accept the women’s knowledge, cultural practices and work experiences without imposing a Western ontology of modernity. To this end, I build my post/decolonial feminist theoretical approach into my critical, reflexive
approach to ethnography. In effect, a post/decolonial feminist theoretical approach reconfigures a critical, reflexive ethnography to recognise that my research is concerned with: power and politics in research and the production of knowledge; the representations of marginalised, ‘Other’ women; the development of reciprocal relationships; and the researcher’s voice, place and privilege. In sum, these concerns identify my position of privilege in the field and my right, and ability, to represent the women of this research and their knowledge as the key challenges in undertaking this research.

Informed by post/decolonial feminist theories, I argue for the need to decolonise organisation studies and reconceptualise ethnographic research if we are to engage with the marginalised ‘Other’ and bring forward an alternative organisation studies discourse from the perspective of Otherness. This approach contributes to the deconstruction of the mechanical transfer of organisational knowledge from the West by recognising the specific experiences of work associated with traditional, non-modern and alternative ways of organising by women in the Global South to produce original indigenous knowledge. That is to say, by exploring Maya women organising in the margins using this lens, I can demonstrate the knowledge and agency of Maya women and their capacity to create and organise.

**Dissertation Outline**

In expanding on the above discussion, in Chapter Two I call for the decolonisation of organisation studies. I outline the need for criticality and reflexivity in organisation studies, review the existing literature on postcolonial and decolonial theory, distinguish between the theoretical positions and explore their contribution to organisation studies. In particular, I provide detailed insights into the concepts of
modernity, coloniality of power and the geopolitics of knowledge, and emphasise the importance of creating a space in organisation studies discourse for alternative, non-Western knowledge and experiences.

In Chapter Three, I turn to feminist theorising in organisation studies and critique organisation studies from feminist perspectives. Providing a review of feminist theorising in organisation studies, I discuss how hegemonic Western feminist discourse privileges the experiences of white, Western women, and, by this means, I introduce postcolonial feminist theory that challenges Western feminist homogenisation of women in the Global South. There follows an introduction to decolonial feminist theory and a review of the concepts of coloniality of gender and indigenous feminism. This chapter emphasises the importance of providing space in organisation studies for marginalised, indigenous women to voice their own conceptualisations of gender, identity and organisation from their different social, cultural and historical locations.

Chapter Four introduces my philosophical and methodological approach. I follow a bricolage approach to research, which is an interpretive and subjective approach that positions the researcher in the research process to address the complexities of the lived world and the complications of power. I then discuss the development of my study design and how it was influenced by my bricolage and theoretical approach. In this chapter, in particular, I engage in postcolonial, decolonial and feminist debates that problematize the position of the researcher, and discuss how I address the complexities of positionality and representation.

In Chapter Five, I introduce the Maya of Guatemala. Focusing primarily on Maya women, I provide insight into their social, cultural and historical location. In this chapter, I provide context to the lives of the Maya women participants. Exploring their
ancient past of colonisation and their recent past of Civil War and genocide, I discuss the cultural resilience of the Maya of Guatemala. However, while Maya cultural identity has remained resilient, a history of colonisation, subjugation and Civil War has produced a socially and economically dislocated Maya population in Guatemala. In particular, I discuss how this has led to Maya women being the most systematically excluded and discriminated against demographic in Guatemalan society.

In Chapters Six and Seven, I introduce the narratives of the Maya women participants. Chapter Six explores the lived experiences and everydayness of being a marginalised, Maya woman. This chapter provides a space for the Maya women participants to ‘speak back’ and voice their own understanding of their identity and gender. The Maya women contribute to the decoloniality of gender by challenging commonly held assumptions regarding their capabilities, struggles, experiences, identity and way of life. Next, in Chapter Seven, I explore the process of organising from the experiences of Maya women working together in the margins and the impact of their organising together. The women’s narratives give legitimacy to their experiences and their capacity to create and organise. This chapter contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by recognising the knowledge contributions the Maya women participants can make to the discipline.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I present the conclusion of my dissertation. In reflecting on my work, I discuss and interpret of my empirical findings, and provide insight into the implications of my dissertation. In this chapter, I also outline the challenges and limitations of my research and provide direction for future research. In sum, I address how my work contributes to the advancement of organisation studies.
CHAPTER TWO
DECOLONISING ORGANISATION STUDIES

I follow Clegg and Hardy’s (2006) questioning of organisation studies; the authors argue that there is an ongoing need to reflect on organisation studies, question the direction of the discipline and critique the development of organisation theory. Clegg and Hardy (2006, p. 426) argue that

organizations are empirical objects, such that we ‘see’ something when we see an organization, but each of us may see something different, see that thing seen differently, and see different things at different times, not just because of material or representational change over time in the thing seen but also, of course, in ways of seeing.

Indeed, I argue that our understanding of organisation is subjective and reflective of our social, cultural and historical location. In this literature review, I contest the modernist Western domination of organisation and organising and question how organisation studies discourse is implicated in the reproduction of the modernist Western perspective of organisation and organising. I draw from organisation theorists like Weick (1969) and focus my attention on the process of organising, rather than the entities of organisations. That is to say, I view organisation as a continuous process out of which a sense of organisation/organising unfolds and is enacted (Clegg and Hardy, 2006).

In this chapter, I call for the decolonisation of organisation studies. I first outline the need for criticality and reflexivity in organisation studies and briefly detail the contribution of the critical management studies movement. In the following section, I introduce postcolonial theory and provide insight into how postcolonial theorising can benefit organisation studies. There follows an examination of the different theoretical
perspectives in postcolonial and decolonial theorising, including the concepts of modernity, coloniality of power and the geopolitics of knowledge. I then emphasise the importance of creating a space in organisation studies discourse for alternative, non-Western knowledge and experiences, and using the concept of border thinking I call for the decolonisation of organisation studies to create space for a pluriversal understanding of organisation/organising.

**Criticality in Organisation Studies**

Clegg and Hardy (2006) reflect on the developments in organisation thought and theory and note that there is a growing realisation that much of current organisation studies theory and research does not adequately capture emergent ideas and perspectives of and within organisation/organising. The authors explain that achievements in organisation studies are an effect of theoretical privilege, and this privileged position does not acknowledge other possible experiences of organisation. The organisational world is part of the social world, and thereby there is a need for the grounding of theoretical claims in local and specific circumstances not only in the environments of those in a theoretically privileged position (Clegg and Hardy, 2006; Hardy and Clegg, 1997; Weick, 1999; 2002). To provide alternatives to mainstream privileged perspectives of organisation/organising Calás and Smircich (1999), Clegg and Hardy (2006), and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) encourage organisation theorists and researchers to engage in reflexivity. Reflexive practices force researchers to examine their relationship to the research process and become aware of the social, cultural and historical positioning of their research context.
Reflexivity in organisation studies is a relatively new approach to the discipline, which, until recently, has left little space for questioning the privileged position of researchers and theorists. The questioning of organisation studies can benefit the discipline by creating space for an understanding of knowledge-making and a consideration of the cultural, social and political processes whereby research is conducted and knowledge produced. Thus, the role of reflection and the process of reflexivity are essential to the epistemological development of organisation studies (Clegg and Hardy, 2006; Jacques, 1992). As such, there is a need to question, to be reflexive and to be critical within and of organisation studies if we are to broaden and deepen our understanding of organisation and organising.

Critical management studies is a theoretical movement that encourages the questioning and critiquing of the authority and significance of mainstream thinking and practice in management and organisation studies. The movement is critical of established social practices and institutional arrangements and challenges domination, for example, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, etc., by developing alternative ways of understanding and performing management and organisation (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009; Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007).

A pluralistic theoretical tradition of the social sciences critical management studies constitutes a broad and diverse range of positions. The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, drawing on Marx and Gramsci, has had considerable influence on the development of the discipline of critical management studies. The thinking of these theorists helped frame critical management studies as an alternative to mainstream and positivists management and organisation studies. Additionally, the critical thinking of feminism, cultural studies, environmentalism, queer theory, postcolonialism, among
others, have grown critical management studies into a pluralistic, multidisciplinary movement (Alvesson et al., 2009; Fournier and Grey, 2000).

The theoretical pluralism and multidisciplinary nature of critical management studies result in conflicting intellectual traditions. Indeed, critical management studies has been challenged by conflicting theories and torn between the different epistemological and ontological positions of its various theoretical traditions. Nonetheless, the movement has been enriched by this variety of critical thinking that has inspired new direction and renewed impetus for theorising and researching alternative forms of management and organisation (Alvesson et al., 2009; Fournier and Grey, 2000). Critical management studies is not a single monolithic approach, but a liberal theoretical approach open to new ways of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising. The diversity and plurality of critical management studies constitute the very criticality of the theoretical movement (Taskin and Willmott, 2008).

Critical management studies offers a range of alternatives to mainstream organisation theorising. This approach critiques and questions taken-for-granted assumptions to develop an alternative body of knowledge and enable researchers to reflect critically on the idea of progress in organisation studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Taskin and Willmott, 2008). Motivated by the provincialism and universalistic posturing of management and organisation studies, critical management studies is a political project aiming to unmask power relations around which social and organisational lives are entwined (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Jack et al., 2011). Alvesson et al. (2009) explain that, instead of being progressive forces of emancipation and change, mainstream, positivist organisation theories have become a means of sustaining forms of exploitation and oppression institutionalised in the status quo, whereas critical management studies encourages critical thinking, reflexivity and
questioning of the status quo. The underlying philosophical assumptions of the traditional positivist approach to organisation studies and the assumptions of the critical management studies movement are compared in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Philosophical Positions of Positivism and Criticality in Organisation Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic assumptions</th>
<th>Positivist approach to organisation studies</th>
<th>Critical management studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim of inquiry</strong></td>
<td>Explanation: seeks to explain and predict what happens in the organisational world by searching for patterns and relationships.</td>
<td>Critique and question: seeks to challenge the status quo and mainstream thinking of management and organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong></td>
<td>Reality as a concrete structure: Organisation as a single, tangible, fragmentable phenomenon of interest.</td>
<td>Reality is produced by people and is shaped and influenced by social, cultural and historical dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge of the organisational world is deductive and derived from scientific methods of research.</td>
<td>Knowledge is inductive: the foundations of knowledge of a given context surround an object of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General philosophical perspective</strong></td>
<td>Functionalist</td>
<td>Critical theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Burell and Morgan, 1979; Fournier and Grey, 2000; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Morgan and Smircich, 1980)
Opposing mainstream, positivist organisation studies traditions, I position my thesis within the critical management studies spectrum of organisation studies. Specifically, as critical management studies is a broad, umbrella movement within organisation studies, I locate my research within the field of postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory is one of the most significant theoretical developments in organisations studies in more recent times and offers critical management studies a social, cultural and historical critique of the colonial and imperial past and present of organisation theory and practice (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Prasad, 2003; Westwood and Jack, 2007). Postcolonial theory encourages organisation theorists to confront the geopolitics of organisation studies by examining the cultural and geopolitical asymmetrical relationship between the West and the Rest ('the Other') (Brewis and Jack, 2009).

**Positioning Organisation Studies in Postcolonial Theory**

Postcolonial theory spans many disciplines and has only recently been adopted in organisation studies. Across diverse disciplines, postcolonial theory critiques Western representations of non-Western worlds and reveals how knowledge is produced in and by the West and layered with imperialist and colonial power, referred to as the geopolitics of knowledge. In so doing, the West creates and sustains a politics of Western knowledge dominance and renders the Rest ('the Other') an object of knowledge for Western powers (Ashcroft et al., 2006; Ghandhi, 1998; Jack et al. 2011; Loomba, 1998; Prasad, 2003; Said, 1978; Westwood, 2006; Young 2001).

Organisation studies has seen growing use of postcolonial theory by leading organisation and management theorists (e.g., Alcadipani, Khan, Gantman, and
Nkomo, 2012; Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Banerjee and Prasad, 2008; Calás and Smircich, 1999; 2006; Frenkel and Shenhav 2003; 2006; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Imas and Weston, 2012; Jack, Calás, Nkomo, and Peltonen, 2008; Jack et al., 2011; Khan and Koshul, 2011; Mir and Mir, 2012; Nkomo, 2011; Prasad, 2003; UI Haq and Westwood, 2012; Westwood, 2006; Westwood and Jack, 2007) in leading organisation studies academic journals (e.g., *Organization* and *Organization Studies*), as well as a broad range of postcolonial scholarly presentations at various leading international critical management studies conferences, (e.g., The Critical Management Studies division of the Academy of Management Conference, The European Group for Organizational Studies, The International Critical Management Studies Conference, The Latin American and European Meeting on Organization Studies). Even so, postcolonial theorising in organisation studies is an emerging field of study, and there is a need to deepen and broaden postcolonial research within the organisation studies discipline (Jack et al., 2011).

In Frenkel and Shenhav’s (2003; 2006) attempt to decolonise organisation studies, the authors find that Western bodies of knowledge repeatedly maintain a description of the non-West as inferior cultures in need of modernisation. In so doing, Western academic discourse creates differences between the West and ‘the Other’, which accords Western academics with the right to represent ‘the Other’. Frenkel and Shenhav (2003) call for further incorporation of postcolonial theory in organisation studies and argue that there is a need to examine the description and representation of ‘the Other’ to provide space for the pluralising of organisation studies discourse. To this end, postcolonial theory can offer another way to conceptualise organisation.

Jack et al. (2011, p. 278) explain that postcolonial theory “is a commitment to questioning the prevailing ontologies, epistemologies and methods of the academic
centre and offering alternatives to neo-positivistic and neo-modernist perspectives characteristic of the field [of organisation studies]”. Postcolonial theory can develop “fresh insights about power, control and resistance in organisation” (Prasad, 2003, p. 32). Ul-Haq and Westwood (2012) argue that Western knowledge dominance in organisation studies has resulted in a dearth of indigenous theorising and alternative epistemologies in ways of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation. The postcolonial theoretical perspective interrogates the universalistic assumptions of organisation studies and creates space for alternative ontologies and epistemologies. In sum, postcolonial theory in organisation studies seeks to critique the representation and objectification of ‘the Other’ and facilitate space for organisation theorists located outside of the geographic and epistemological ideology of Western centred discourse to craft new critical organisation theories and alternative understandings of organisation/organising (Mir and Mir, 2012; Prasad, 2003).

From Postcolonial Theory to Decolonial Theory

Postcolonial theorising developed from the seminal work of diasporic academics from India and the Middle-East, most notably Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994), focusing on the consequences of colonisation, decolonisation and, primarily, culture, identity, and socio-economics post-colonisation (Bhambra, 2014). Decolonial theorising followed postcolonial theory, emerging from the modernity/coloniality research programme in Latin America led by prominent theorists Walter Mignolo (Mignolo, 2007; 2009; 2011), Arturo Escobar (Escobar, 2007; 2010), Enrique Dussel (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006) and Anibal Quijano (Quijano, 2000; 2007), among others. Decolonial theorising developed from the work of Latin American academics is strongly linked to works in development theory, focuses on the consequences of
colonialism and coloniality, and spans a much longer time scale than postcolonial theorising (Bhambra, 2014).

Mignolo (2007) argues that although much of decolonial theorising emerged following postcolonial theory, decolonial theory precedes postcolonial theory historically because the concept of decoloniality materialised at the same time as colonisation of the Americas in the sixteenth century. Postcolonial theorising focuses on Europe’s colonisation of the Orient (the East) from the nineteenth century. However, decolonial scholars consider the colonisation of the Americas a precondition for postcolonial analysis, arguing that without the colonisation of the Americas in the sixteenth century there would have been no subsequent colonisation of the Orient, and thereby no postcolonial theorising (Mignolo, 2007; Bhambra, 2014). In sum, postcolonial and decolonial theorising belong to two separate geographic regions with different timelines and experiences of colonisation.

Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui (2008) present a collection of decolonial critiques that demonstrate the political, theoretical and methodological positions of the foremost scholars from Latin America as related to the postcolonial condition. The key argument presented by Chanady (2008), Coronil (2008) and Hulme (2008), among others in Moraña et al. (2008), against postcolonial theory is that postcolonial theorising addresses the colonial encounter as actualised in direct, formal European rule that climaxed in the early twentieth century. However, the Americas have been ‘independent’ for almost 200 years, and power relations have assumed an array of contradictory postures, resulting in uneven development and differences in social (in)equality across the Americas. The authors argue that postcolonial theory has become an extremely broad field that homogenises cultures and colonial experiences.
and, moreover, does not encompass the historical, social and cultural uniqueness of the Americas.

Decolonial theorists claim that Latin America has remained absent from discussions in postcolonial theory, which are primarily situated in the West about the Middle-East, India and South Asia, and argue that postcolonial theory could have been enriched by a better dialogue with Latin American academics, particularly because of Latin America’s prior and distinct form of European colonisation (Bhambra, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2011; Hulme, 2008; Salvatore, 2010). Mignolo (2007) contends that postcolonial theory is an extension of Western European critical theory, particularly the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida, applied to the East. Postcolonial theory emerged from Western academic institutions as a critical practice dedicated to unmasking the colonial origins of European modernity that legitimised British and French colonialism from the age of Enlightenment. As such, postcolonial theorising is mostly located in the English-speaking world directed at thoughts, ideas and culture produced from the 18th century (Grosfoguel, 2011; Salvatore, 2010). To this end, decolonial theorists argue that there is a dearth in postcolonial theorising as it has largely ignored the distinctive colonial experiences in Latin America and the origins of modernity dating back to fifteenth-sixteenth century Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. In sum, the fundamental distinction between the two geographical and theoretical groups is their arguments about the origins of modernity (Bhambra, 2014; Salvatore, 2010).

The Origins of Modernity

Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) explain modernity as a phenomenon that denotes the sociocultural centrality of Europe from the moment America was discovered (1492). The authors maintain that modernity is founded in the convergence of three related
processes: capitalism as an economic and civilising system for which people consider there is no alternative; colonialism of epistemic, cultural, political and social systems; and Eurocentrism, the universality of European ontology, now equalled by Americanocentrism. Modernity is specific to “the context of Eurocentric hegemonic patterns of knowledge and its claims of universality” (Misoczky, 2011, p. 347).

Similarly, Said (1978) explains that the idea of the universality of a Western ontology is based on the displacement of ‘the Other’ from the effective history of modernity. Thus, history became a product of the West. In displacing actions, ideas and history of ‘Others’, modernity became synonymous with the West and removed the very question of ‘the Other’ in history.

Essentially, modernity is based on the civilising and developing missions of various European countries with the objective to enable non-Westernised countries to progress and modernise towards the European ontology (Ascione, 2014; Quijano, 2007). According to decolonial theorising, this started with the colonisation of the Americas in the fifteenth century, contrasting to postcolonial theorising that only considers the colonisation of countries in the Asian and African continents from the eighteenth century. Modernity, therefore, refers to the crystallisation of discourses, practices and institutions that have developed over the past few hundred years from certain ontological and cultural commitments of Europe (Misoczky, 2011; Escobar, 2010). Escobar (2010) explains that the world and all knowledges constructed on the basis of an ontology of modernity became a universal ontology, and this universal ontology has gained coherence over certain constructs and practices, for example, the primacy of humans over other humans, animals and nature, the idea of the individual separate from the community, the cultural constructs of ‘the economy’ and ‘the market’, and implementation of capitalism as a socio-natural form. In sum, modernity
refers to the dominant type of Euro-modernity. This does not mean that modernity is one and unchanging. There are other forms of modernity, however, “in universalising itself and treating other groups as different and inferior through knowledge-power relations, the dominant form of Euro-modernity has denied the ontological difference of the others” (Escobar, 2010, p. 9).

Bhambra (2014) explains that the critical issue to emerge from the work of decolonial scholars is to pull the time horizon of debates on modernity back to the fifteenth century and to call for postcolonial theorists to consider the impact of modernity in a Latin American context. Notwithstanding their temporal and geographic differences, both postcolonial and decolonial theorists understand modernity as the universal European ontology enforced on countries, cultures and peoples during colonisation, while eradicating alternative and indigenous knowledges, cultures and ontologies.

**Modernity/Coloniality**

Despite the elimination of direct political, social and cultural domination established by the Europeans over the conquered in Latin America, Africa, the Middle-East and Asia, the relationship between Europe (and their Euro-North American descendants) and ‘the Others’ continues to be one of domination (Hulme, 2008; Quijano, 2007). Rather than direct imposition from the outside, the universality of a Eurocentric ontology of modernity is maintained within post-colonial countries through the hegemony of the socioeconomic interests of dominant social and ethnic groups. In other words, as argued by decolonial and postcolonial theorists, modernity is maintained by colonisation’s successor, Western imperialism, that is, the current economic dominance and political power of Western nations over post-colonial and Global South countries (Quijano, 2007; Said, 1978; Ul-Haq and Westwood, 2012).
Modernity has transformed cultural Europeanisation and Americanisation into aspiration, that is, the desire to achieve the same material benefits and power as the West via ‘development’. Escobar (2007), Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2007) term this ‘coloniality’. The concept of coloniality is an essential contribution of decolonial theorising and a primary distinction from the contributions of postcolonial theory. Decolonial theorising focuses on the concept of coloniality in Latin America largely because the forms and effects of cultural colonisation experienced in Latin America are different than that of other colonised countries and cultures. As explained by Quijano (2007, p. 170),

The cultural repression and the massive genocide together turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality; that is, deprived of their own patterns of formalized, objectivised, intellectual, and plastic or visual expression. … Latin America is, without doubt, the most extreme case of cultural colonisation by Europe.

Coloniality is a broad category that stands for the post-colonial in Latin America, but without the ‘post’ and emphasis on the ‘de’ (Bhambra, 2014; Salvatore, 2010). Decolonial theorists use the prefix ‘de’ to demonstrate that colonisation is not in the past, as is inferred with the prefix ‘post’ used by postcolonial theorists, but still endured in the form of coloniality.

Mignolo (2011) and Restrepo and Escobar (2005) explain that coloniality and modernity are mutually dependent phenomena: coloniality is constitutive of modernity and there can be no modernity without coloniality. Coloniality refers to “the pattern of power which has emerged as a result of colonialism” and is an explicit strategy of epistemological control and domination (Misoczky, 2011, p. 347). Modernity is presented as a rhetoric of salvation to mask coloniality. Coloniality is the force of oppression and exploitation, as explained by Mignolo (2007, p. 162), “moderni,
capitalism and coloniality are aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority, of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity”.

Developed by Quijano (2000; 2007), the ‘coloniality of power’ is the interrelational of four domains of power and control: control of economy (e.g., land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); control of authority (e.g., government, institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (e.g., family, education); and control of subjectivity and knowledge (e.g., epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). Quijano (2007) argues that the coloniality of power is the persistent categorical and discriminatory discourse that is reflected in the social and economic structures of modern post-colonial societies, particularly Latin America. The coloniality of power simultaneously dismantles ‘Other’ knowledges, social organisation and ways of life (Mignolo, 2007). Thus, coloniality has created the culturally, socio-economically and politically marginalised of the Global South.

**The Coloniality of Knowledge**

The coloniality of power, specifically the control of subjectivity and knowledge, as understood and developed by decolonial theorists Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2007), is comparable to postcolonial theorists’ concern regarding the geopolitics of knowledge. Indeed, the terms coloniality of knowledge and geopolitics of knowledge are often used interchangeably within post/de-colonial discussions (e.g., Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Mignolo, 2002; Misoczky, 2011; Ul-Haq and Westwood, 2012). The geopolitics and coloniality of knowledge are concerned with the intellectual hegemony of knowledge produced in the West following the practices of Euro-Western knowledge production and dissemination. The coloniality of knowledge argues that the West’s knowledge system attained dominance through participation in colonisation and sustained this dominance through persistent intellectual and cultural imperialism.
that has marginalised and, in some cases, eradicated alternative knowledge systems and ways of organising (Alcadipani and Faria, 2014; Calás and Smircich, 2003; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Jack et al., 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Misoczky, 2011; Quijano, 2007; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; UI-Haq and Westwood, 2012; Walsh, 2007).

Ibarra-Colado (2006) explains that the coloniality of knowledge is a means of control by detaching those in the Global South from their native condition and capacity for autonomous thought. Coloniality of knowledge has enabled Western-centric intellectualism and imperialism to flourish, in so doing, creating unequal core-periphery relationships between institutions, academics and systems of knowledge between the West and the Rest (UI-Haq and Westwood, 2012). UI-Haq and Westwood (2012) argue that academic centres are located in the West, and this is where the terms and categories of academic debates and discourse are determined. Therefore, the West remains at the centre producing and disseminating knowledge and the Rest are the nations consuming knowledge.

Academic discourse has become a construct of the West. Thus, the coloniality of knowledge is maintained through Western academic institutions. In the context of organisation studies, Alcadipani et al. (2012), Ibarra-Colado (2006; 2008) and UI-Haq and Westwood (2012) explain that this is evident in a number of ways. First, the widespread mechanical transfer of academic programmes and textbooks from Europe and America, for example, by organisation ‘gurus’, ensures the reproduction of their ideology. Further to this, the implementation of case studies to teach organisation studies follows a stereotypical European or American businessperson: white, male, liberal, upper/middle-class, heterosexual. Additionally, non-Western local elites, both students and academics, aspire to Western academic institutions. These non-Western academics mostly limit themselves to mainstream theories and methods taken from the
West and implement them in their environments. Global South academics in the West adopt Western epistemologies to the point that they see little value in their own organisation and management traditions, ignoring or reshaping them so to become palatable to Western organisation theories. Finally, the dominance of the English language in academia places many academics from the Global South at a disadvantage and creates barriers for them publishing in leading academic journals, of which the top ‘international’ journals only consider knowledge produced in the English language.

In sum, Global South academics have had to adopt Western (Eurocentric and Americanocentric) theories and practices, thereby facilitating and perpetuating the coloniality of knowledge. This is not to say that Global South scholars are not aware of the coloniality of knowledge. Many scholars acknowledge this but note that Western frameworks give them recognition in the international arena. In other words, “to belong in ‘the international community’, you must speak the Centre’s language, use its concepts, discuss its agendas and perform to the stereotype of the ‘imperfect South’ while keeping ‘a polite silence’ on the real causes of your problems” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 471).

**Decolonial and Postcolonial Theorising**

While decolonial and postcolonial theorising offer different geographic perspectives regarding the experiences and consequences of colonisation and different temporal locations pertaining to the origins of modernity, nonetheless, their theoretical perspectives offer more similarities than differences. Both the decolonial and postcolonial perspectives demand the acceptance of marginalised, different and alternative ontologies, epistemologies and worldviews, and ultimately call for the de-colonisation of knowledge. As explained by Bhambra (2014, p. 120),
Postcolonialism and decoloniality are only made necessary as a consequence of the depredations of colonialism, but in their intellectual resistance to associated forms of epistemological dominance they offer more than simple opposition. They offer … the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge.

Escobar (2007) explains that while decolonial theory distinguishes itself from postcolonial theory, it finds inspiration from a variety of sources including, postcolonial theory, feminist theory and European critical theories, and many decolonial theorists operate outside of Latin America. Decolonial and postcolonial theory should be seen as another way of thinking, countering modernity and broadening non-Western modes of thought and ways of ‘seeing and doing’ (Escobar, 2007). Both postcolonial and decolonial theorists maintain that modernity and the coloniality of knowledge enforce Western organisation discourse and practices upon the lives and experiences of those in the non-West, dictating a Western tradition of organisational thinking that defines how and what should be studied and practised (Imas and Weston, 2012). The application of decolonial and postcolonial theories provides a space for reflection while also challenging organisation theorists’ thinking regarding the idea of progress in organisation studies (Calás and Smircich, 2003; 2006; Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

**Decolonial and Postcolonial Theorising in Organisation Studies: Voices of ‘the Other’**

There is little indigenous theorising of alternative epistemologies and ontologies in mainstream organisation studies. However, there is a space coming from both decolonial and postcolonial perspectives to challenge the coloniality of knowledge and provide alternative knowledges and voices in organisation studies discourse. As noted
above, motivated by the provincialism and universalistic posturing in organisation studies, the critical management studies movement has adopted postcolonial theory as part of its criticality of organisation studies (Jack et al., 2011; UI Haq and Westwood, 2012). However, there is significantly less contribution from the Latin American decoloniality field in both organisation studies and critical management studies. Ibarra-Colado’s (2008) discussion of critical management studies in Lain America concludes that the epistemic coloniality of organisation theory and practice is often ignored. Ibarra-Colado (2008) argues for organisation and management scholars in Latin America to contribute to the critical management studies movement from a decolonial perspective while also calling for the integration of decolonial theory into critical management studies. The author emphasises the importance of decolonial theorising in organisation studies to recognise the specific experiences of management and organisation associated with traditional, communitarian or non-modern ways of organising and to produce original and alternative indigenous knowledge so to break the mechanical transfer of organisation knowledge from the West. Indeed, Faria (2013) calls for a decolonial management studies movement in which many knowledges and ways of organising can co-exist.

A Postcolonial Interrogative Space in Organisation Studies

As argued by Calás and Smircich (2003; 2006), much of organisation theory, no matter how global, only represents the ways of thinking of certain people and not others. However, recent interest in postcolonial theory within critical management studies provides an opportunity to address how the marginalised of the Global South organise their work and their lives, while also providing a space for ‘the Other’ to restore their own agency in organisational life (Mir and Mir, 2012). Mir and Mir (2012) note that over the past two decades there has been an increase in the movement to decentre
Western ideology and epistemology in organisation studies, in which non-Western, anti-colonial and anti-imperial organisation subjectivities lie at the centre and Western ideas are moved to the periphery.

Indeed, there are a number of highly-cited, peer-reviewed exemplars of postcolonial theorising of organisation studies in the critical management studies movement. Khan and Koshul (2011) provide a contribution to postcolonial theory with a critical narrative from the Global Muslim South that resists Western global capitalism. Similarly, UI-Haq and Westwood (2012) find from their review of organisation studies literature that Islamic organisation knowledge is blatantly absent. The authors argue that despite the critical management studies movement and the growing use of postcolonial theory in organisation studies, there is still a limited contribution from the Global South. They further argue that the claims of increased diversity in organisation studies are groundless as the field is still monopolistically dominated by (mostly) white, male voices from the West. Srinivas's (2012) analysis of modern Indian management finds that it is futile to search for authentic indigenous knowledge in a world interpellated with the logic of global capitalism and Western modernity. Nkomo's (2011) report on a post- and anti-colonial reading of representations of African management challenges postcolonial theorists to avoid the traps of empty theorising that are disconnected from the organisational lives of those in the Global South and encourages an examination of the more insidious Eurocentric assumptions. And Islam's (2011) theoretical review of the anthropophagic (cannibalistic) appropriation of indigenous culture in Brazil argues that there is a need for in-depth case studies to contribute to organisation theory grounded in Brazilian identity. For Islam (2011), anthropophagism works as a metaphor to discuss the relations between the Global South and West.
Postcolonial theory has contributed to the increasing critique of the ethnocentricity and homogeneity of organisation studies, and many organisation theorists are now calling for a greater reflection on the production and dissemination of organisational knowledge (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Mir and Mir, 2012). Jack et al. (2011) note that postcolonial theorising interrogates organisation studies and moves the field beyond the privileged elite in Western academic centres. However, much of postcolonial theorising in organisation studies is still coming from the voices of those located in Western academic centres, and there is limited empirical research contributing to this space from the voices of those living, working and organising in the Global South. In other words, postcolonial theorists remain largely in the English-speaking world critiquing organisation studies and theorising about ‘the Other’.

Border Thinking: Decolonising Organisation Studies

With the exception of the few scholars noted in this section, there are limited contributions from Latin American decolonial theorists in organisation studies. Unlike postcolonial theory, decolonial theorising has remained primarily in the Global South with much of its theorisation published in Spanish and Portuguese. This creates barriers for decolonial theorists to publish in leading academic journals as the geopolitics of knowledge in organisation studies only legitimises knowledge produced in English.

Ibarra-Colado (2006) explains that organisation studies and practices, in the context of an ontology of modernity, do not acknowledge non-Western experience, and subsequently, there are no recognised modes of organising in these regions. Alcadipani et al. (2012) find that the limited engagement with indigenous organisational knowledge in the Global South has largely been categorised and determined through the gaze of the West. There is a need to create a space in
organisation studies that recognises the importance of ‘the Other’s’ capacity for intellectual autonomy and their own seeing, doing and thinking, thereby constructing a different organisational knowledge “from the perspective of Otherness” (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 466). The organisational realities of ‘the Other’ need to be voiced from their own social, cultural and historical location. Imas and Weston (2012) find from their research in Brazil and Zimbabwe that those living in the socioeconomic margins of the Global South construct their organisation experiences in their everyday struggle for survival. The authors demonstrate the importance of providing space for the voices of those organising in the margins to produce alternative organisational knowledge. Decolonial theory and its theorisation of modernity/coloniality can enrich the interrogative space in postcolonial theorising by contributing to organisation studies from the geopolitical Latin American space. Incorporating different perspectives and alternative knowledges produced from the epistemic colonial difference decolonial theory can contribute to the de-colonisation of organisation studies (Misoczky, 2011).

Decolonial theorists Alcadipani and Faria (2014), Faria (2013), Grosfoguel (2009; 2011), Ibarra-Colada (2006; 2008) and Misoczky (2011) draw on Mignolo (2005; 2007; 2011) and Mignolo and Tlostanova’s (2006) concept of border thinking when discussing the decolonisation of organisation studies. Border thinking is based on the idea that the lived experiences of those who have been excluded from the production of knowledge by modernity exist at or outside the borders of the coloniality of power. That is, it is based on the idea that thinking is inevitably located. The border is defined by epistemic and geographic difference, and border thinking is understood as thinking from the outside using alternative knowledge traditions and alternative
languages of expression. Border thinking is another thinking from another location developed by those in the Global South who build agency from colonial difference.

‘Critical border thinking’ ... is grounded in the experiences of the colonies and subaltern empires. Consequently, it provides the epistemology that was denied by imperial expansion. ‘Critical border thinking’ also denies the epistemic privilege of the humanities and the social sciences – the privilege of an observer that makes the rest of the world an object of observation. It also moves away from the post-colonial toward the de-colonial, shifting to the geo- and body-politics of knowledge. (Mignolo and Tostlanova, 2006, p. 206)

Faria (2013) argues that critical management studies is in need of border thinking and should be reframed from the perspective of decolonial thinking. Coloniality/modernity rendered invisible the knowledge contributions from those on the outside of the border and those who sanction knowledge on the inside of the border (the Centre / the West) took responsibility to sort the problem of the coloniality of knowledge. That is to say, Faria (2013) argues that critical management studies, a movement developed in and by the West, made the Centre the source of the solution to the coloniality of knowledge as opposed to the solution coming from outside the border.

Mignolo (2011) argues that the decolonisation of knowledge as a project requires border thinking as a method. Border thinking is a double critique that implies an ability “to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 67). Border thinking thus enables the coexistence of different ways of life and different ways of knowing, along with creating a pluriversal space for diverse epistemic encounters that recognises and values knowledge that has been produced from the lived experience of the colonial difference (Faria, 2013). Decolonial theorists argue for the epistemic move towards border thinking in organisation studies as a necessary condition for those on both sides of the border to recognise that “there is life
beyond Northern academia, both in terms of [critical] managerial theoretical concepts and in terms of organizational practices” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 131). Border thinking thereby facilitates the decolonisation of organisation studies in moving from universality to pluriversality (Mignolo and Tostlanova, 2006). Decolonising organisation studies contributes to a pluriversal world in which many organisational epistemologies and ways of organising can co-exist.

To this end, my thesis contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by drawing on border thinking to foreground the knowledge and experiences of Maya women organising in the margins of the Global South. In so doing, I create a space for an alternative understanding of organising locally constructed from outside the border and the lived experience of colonial difference.

**Critiquing the Critical in Organisation Studies**

In sum, this literature review demonstrates the importance of a critical reflection on the idea of progress in organisation studies. Significant headway has been made to incorporate critical perspectives into organisation studies, particularly through developments in the critical management studies movement and their incorporation of postcolonial theorisations of the geopolitics of organisation knowledge. Nonetheless, the decolonial perspective in organisation studies demands the recognition that even critical management studies is dominated by Western and non-Western scholars theorising in and from the West. Organisation studies can only truly be de-colonised when pluriversal understandings of organisation and organising from the epistemologies and experiences of those living the colonial difference are brought into mainstream discourse.
In what follows, I develop further my critique of organisation studies by incorporating feminist discourse. I expand my theoretical approach to include postcolonial feminist and decolonial feminist theorising in organisation studies to bring to visibility the experiences of marginalised indigenous women who have been silenced in both mainstream organisation and feminist theorising.
CHAPTER THREE

INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S VOICES: ORGANISING IN THE MARGINS

As discussed earlier, my thesis critiques Western modernity’s domination in organisation studies discourse and the coloniality of organisation knowledge. Postcolonial theories in organisation studies have made significant progress in highlighting Western domination of ‘Other’ subjectivities and epistemologies, and in demonstrating the importance of interrogating the universalistic assumptions of organisation studies. Further critiquing organisation studies, decolonial theory provides the space for a pluriversal understanding of organisation and organising from the social, cultural and historical location of those living outside the border.

Together with this critique, the framing of my thesis incorporates feminist theorising of organisation studies, which can “open views to a world of many other subject positions” (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p. 328). Feminist theoretical perspectives are critical discourses in that they critique the status quo and, when applied to organisation studies, they further challenge our idea of progress in organisation theory and practice. Together with recent interests in postcolonial and decolonial theorising, feminist theorising in organisation studies provides the impetus to address how non-Western, marginalised women organise their work and their lives. Thus, my theoretical justification draws on postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theories to decolonise organisation studies and broaden our understanding of organisation and organising from the knowledge and experiences of marginalised women.
In this chapter, I critique organisation studies from feminist perspectives. In particular, I incorporate the epistemologies of marginalised, indigenous women to decolonise organisation theory and practice. I first provide an understanding of feminist theory, and there follows a review of feminist theorising in organisation studies. I then provide insight into postcolonial feminist theorising, which incorporates heterogeneous female identities and opposes hegemonic feminist approaches that privilege the experiences of white, Western women. This review is followed by a detailed discussion of the decolonial feminist movement in Latin America and provides insight into the concepts of coloniality of gender and indigenous feminism. I close this chapter emphasising the importance of providing space in organisation studies for marginalised, indigenous women to voice their own conceptualisations of gender, identity and organisation from their different social, cultural and historical locations.

**Introducing Feminism and Feminist Theorising**

Lorber (2010) simply introduces feminism as a social movement with the basic goal of striving for social and legal equality between men and women. Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005, p. 2) note

> the reality is that no country in the world, no matter how advanced, has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision-making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement, and equal participation and status in all walks of human endeavour. Gender disparities exist, even in countries without glaring male-domination.

Gender (in)equality is deeply ingrained in the structures of society with different societies and cultures having different understandings of gender (in)equality (Lorber, 2010). As such, feminist thought and action is complex, and their understandings
change over time and space. Bourne (2006) notes that feminist theorising is not monolithic, reflecting different schools of thought regarding different explanations for women’s oppression and inequality and different solutions for their elimination. How gender is understood represents a fundamental conceptual distinction among feminist theoretical perspectives. Nonetheless, as explained by Calás and Smircich (2006, p. 286), feminist theories are joined in recognising and seeking to overcome “gendered dominance in social arrangements”. Feminist theories are critical theories, yet they vary in their degree of critique and the nature of their politics.

In organisation studies, the political and critical nature of feminist theories ranges from women’s access to, and work in, organisations, to the idea of organisational practices being gendered, to questioning ‘gender’ and ‘organisation’ as stable analytical categories (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003). Thus, the concern runs from seeking organisational reform, to organisational and societal transformation, to transforming our understandings of what constitutes knowledge and practice in organisation studies. Feminist theories provide multi-theoretical lenses to the study of organisation/organising and provide space for challenging our understanding regarding power relations and the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality (Calás and Smircich, 1989).

Calás and Smircich (1999) argue that, together with postcolonial theory, feminist theorising is one of the most significant theoretical developments in organisation studies in the twenty-first century. As critical theoretical perspectives, feminist and postcolonial theories share some similarities to help reframe organisation theory and discourse. For example, both are concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge at the inception of theory and the representation of ‘Others’/women and their knowledge (Calás and Smircich, 1999). Both feminist theories and postcolonial
theory form part of the critical management studies movement and offer a variety of critical perspectives that bring attention to the politics of knowledge in organisation studies (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003).

**A Review of Feminist Theorising in Organisation Studies**

Gherardi’s (2003) comprehensive review of the application of feminist theories within organisation studies finds that the discipline has been tenacious in defending a gender-neutral position that minimises gender differences in organisation theory and discourse. Gherardi (2003) argues that organisation studies is too institutionalised in its mainstream, or ‘malestream’, theorising, and finds that when the discipline integrates feminist theories they are preoccupied with gender discrimination and integration policies that end-up reproducing women’s fundamental Otherness.

Gherardi’s (2003) review follows Calás and Smircich’s (1996; 2006) comprehensive analysis of feminist theorising in organisation studies. In their analysis, Calás and Smircich (1996; 2006) traverse liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern and postcolonial perspectives, reviewing each of their diverse theoretical perspectives and their application in organisation studies. Calás and Smircich (2006) explain that different feminist theories demonstrate very different assumptions about the concept of gender, the nature of society, and gendered social, management and organisation issues, as well as how they are researched and the implications for research. Here follows a brief summary of the different feminist theoretical perspectives and their intersection with organisation studies as analysed by Calás and Smircich (1996; 2006) and Gherardi (2003).
Liberal feminist theory follows liberal political theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that call for equality in all spheres of life, but without radical transformation of the social and political systems. Liberal feminist theory is based on the ideas of equality and equity for women, but has been criticised for not moving the conversation beyond the view that “women are as good as men” (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p. 290). When it comes to organisation studies, most scholarship related to a liberal feminist tendency can be classified as ‘women-in-management’, primarily concerned with the persistence of sex segregation in organisations and seeking to explain why it continues within what is assumed to be a gender-neutral system.

Radical feminist theory has political roots in the left and takes the subordination of women as its fundamental problematic. It conceives gender as a system of male domination and thereby a fundamental organising principle of patriarchal society. Regarding organisation scholarship, radical feminism has sought to detail and practice alternative organisation that reflects feminist values and negates leadership and structure, arguing that feminist organisational practices should be informed by equality, community and participation. Regarding organisation studies literature, radical feminism focuses on universal patriarchy as the primary structure of women’s oppression limiting women’s ability to account for the concrete ways in which gender differentiates the experience and the situation of diverse women in organisations.

Psychoanalytic feminism is interested in connecting the individual’s mind-world with her developmental experiences. It considers the patriarchal family engendering distinctions in male/female psychological development and different notions of gendered self and identity. In other words, a woman’s way of ‘thinking and doing’ is deeply rooted in her psyche. Psychoanalytical feminist theory considers this a social problem, as well as an epistemological problem concerning whose knowledge is
valued and whose is devalued. Organisational research following this tendency celebrates women’s ways of ‘knowing and doing’, whereby women’s differences become skilled resources for effectiveness and competitiveness. In the organisational studies literature, psychoanalytical feminist theory highlights the everyday organisational experiences of subordination and domination (Harding et al., 2013). Benjamin (1995) argues that interactions between culture and psyche in the West refuse subjectivity to the woman. This results in the interplay of domination and submission between male/female or masculine/feminine.

Liberal, radical and psychoanalytical feminist theories, although each with their different epistemological assumptions, share fundamental ontological assumptions whereby women’s oppression is situated in their condition of being women. Thus, they are concerned with issues of equality, similarity or difference and seek solutions to how women and men can exist together, or separately, without subordination or oppression. Often referred to as ‘women’s issues’, the three theoretical perspectives are politically united in their concern to reform organisations and organising. However, they are criticised for largely privileging the experiences of already privileged women, that is to say, white, Euro-American, middle-class, heterosexual women, while essentially ignoring the experiences of ‘Other’ women (Mohanty, 1988).

The remaining three theories analysed by Calás and Smircich (1996; 2006) and Gherardi (2003) are socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern and postcolonial theories, with all taking a view of gender different to that liberal, radical and psychoanalytical approaches:

As they see it, gender(ing) as social(ly) system(ic) is a process, produced and reproduced through relations of power among differently positioned members of society, including relations emerging from historical
processes, dominant discourses and institutions and dominant epistemological conceptualizations, all of which become naturalized as ‘the way it is’. (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p. 301)

Beginning with the conditions in which gendered identities and subjectivities are constructed, these theories engage analytically with the complexities of social, economic, cultural and knowledge systems to critique their sustaining assumptions so as to challenge and change conditions.

Socialist feminist theory addresses the complex intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality in explaining the prevalence of gender segregation and oppression. Acker (2006) explain that, for socialist feminism, the focus is on particular structural, historical material conditions and relations of power that are rooted in the process of gendering. Thus, there is more to gender than the social construction of binary identity. In organisation theory, their interest is in uncovering the many ways in which organisation is continually structured along gendered lines. Socialist feminism argues that gender assumptions are embedded in societal expectations and that they interact with organisational rules, structure and practices. They further argue that the gendering of organisations occurs through symbols, images, and ideologies that legitimise gender inequalities and differences.

Postmodernism exhibits a critical distrust concerning ‘meta-narratives’, transcendental reason and the possibility of objective knowledge, and, with the same approach, poststructuralist feminist theory interrogates the constitution of the ‘feminist’ within modernity. Poststructural/postmodern feminist theorists conceive of gender as fluid and multiple, rather than fixed and homogenous. They question the claims of many feminist theorists that posit a privileged knowing subject, essentially, a feminine and universal representation of woman. These approaches contain the basis for a broader critique of how knowledge is constructed, in so far as it depends on the
possibility of representing a reality that does not exist outside the representation of language. Poststructuralism/postmodernism affords feminist theorising a greater capacity for reflexivity, but offers no ground on which to stand, other than critical deconstruction. Within organisation studies, poststructural/postmodern feminist theorists have been influential in the examination of the discursive formations of gendered organisational subjectivities and subject positions, as well as discourses of resistances to these formations. Lorber (2010) explains that, according to postmodern feminism, personal identities and identity politics of groups in organisations are constantly shifting, making room for individual and social change, and for new kinds of relationships in organisations.

In contesting Western feminist theorisations of gender, the postcolonial perspective views such theorisations as privileging the experiences of already privileged Western women (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Mohanty, 2003a; 2003b). Postcolonial feminist theory challenges the constructions of Global South women in Western knowledge and feminist theorisation that represents them as uniformly lacking development, education, knowledge, progress, wealth, agency, etc. This theoretical perspective argues that gender can no longer be a stable analytic lens to be employed across cultures, societies and histories. Postcolonial feminist theory gives voice to marginalised and invisible ‘Other’ women to speak back and (re)claim their agency, knowledge, capabilities, struggles and strategies for survival within their own social, cultural and historical locations. In its reading of organisation theory, the ‘women-in-development’ literature problematizes the representational space available for the subjectivities of women in the Global South. As noted in the previous chapter, postcolonial theory is beginning to establish itself within organisation theory. However, the voices of women from the Global South are lacking within this discourse
and they are still constituted as ‘the Other’ by mainstream organisation and feminist discourse. This theoretical perspective forms part of the framing of my study and its contribution to the critical discourse in organisation studies.

Many different voices contribute to feminist theory discourse on gender and their contribution to organisation studies. These theories locate gender in the body (liberal, radical and psychoanalytical), in culture and social relations (socialist and postcolonial) and in language (postmodern/poststructural). Table 3.1 (overleaf) summarises the six theoretical approaches emphasising how different epistemologies and conceptualisations of gender translate into different conceptions of the relationship between feminist theorising and organisation studies.
### Table 3.1: A Summary of Feminist Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of Thought</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Radical</th>
<th>Psychoanalytical</th>
<th>Socialist</th>
<th>Postmodern/Poststructural</th>
<th>Postcolonial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Roots</td>
<td>Evolved from 18th–19th century political economy.</td>
<td>The women’s liberation movement of the late 1960’s.</td>
<td>Evolved from Freudian and other psychoanalytical theories.</td>
<td>Emerged in the 1970’s as part of attempts of women’s liberations movements to synthesize Marxist, psychoanalytical and radical feminism.</td>
<td>Located in contemporary French poststructuralist critiques of ‘knowledge’ and ‘identity’.</td>
<td>Emerging from intersections of gendered critiques of Western feminism and postcolonial critiques of Western epistemologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Gender</td>
<td>Gender is socialised onto sexed human beings for appropriate behaviour.</td>
<td>Gender is a social construction that ensures women’s</td>
<td>Gender structures a social system of male domination that influences psychosexual development.</td>
<td>Gender is processual and is socially constituted through several intersections of sex, race, ideology and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Considers the constitution of complex subjectivities beyond Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological Position</td>
<td>Positivist, gender-neutral objectivity.</td>
<td>subordination to men.</td>
<td>Holistic female-centred knowledge is possible outside of patriarchal structures.</td>
<td>Women’s way of knowing is different from men’s because of different psychosexual development.</td>
<td>Feminist standpoints represent a particular historical condition of oppression that is more adequate for understanding contemporary society.</td>
<td>materiality of human bodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations of Gender / Organisation</td>
<td>Needed Organisational Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation theory as gender neutral.</td>
<td>Gender imbalance can be corrected through human development and/or structural/legal interventions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative feminist organising practices.</td>
<td>Gender oppression can be eradicated only through separatist institutions, e.g. feminist organisations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female skills as an organisational advantage.</td>
<td>Understanding psychosexual dynamics in organisations contributes to establishing organisations where feminine values are also appreciated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising as a gendered process and organisations as a series of reproduction of patriarchy and capitalism.</td>
<td>Organisations are relational systems, change must start by understanding them as processes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising as the discursive mobilisation of power/knowledge resources.</td>
<td>Discourse of organisation should be denaturalised.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalised economy and worldview organising principles. Organisations as institutions of the coloniser.</td>
<td>To include ‘the Other’s’ knowledge and ways of ‘seeing and doing’ from the perspective of Global South women.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Calás and Smircich, 1996; 2006; Gherardi, 2003)
Postcolonial Feminist Theory: Representing ‘Other’ Women

Over two decades ago, Ferguson (1994), and somewhat more recently, Jaya (2001), argued that dominant forms of research and theorising in organisation studies are implicitly male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial, and called for more theories, voices and politics in organisation studies. Ferguson (1994) asserted that more voices are necessary for a deeper understanding of how interrelated categories of gender, race and class reflect and shape organisation/organising and organisational life. The subsequent decades have seen wider developments in this call, with more organisation theorists positioning themselves in this praxis; however, there is still a vast space to be filled with further theoretical development and empirical research (Harding, et al., 2013; Townsley, 2003).

The emergence of postcolonial feminism forms part of the third wave of modern feminist theorising. Gherardi (2003), Harding et al. (2013) and Lorber (2010) explain that calls for equality and emancipation constitute the first wave (e.g., liberal, radical and psychoanalytical feminist theories), with the second wave focusing more on politics and political action (e.g., socialist feminism). The second wave contained a variety of different voices focusing on the continued ways women are more socially disadvantaged than men, for example, calling for greater access for women in society (e.g., the workplace, the arts, politics, educational opportunities, etc.), arguing against the sexual oppression of women, working to eliminate sexual violence and harassment against women, challenging the cultural production of women in the media, and much more. However, the first and second waves of feminism have come under criticism for privileging the perspectives of Western feminist theorists and the experiences of Western women (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Harding et al., 2013; Lorber, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). The third wave of feminist theorising signalled an important shift in
the strategic consciousness of feminist praxis, incorporating heterogeneous female identities, different races, ethnicities and cultures (Garrison, 2004), opposing a hegemonic feminist approach that privileges the experiences of Western and Westernised women.

**Introducing Spivak’s Subaltern Woman**

Gayatri Spivak (1985; 1988; 1990) is a leading postcolonial feminist theorist with original contributions to this field from her theorisation of the female postcolonial subject, specifically women in British-ruled India. Spivak argues that these women are doubly subjugated by colonial rulers and indigenous patriarchy. As a postcolonial feminist theorist, Spivak problematizes Western attempts to represent Global South women, for instance, Western feminist theories speak of women as a universal category without reference to the specific political, social, cultural or historic realities of marginalised, non-Western women. In developing her postcolonial feminist theory of the subaltern woman, Spivak (1988) broadens Gramsci’s (1971) notion of the subaltern, that is, persons whose political and social agency has been removed by denying them representation and a voice in their society. Subalternity refers to those socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures. Spivak (1988) uses the notion of the subaltern as a space to question the subject positions of the marginalised, non-Western woman – a muted, gendered person beyond representation and inhabiting the margins of Western feminism and organisation theorising.

Spivak (1985; 1988; 1990) argues that the West dominates, restructures and has authority over the representations of Global South women. For Spivak, the female postcolonial subject occupies a space that is not readily accessible by Western feminist theories as these theories are themselves cultural products of the West. Thus, Spivak
argues, the West creates binary identities between Western women and ‘Other’ women, and critiques Western narratives that attribute certain qualities to Global South women, presenting them as ‘the Other’. Global South women then become homogenised and represented in a normalised fashion. Spivak (1988) argues for plurality and heterogeneity in the representation of women.

**Challenging the Homogeneity of Women in the Global South**

The work of Mohanty (1988; 1991; 2003a; 2003b), another foremost Indian postcolonial feminist scholar, soon followed Spivak, with both women leading the discourse on postcolonial feminist theorising. The postcolonial feminist theoretical justification of my study is based on Spivak’s (1985; 1988; 1990) seminal work and Mohanty’s (1988; 1991; 2003a; 2003b) thesis on this subject, building on the argument that women from the Global South are still constructed as ‘the Other’.

Mohanty (2003a; 2003b), Spivak (1988) and Wood (2001) argue that feminist writings discursively colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Global South, which produces a composite, singular Global South woman – the gendered subaltern subject – an image that carries with it the authorising signature of Western imperial discourse. Parpet (1993) argues that the preceding waves of feminist theories, outlined above, ‘explained’ women as if the reality of white, Western, middle-class women applied to all women from all cultures, classes, races and religions of the world. Thus, feminists seemed to ignore the possibility of differences among women themselves, as such, the writings of feminist theorists have become generalised on the grounds of their own experiences. Feminist critiques form part of hegemonic Western discourse and are dominated by theories and praxis that reflect the Western construct of women, and women who do not fit this profile are presented as ‘the Other’. Assuming the category of ‘woman’ and her subordination as
universal, Western feminist theorists have contributed to the coloniality of knowledge. As such, epistemic coloniality also forms part of the postcolonial feminist debate.

The geopolitics of knowledge in feminist theorising portrays Global South women as a homogenous category needing economic development and an oppressed figure in need of Western emancipation (Barker, 2000; Mohanty, 2003a; 2003b; Wood, 2001). In such representations, the Global South is conceptualised as a singular place and the Global South woman is a sexual-political object whose subject position is already determined (Mohanty, 2003a; 2003b; Spivak, 1988). Global South women are therefore assumed as a coherent homogenous group of women with the same interests and desires, whether from a rural or urban area, educated or unschooled and regardless of religion, class, ethnic and racial location. These women are assumed victims of particular cultural and socio-economic systems and are defined by their gendered identity (Mohanty, 2003b), with such representations affording no agency to the women in the Global South. Western feminist discourse is based on ethnocentric, universal theorising of all women with Western feminists speaking on behalf of all women (Mohanty 1988; 2003a; 2003b; Spivak, 1988). In so doing, Western feminists position themselves as the “saviours of their poor Third World sisters” (Mendoza, 2002, p.301).

As a result of this systematic appropriation of the figure, identity and image of women in the Global South, a characterisation of these women has been created that only emphasises their feminine gender (sexually constrained) and their being ‘Third World’, that is, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised, etc. (Mendoza, 2002; Mohanty, 2003a; 2003b; Spivak, 1988). Mohanty (2003b) refers to this as the production of the ‘Third World difference’, that is, a stable, ahistorical difference that oppresses most, if not all, non-
Westernised women in the Global South. In the production of the ‘Third World difference’, Western feminists appropriate and colonise the constitutive complexities that characterise the lives of women in the Global South.

As noted by Calás and Smircich (2006, p. 322) ten years ago, the issue of postcolonial feminism “waiting to become apparent in contemporary organisation studies literature” is still very relevant. It is in the process of discursive homogenisation and systematisation of the oppression of women in the Global South that power is exercised in much of the organisation literature. The representations of non-Westernised women in the Global South are exacerbated when it comes to the perceived contribution they make to work. Constructs such as femininity, domesticity and race portray these women to be involved in lesser working activities – for example, the production of raw materials, less important managerial roles or the unrecognised labour in the home – rather than in the full involvement and contribution made at work by women in the West, who are portrayed as modern and accomplished (e.g., Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012; Mishra, 2013; Mohanty, 1988; 2003b). Postcolonial feminist theory helps to re-define organisation theorists’ approach and recognise non-Westernised Global South women, not as ‘the Other’ or inferior, uneducated females, but to bring forward their experiences and struggles in a way that foregrounds and nurtures their understanding of their organised existence.
This page contains information about decolonial feminism, specifically focusing on the identity of indigenous women in Latin America. The text discusses the progress made in postcolonial feminist theoretical developments, noting that much of this theorization remains situated in the West, particularly in discussions about India, the Middle-East, and South Asia. Postcolonial feminist theorizing is criticized for being colonized by hegemonic practices of Global South feminists, who maintain continuity with the metrics of modernity and colonial privilege, often constructing marginalized, non-Western women as ‘the Other’ within ‘the Other’ (Espinosa Miñoso, 2009). As a result, their voices are often eclipsed by the discourses about them. Decolonial feminism aims to provide a space for the voices and experiences of marginalized, non-Western women, engaging with debates pertaining to coloniality/modernity and indigenous identity and gender in Latin America, with a focus on providing a space for the silenced voices of women to speak of their identities, personal and organizational lives. 

Sandoval (2000, p. 44) explains that decolonial feminism, part of the third wave of feminism, provides “a structure, a theory and a method” for reading and understanding these experiences.
constructing identity for Global South women of colour, primarily focusing on marginalised, indigenous and black women in Latin America. Decolonial feminism is an emerging theoretical concept, centring postcolonial feminism in a Latin American cultural, social and historical context and ascertaining that gender is a colonial construct. Decolonial feminism is inspired by the Chicana feminist movement, motivated by the historical, social and cultural marginalisation of women of Mexican descent in the U.S., (e.g., Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Saldivar-Hull, 1991; Sandoval, 2000), the work of gender theorists in post-colonial countries (e.g., Connell, 2014; Oyěwùmí, 1997), and women of colour feminist politics (e.g., Roshanravan, 2014). Lugones (2010, p. 757) argues that race and gender are not separate categories in decolonial feminism by explaining that “the intersection of ‘woman’ and ‘black’ reveals the absence of black women rather their presence” in institutional and public life. In sum, decolonial feminism centres decolonial debates on race, gender and sex, and analyses the concept of coloniality to deconstruct Western gender concepts that have become normalised (Connell, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2011; Lugones, 2007; 2010; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Schiwy, 2007).

**The Coloniality of Gender**

Lugones (2007; 2008; 2010), a leading Latin American decolonial feminist theorist, builds her theory of decolonial feminism on the argument for modernity/coloniality to be understood through specific articulations of race, gender and sexuality. Lugones (2008; 2010) calls for a review of modernity/coloniality from a consciousness of race, gender and sexuality and an (re)examination of the persons categorised within this context, e.g., marginalised indigenous women. Colonisation colonised the indigenous people’s sense of self and identity, their understanding of cosmology and organising, and their gender relations, in so doing, implementing European understandings of
sex/gender and erasing the various conceptualisations of sex/gender that pre-existed European modern/colonial gender systems (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Schiwy, 2007). Thus, indigenous women’s identities and gender were colonised (Connell, 2014). According to Lugones (2010), modernity/coloniality organises the world into homogenous, separable categories arranged through hierarchical dichotomies that have erased colonised/indigenous women from most areas of social life. As such, gender has permeated the discourse of colonisation and is inseparable from the coloniality of power (Schiwy, 2007). Lugones (2008) describes the coloniality of gender as an encompassing phenomenon, where all control over sex, subjectivity, authority and labour is organised around it.

In developing the coloniality of gender concept, Lugones (2007; 2008) adjusts Quijano’s (2000, 2007) formulation of the coloniality of power through a deeper consideration of gender and its entwined relationship with race. Lugones argues that Quijano’s understanding of sex/gender as defined by patriarchal and heterosexual contestations over ‘sexual access’ is a paradoxically Eurocentred understanding of gender. Lugones, therefore, sees Quijano’s framework as a further means through which the subjection and disempowerment of colonised/indigenous women can be obscured. Coloniality permeates all aspects of social existence and gives rise to new social and geo-cultural identities, thereby creating gendered identities as well as racial identities (Lugones, 2007; 2008).

Much research suggests that pre-colonial conceptions of gender are complex and structured differently from European conceptions (Connell, 2014). For example, the research of Oyèwùmí (1997, p. 31), a leading decolonial Nigerian feminist scholar and gender theorist, finds that “gender was not an organizing principle in Yorùbá society prior to colonization” as there simply was no gender system in place in Yorùbá (a West
African ethnic group) culture. The subsequent oppressive gender system that was imposed on Yorùbá society through colonisation encompasses the subordination of females in every aspect of life. Oyèwùmí (1997) explains that the concept of gender was introduced by the West as a tool for domination that designates two binary oppositions and hierarchical social categories; women became defined in their relation to men and were unable to have power, own land or participate in leadership roles in society. The implementation of the concept of gender in Yorùbá society resulted in the emergence of women as an identifiable category subordinate to men in all situations. Oyèwùmí (1997) finds, as theorised by Lugones (2008), that colonisation created the concepts of race and gender; the imposition of race accompanied the inferiorization of the indigenous, and the imposition of gender accompanied the inferiorization of indigenous women. Lugones (2008) explains that understanding the role of gender in pre-colonial times enables an understanding of the nature and scope of change in societies and social structures following colonisation and the implementation of modernity/coloniality.

Connell (2014) and Schiwy (2007) explain that gendered violence played a formative role in the shaping of colonial societies and, through the colonially of gender, gendered hierarchy continued after the official end of colonial rule.

Colonization itself was a gendered act, carried out by imperial workforces, overwhelmingly men, drawn from masculinized occupations such as soldiering and long-distance trade. The rape of women of colonized societies was a normal part of conquest. The colonial state was built as a power structure operated by men, based on continuing force. Brutality was built into colonial societies. (Connell, 2014, p. 558)

Schiwy (2007, p. 276) explains that the force and brutality of the process of colonisation were not the only harm inflicted on women, but it also enacted the inability of colonised men to “protect their women”. The rape and brutality inflicted
on colonised women re-enforced European patriarchal relations, where women were reduced to objects, and their abuse comes to signify damage to colonised men’s honour, thus inscribing a continuous gendered and racial hierarchical order. The Western gendered system, as implemented by colonisation and maintained by the coloniality of gender, permeates patriarchal control over women’s identity and their production of knowledge (Lugones, 2010; Schiwy, 2007).

Lugones (2007; 2008; 2010) explains that decolonial feminists are a community of indigenous women scholars in Latin America constructing a new indigenous feminist geopolitics of knowledge and knowing.

**Indigenous Feminism in Latin America**

Butler (2004, p. 10) explains that gender is a historical and social category that is continually enacted, albeit under the constraints of existing norms that differ across “geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose”. Gender is thus a construct that regards the Western ideals we uphold about masculinity and femininity, roles and power relations. Indigenous/colonised women’s questioning of gender is paramount to the process of decolonisation, such that women challenge the coloniality of gender and create a space for a movement towards indigenous feminism in Latin America (Schiwy, 2007). This questioning of gender by indigenous women is not about returning to an ancient idealised past, but a process of decolonisation by deconstructing gender categories, questioning the historical construction of gender in Latin America, and re-evaluating gender in their contemporary sociocultural context (Cunningham, 2006; Lugones, 2007; 2010; Oyarzún, 1992; Richard, 1996; Schiwy, 2007).
The coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of gender have contained decolonial feminist thought and action in the Global South. Thus, much of the theorisation of indigenous feminism in Latin America remains in Latin America, published in Spanish, Portuguese and the numerous indigenous languages throughout the region (Richard, 1996; Schiwy, 2007). Moreover, as an emerging movement, indigenous women are only beginning to raise their voices. Indigenous feminism is relatively new in Latin America, as noted by Hernández Castillo (2010, p. 540), “to speak of indigenous feminism [in Latin America] would have been unthinkable twenty years ago”. Nonetheless, in the past two decades there has been an emergence of different indigenous feminist movements in different Latin American countries, each with different struggles. The diversity of Latin American indigenous feminist movements reflects the heterogeneous make-up of Latin America and the sociocultural and linguistic heterogeneity of indigenous women in Latin America (Hernández Castillo, 2010; Richard, 1996; Schiwy, 2007). Notwithstanding this diversity, the Summit of Indigenous Women in the Americas (Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América) found that their different indigenous epistemologies contained similar elements, for example: in contrast to individualism promoted by globalised capitalism, indigenous feminists reclaim the value of community in terms of a life where people are linked to their surroundings, e.g. neighbours, family, community and environment, with respect and equality; and in contrast to patriarchal ideologies, indigenous epistemologies promote duality or dualism, in which the feminine and the masculine are two energy forces found in one (Hernández Castillo, 2010).

Much of the movement towards indigenous feminism in Latin America is based on the principles of Abya Yala (‘land in full maturity’ or ‘the lifeblood land’), which is the name given by the Kuna indigenous society to the colonised Americas as a
declaration against the subjugation of indigenous identity in the Americas (Espinosa Miñoso, Gómez Correal, and Ochoa Muñoz, 2014). *Abya Yala* is embedded with the indigenous Andean philosophical cosmology of *Sumak Kawsay*, which is a holistic vision of *Bien Vivir* (the Good Life) that seeks to create material and spiritual conditions for the construction and maintenance of a harmonic life in equilibrium with community, society and others (Misoczky, 2011). *Abya Yala* provides an epistemological and ontological platform upon which indigenous women can challenge the coloniality of gender that has rendered them voiceless in their communities and wider Latin American societies. As such, *Abya Yala* is the impetus for indigenous women to question gender and thereby move towards the process of decolonisation and the creation of a space for indigenous feminism that truly reflects and dignifies their identities. Despite the variety of indigenous movements and different approaches to indigenous feminism in the region, for example, differences in denomination, language, spiritual rituals, politicisation, etc., *Abya Yala* respects and preserves their differences while trying to challenge the coloniality of gender and power (Misoczky, 2001).

In different regions in Latin America, indigenous women are beginning to raise their voices and demand cultural and political rights for their communities and a more just society for women within their communities (Hernández Castillo, 2010). Most indigenous feminists in Latin America join their voices together with national indigenous movements motivated by socioeconomic marginalisation and racial oppression, but, at the same time, these women are struggling within their communities to change traditional elements that exclude and oppress them because of their gender (Bastian Duarte, 2012; Cunningham, 2006; Hernández Castillo, 2010). As such, much indigenous feminism is shaped by its linking of the collective demands of indigenous
peoples with specific gender-based claims that question the coloniality of gender (Bastian Duarte, 2012). For example, Hernández Castillo's (2002) analysis of indigenous feminism in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), in Southern Mexico, finds that Zapatista women have become some of the most influential advocates for indigenous women’s rights in Latin America. Zapatista women participate in the indigenous struggle for land and democracy, as well as gender rights for women within the family, community and the EZLN movement itself. Hernández Castillo (2002) explains that Zapatista women incorporated themselves into the spaces for collective reflection on indigenous rights and then created a space for the collective reflection on indigenous women’s rights. These women began raising their voices, demanding indigenous rights and respect for their specific rights as indigenous women. However, Zapatista and various indigenous women movements in South Mexico have suffered the most brutal form of patriarchal gender-based violence from Mestizo (persons of Spanish and mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) Mexican paramilitaries as a punishment for their activism and as a message to indigenous men in their families, communities and organisations, thereby relentlessly reinforcing the coloniality of gender and power (Hernández Castillo, 2002).

While the struggles of the Zapatista movement have made headlines in the West, much of the theorisation regarding Abya Yala and indigenous feminism in Latin America comes from the Andean and Bolivian region. Aguinga, Lang, Mokrani and Santillana (2013) and Rousseau (2011) find from their studies of Andean indigenous feminism and Bolivian indigenous feminism, respectively, that indigenous women have strongly influenced regional economic development policies by arguing that the imposed Western capitalist framework is profoundly racist, patriarchal and imperialist. With Abya Yala, these indigenous feminists have created a movement that centres on
indigenous knowledge, respect and the meaning of community, while also promoting indigenous women’s rights that balances their conceptions of culture with feminist practices of equality and equity. In Bolivia, the *Mujeres Creando* (Women Creating) movement is a feminist activist group made up of indigenous and Mestizo women working together to critique the coloniality of knowledge and gender through protests, street theatre and art projects. *Mujeres Creando* voice their opposition to the patriarchal, racist and capitalist frameworks ignorantly imposed upon them by the West and local elites without consideration for their cultural, social or historical context (Schiwy, 2007).

Espinosa Miñoso (2009) and Paredes (2010; 2008) explain that *Mujeres Creando* are communitarian feminists who use the principles of Abya Yala to advocate for a collective and communitarian understanding of feminism that opposes Western individualism and challenges the heterogeneous gender system imposed upon indigenous women by calling for a paradigm of duality, in which gender is understood as fluid. Paredes, an indigenous lesbian feminist activist, founded *Mujeres Creando* as a space for unity among women to foster a communitarian feminist movement that encourages a decolonial discourse to promote community and duality. Paredes speaks of the community as a body in which the male, female and intersexual all exist harmoniously and she encourages all, despite sex, gender, race or ethnicity, to join in the movement of feminists to create a new community (Townsend, 2015). Communitarian feminists resist the coloniality of power and gender that creates the system of dominance imposed upon indigenous women in Latin America by working toward a collective goal of decolonisation and depatriarchalisation. By working together, communitarian feminists create a space for collective action to support indigenous women’s rights and promote their own ideals, values and beliefs.
In sum, indigenous feminism comprises of women who, beginning with their own history of colonisation, adopt decolonial feminist practices and weave them into their own indigenous struggles and view of culture (Bastian Duarte, 2012). Bastian Duarte (2012, p. 162) and Hernández Castillo (2010, p. 539) provide an extract of Bastian Duarte’s (2002) interview (in Spanish) with Alma López, a Maya K’iche’ woman from Guatemala, who explains indigenous feminism as a complex understanding of feminism based on Maya women’s social, cultural and historical location that is ignored by mainstream, Western and Westernised academics:

As an indigenous feminist I intend to recover the philosophical principles of my culture and to make them fit into the reality of the twenty-first century. That is to say, to criticize what I don’t like about my culture while proudly accepting that I belong to that culture. Indigenous feminism is to me part of a principle – women develop and make revolution to construct ourselves as independent persons who become a community that can give to others without forgetting about themselves. The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture are equality, complementarity between men and women, and between men and men and women and women. That part of the Maya culture currently doesn’t exist, and to state the contrary is to turn a blind eye to the oppression that indigenous women suffer. The complementarity is now only part of history; today there is only inequality, but complementarity and equality can be constructed. … The feminist movement that comes from academia is scarcely related to us. Why learn something that is unrelated to your reality or your culture? … We need to rebuild the feminism of indigenous women.

Calixta Gabriel Xiquin, a Kaqchikel Maya spiritual guide and feminist advocate, explains that Maya women are typically poor and rural, and this has denied them the right to be women in a women’s struggle: “being a woman, indigenous and poor, in this society, condemns one to exclusion in the majority of spaces” (Krogstad, 2015, p. 50, quoting Gabriel Xiquin). As poor, indigenous women, the concept of feminism has a different understanding as it is mostly associated with urban, middle-class, white women and Ladinas (women of mixed Maya and European descent). As such, feminism is often regarded as divisive of their struggles with indigenous men and
creates an obstacle for indigenous women to be involved in dialogues about feminism. Thus, many indigenous women involved in women’s movements in their community and society do not identify themselves as feminists (Cunningham, 2006; Hernández Castillo, 2010; Krogstad, 2015). Indigenous feminism, or indigenous women movements, implies a new path that is not an imposition or prescription, but a worldview, a way of ‘seeing and doing’ and understanding gender that emanates from poor, indigenous women in the Global South.

**Decolonising Organisation Studies with the Voices and Experiences of Indigenous Women**

The full contribution marginalised, indigenous women can make to organisation studies is under-theorised and under-researched. Postcolonial feminist theorising is an emerging field in organisation studies and there is a dearth of literature regarding decolonial feminist theory in organisation discourse. Organisation theorists need to engage in dialogues with women in the Global South who have different values, ideas and experiences so to challenge the liberal, white feminist paradigm that continues to dominate organisation studies (Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012). Harding et al. (2013) argue that organisation studies can be enriched, and central debates even redefined, from the knowledge and insights of post/decolonial feminist theorists.

Few organisation theorists identify the differences between postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory and their contribution to organisation studies, however, there are fundamental differences between the two theoretical perspectives. Table 3.2 (overleaf) is an extension of Table 3.1, summarising the different epistemologies and
conceptualisations of gender between postcolonial and decolonial feminist theories and their relationship to organisation studies.

Table 3.2: A Summary of Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminist Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of Thought</th>
<th>Postcolonial Feminist Theory</th>
<th>Decolonial Feminist Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Roots</td>
<td>Emerging from intersections of gendered critiques of Western feminism and postcolonial critiques of Western epistemologies.</td>
<td>Located in the Global South. Emerging from the colonial difference of marginalised, indigenous, peasant, black, lesbian, non-Westernised women’s debates on their identity and gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Gender</td>
<td>Considers the constitution of complex subjectivities beyond Western conceptions of gender.</td>
<td>Challenges the coloniality of gender. Gender is a colonial construct that colonised indigenous women sense of self and identity. Various conceptions of gender emerging from different indigenous cosmologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological Position</td>
<td>Epistemology is a system of power relations deployed by the West on the Rest. ‘Other’ knowledges/subjectivities are possible.</td>
<td>Dominant knowledge systems need to be decolonised. Constructing a new indigenous feminist geopolitics of knowledge and knowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations of Gender / Organisation</td>
<td>Globalised economy and worldview organising principles. Organisations as institutions of the coloniser.</td>
<td>Working toward a collective goal of decolonisation and depatriarchalisation. Motivated by socioeconomic marginalisation and racial and gender oppression. Organisations centre on indigenous knowledge, respect and the meaning of community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed Organisational Change</td>
<td>To include ‘the Other’s’ knowledge and ways of ‘seeing and doing’ from the perspective of Global South women.</td>
<td>Need to challenge the coloniality of gender to contribute to the decolonisation of organisation studies from the experiences and worldviews of marginalised, indigenous, peasant, black, lesbian, non-Westernised women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Calás and Smircich, 1996; 2006; Gherardi, 2003; Hernández Castillo, 2010; Lugones, 2007; 2008; 2010)
Both postcolonial and decolonial theories can add richness, depth and complexity to gender and feminist studies in organisation by contributing a more inclusive agenda that encompasses the experiences of Global South women. The experiences and struggles of those who have been made invisible and written out of feminist and organisation theories can bring into mainstream discourse local knowledges and alternative ways of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising. As such, postcolonial and decolonial feminist theories can challenge Western feminist and organisation theorists characterisations of these women as powerless victims, and demystify them as women with their own agency, voice, knowledge and ways of organising.

However, the decolonial feminist theoretical perspective contributes to the debate through the gendered, ethnic lens of marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South. Applying decolonial feminist theory, my research contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by providing a space for marginalised Maya women to voice their own conceptualisations of gender, identity and organisation from their different social, cultural and historical locations. Thus, I propose a feminist border thinking, as suggested by Lugones (2010), thereby responding to the colonial difference from a space where indigenous women, grounded in their experiences of subalternity, are using their indigenous knowledge and building their own agency by organising together to develop their own solutions to the socioeconomic marginalisation and ethnic and gender discrimination imposed upon them through the coloniality of power and gender. As such, a feminist border thinking can bring into organisation studies pluriversal understandings of indigenous feminist organising/organisation that draws on local realities and indigenous worldviews within which organisation, gender and identity, and community and familial structures are
understood locally, constructed from outside the border and the lived experience of the
gendered colonial difference.

In light of the literature reviewed in this and the previous chapter, in the next chapter I construct a post/decolonial feminist ethnography to explore how Maya women living in the margins of Guatemala organise and work together. Using my postcolonial and decolonial feminist theoretical justification, I problematize the position of a white, Western researcher engaging in research with marginalised, indigenous women to decolonise organisation studies. I use the concept of bricolage in my philosophical and methodological approach to enable me to better conceptualise the complexity of research that takes place in the margins and how this is complicated by power.
CHAPTER FOUR

[A BRICOLAGE] METHODOLOGY:

A POST/DECOLONIAL FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY

My research brings us into the personal and organisational lives of marginalised Maya women weavers. This ethnographic research explores how Maya women, living in the margins of Guatemala, organise together. I seek to understand how their organising together is shaped by their social, cultural and historical location. Broadly understood, the objective of my ethnography is ‘to understand marginalised Maya women’s organising’.

Given the complexities of engaging in research with ‘the Other’, I employ a critical, reflexive approach to ethnography. To this end, I follow an abductive approach to research. I implement a critical constructivist paradigm and pursue an approach grounded in a postcolonial and decolonial feminist ethnography. In the sections that follow, I discuss the philosophical and methodological approaches I have taken in conducting my research. First, I provide insight into the development of my critical constructivist philosophical perspective. I then discuss the iterative development of my study design and how it was influenced by postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory. In this section, I engage in postcolonial and decolonial feminist debates that problematize the position of the researcher. Following this, I provide insight into my time in the field and my various data collection methods, discussing how I addressed the complexity of positionality by building relationships through differences during data collection. I then provide an overview of my data management and analysis strategy. Finally, I end the chapter with a discussion of how I addressed the complexity of representation during data analysis and writing.
A Critical Constructivist Paradigm

My study follows a bricolage approach to research. The French word ‘bricoleur’ describes a handy(wo)man who makes use of the tools available to complete a task. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) contend that research is an eclectic process that takes place in a complex lived world and argue that understanding the philosophy of bricolage can help with the research process.

Bricolage is an interpretive and subjective approach to research that positions the researcher in the research process. This approach asserts that understanding “the positioning of the researcher in the social web of reality is essential to the production of rigorous and textured knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2005a, p. 119). In this way, bricolage encourages researchers to address the complexities of the lived world and the complications of power (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005), thereby enabling researchers to better conceptualise the complexity of the research act (Denzin and Lincoln, 1999; Kincheloe, 2001). Critical bricoleurs draw on a range of critical theories, including feminist and postcolonial theories, to explore the ways power shapes knowledge and objects of inquiry. As such, a bricolage approach to research highlights the ways power helps create the social, cultural and economic conditions under which meaning is made, and research processes are constructed (Kincheloe, 2004), while

[b]ricoleurs accept the responsibility that comes with the interpretive process. Knowledge production always involves multiple acts of selection, and these choices of methods, theoretical frameworks and interpretative strategies must be defended. (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 100)

First theorised by Denzin and Lincoln (1999; 2015), based on Levi-Strauss’s (1966) employment of the bricolage metaphor that drives humans to seek understanding through means-making, bricolage was further conceptualised and developed by Kincheloe (2001; 2004; 2005a; 2005b), amongst others (Kincheloe and
Berry, 2004; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, 2015). In its broadest terms, bricolage can be considered a critical, multi-perspective, multi-theoretical, multi-philosophical and multi-methodological approach to an inquiry (Rogers, 2012). Based on the notions of eclecticism, flexibility and plurality, advocates explain that this approach enables researchers to embrace a multiplicity of epistemological and political dimensions through their research inquiry (Berry, 2004; Rogers, 2012). Kincheloe (2001, p. 679) maintains that a bricolage approach to research encourages researchers to employ a bricolage of “historiographical, philosophical and social theoretical lenses to gain [a] more complex understanding of the intricacies of the research design”.

Kincheloe’s conceptualisation of bricolage is a critical response to positivist paradigms, from which he developed the critical constructivist position (Kincheloe, 2005a; Rogers, 2012). My research draws on the concept of bricolage throughout the entire research process and implements Kincheloe’s critical constructivist philosophical approach to research. Critical constructivism is grounded in the notion of constructivism, thereby, opposing positivism and asserting that nothing represents an objective, neutral perspective (Cunliffe, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005a). Furthermore, critical constructivism encourages criticality in the research process and draws on critical theory. In this way, critical constructivism is a bricolage approach, positioned at the intersections between constructivism and critical theory paradigms. Kincheloe (2001; 2004; 2005a; 2005b), amongst others (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln, 2015), argues that knowledge of the world is an interpretation between two people that is crafted in a contextualised space; thus, knowledge is temporal and culturally situated. According to Rogers (2012, p. 10), this means that critical constructivists “seek out ways that phenomena are interconnected with other phenomena and socially constructed in a
dialogue between culture, institutions and historical contexts”. Critical constructivism maintains that historical, social, cultural, economic and political contexts construct our perspectives of the world, self and other (Kincheloe, 2005a). Ontologically, critical constructivists seek to understand how socio-historic dynamics influence and shape an object of inquiry, and epistemologically critical constructivists explore how the foundations of knowledge of a given context surround an object of inquiry (Kincheloe, 2005a; Rogers, 2012).

Kincheloe’s development of critical constructivism was strongly influenced by the work of Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) and his critical pedagogy, which “contributes to the struggle for a better world” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p. 305), as well as French philosopher Michel Foucault and his theorising of the connection between power and knowledge (e.g., Foucault and Gordon, 1980). Foucault maintains that in societies only certain groups and institutions can gain prominence and become sanctioned as proprietors of knowledge and powerful groups maintain their knowledge construction legitimacy by continuously undermining alternative knowledges (Rogers, 2012). Critical constructivism works to dismantle mainstream thinking and practice that, perhaps unknowingly, are implicit in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression, and encourages the questioning of dominant systems and knowledges (Kincheloe et al., 2011).

My research explores the organising practices of marginalised Maya women in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. As discussed in the preceding chapters, these women, their work, and their lives are located outside the dominant Western discourse of organisation studies. To this end, I employ postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory and follow a critical constructivist paradigm to understand alternative ways of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising and.
challenge mainstream views on the subject. Critical constructivism works to expose elitist assumptions embedded in existing knowledge and seeks out subjugated and excluded knowledge to include a variety of knowledges in mainstream discourse (Kincheloe, 2005a). In this way, postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory is strongly compatible with my critical constructivist paradigm, as they work together to exposes the geopolitics of knowledge and bring subjugated knowledges from the margins (e.g., the knowledge and experience of Maya women) into mainstream discourse. In the following section, I continue to engage in bricolage in the construction of my study design. I discuss how the relationships between my critical constructivist paradigm and theoretical approach facilitated the development of my ethnographic approach. Throughout this research, my theoretical, methodological and philosophical approaches are synergistic in their interrelationship, working together to broaden organisation studies discourse through the knowledge, experiences and worldviews of marginalised Maya women.

Study Design: An Ethnographic Bricolage

Introducing Critical Ethnography

My research engages with the organising practices of marginalised Maya women working together to expose the everydayness of their work and their lives, and facilitate their contribution to organisation studies discourse. To this end, following my critical constructivist paradigm, I employ a critical ethnographic approach to research that provides space to produce rich accounts of the field, as well as the space for the Maya women’s voices and narratives (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; Madison, 2005; Till, 2009).
Ethnography is a particular qualitative research approach, as opposed to being a particular method of research, typified by inductive reasoning; it is interpretive in nature, time intensive, iterative and open-ended (Crowley-Henry, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Kelly and Gibbons, 2008; Till, 2009). Broadly understood, ethnography is a form of research that engages with the social and cultural practices of groups of people. However, rather than focusing on creating a description of ‘the Other’, as in traditional ethnography, critical ethnography focuses on the development of a dialogical relationship between the researcher and participants (Baumbusch, 2011; Foley, 2002; Madison, 2012). That is, rather than naming and describing, a critical ethnographer tries to challenge assumptions by fostering conversation and reflection (Kincheloe and McLaren; 2005).

**Developing a Post/Decolonial Feminist Ethnography**

When developing and implementing my critical ethnography, I spent much time reflecting on the question posed by Kincheloe et al. (2015, p. 171), “How can researchers respect the perspective of ‘the Other’ and invite ‘the Other’ to speak?” Kincheloe et al. (2015) caution that critical or well-intentioned research is not without its shortcomings. Understanding ‘the Other’ is one of the primary motivations for doing ethnographic research (Krummer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012) and I want to undertake this research so to know ‘the Other’ and provide a space for marginalised Maya women’s voices in organisation studies discourse. However, as a white European woman engaging in research with marginalised Maya women in rural Guatemala, my desire to know ‘the Other’ and invite her to speak is a potential source of dominance. Given this, I integrate postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory, as reviewed in the preceding two chapters, into my critical ethnography.
Following from my theoretical review in chapter two, many postcolonial scholars are critical of Western academics’ theorising about, and engaging in (ethnographic) research with, ‘Other’ persons in the Global South. Said’s (1993, p. 184) critical approach to anthropology, and relatedly ethnography, ascertains that they are the “handmaiden of colonialism”, perpetuating Western academics ‘right’ to represent ‘the Other’, and, thereby, maintaining the objective ‘Other’. Similarly, Spivak (1988) implicates the researcher by arguing that research typically results in producing reports on ‘the Other’ and analysing the workings of the Western researcher’s power and desire. Postcolonial theory encourages the examination and revelation of how knowledge, produced in and by the West, is layered with imperialist and colonial power. Thereby, integrating a postcolonial theoretical perspective into my ethnographic approach recognises that my research has the potential to create binary oppositions between the people of the West (me) and ‘the Other’ (indigenous Maya women). Moreover, incorporating postcolonial feminist theory into my approach to research identifies that I could unintentionally classify Maya women into the homogenized and rigid category of ‘Third World women’ (Marcus, 2001; Mohanty, 1988). As such, developing an approach to ethnography that integrates postcolonial feminist theoretical concerns demonstrates that my ethnographic research needs to address the issue of power and politics in research and the production of knowledge from this research, in addition to addressing the issue of representation, that is, the postcolonial feminist concern of Western representations of non-Western persons, particularly ‘Other’ women.

Together with this, understanding structure and agency in relation to the lived experiences of the indigenous Maya women participants impacts an ethnography influenced by postcolonial feminist theory (e.g. Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial feminist
theory encourages me to consider how structure and agency come into play in my ethnography. That is, I must question how can I, a white Western woman, facilitate space for the Maya women’s agency when the social and historical structures in/of Guatemala do not facilitate space for this agency. In the next chapter, I explore how the historical and social context of Guatemala has developed structures that marginalise the indigenous Maya, while also identifying that the cultural agency of the indigenous Maya helps to resist the structures developed to marginalise them. However, first, structure and agency impact the development of a postcolonial feminist ethnography by encouraging me to question how I can build a relationship with the Maya women participants to explore how the social and historical structures of Guatemala impact the women’s agency, and how I can represent this agency. In so doing, my research becomes entangled within the complexities of power and privilege (McLaren, 1992).

Relatedly, and equally reviewed in chapter two and three, decolonial theory critiques Eurocentric hegemonic patterns of knowledge and its claims of universality, arguing that this is an explicit strategy of epistemological control and domination (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano; 2007). Moreover, decolonial feminist theory argues that Global South women’s understanding of gender and identity has been colonised; thus, gender is a colonial construct (Lugones, 2008). This theoretical lens thereby requires me to address the coloniality of gender as well as the coloniality of knowledge. I draw on decolonial feminist theory in my ethnography to help me engage with the Maya women participants and understand the women’s knowledge, worldviews and understanding of gender from the everydayness of their lived experiences.

Motivated by postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory I incorporate these theoretical perspectives into my ethnographic approach to help me, without judgement
or condescension, understand the subjugated knowledge and experiences of marginalised Maya women. Yet, this problematizes my position as a white Western woman engaging in research with Maya women living in the margins of Guatemala. Integrating postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory into my research approach requires me to address the issue of representation, that is, I must question how I can, or if I can, represent the agency and lived experiences of marginalised Maya women. In so doing, reflexivity also forms part of my ethnographic bricolage.

Integrating postcolonial and decolonial feminist thought requires deep engagement with how the *self* is involved in the ethnographic research process. Reflexivity questions our relationship with our social world and the way in which we understand our experiences (Clifford, 1986; Cunliffe, 2003). Being reflexive encourages us to be honest in the motivations that bring us to our research and also to be honest about our identities, positions, assumptions, anxieties, etc. when engaging in research (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley 2008; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Doucet, 2008; Hardy Phillips and Clegg, 2001; Johnson and Duberley, 2003; McDonald, 2013). Reflexivity provides me with the space to be honest about my *self* and bring this with me into the research inquiry.

Following Foley’s (2002) analysis of reflexivity in critical ethnography, I have to be self-reflexive and regard myself as ‘the Other’ so to become reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of my *self*, and by extension ‘the Other’. Engaging in self-reflexivity throughout my research, I am forced to actively question my position, activities and identity as a researcher in both my and the Maya women’s social web of reality (Styhre and Tienari, 2013). To be reflexive and critique myself means that I am forced to explore the Self-Other relationship and power relationships during and after fieldwork. This is particularly important in the context of research
with multiple axes of difference, inequalities and geopolitics (Sultana, 2007), and, in
the context of my postcolonial and decolonial feminist approach, I am encouraged to
reflexively examine my power in the research process and the production of
knowledge, and also Maya women’s view of me.

Applying the postcolonial and decolonial feminist lenses to my approach to
ethnography I am subjectively positioned in my research, and my self and
interpretative authority form part of the research and text produced (Krumer-Nevo and
Sidi, 2012). In other words, myself and the Maya women participants are “knottily
entangled” (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Exploring relationships, embracing differences,
contextualising the research and questioning my authority to represent the Maya
women participants and their knowledge reduces privilege and distance and helps
create a more symmetrical power relationship between the self and ‘the Other’, and
thereby resists Othering in the research process (Fine, 1994; Krumer-Nevo and Sidi,
2012). Thus, a postcolonial and decolonial feminist ethnography embraces reflexivity,
and reflexive practices encourages the questioning of the researchers position as
(re)presenter of participants, the examination of power relationships and the
recognition of the intersections of voice, place and privilege throughout the research
process (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; Sultana, 2007).

Together with embracing reflexivity, my postcolonial and decolonial feminist
ethnography is equally influenced by feminist research. Forging relationships during
fieldwork are the feminist ideal of equal, collaborative and reciprocal research
engagement (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Undurraga, 2012), and my ethnography is motivated
by an ethical commitment to the participants and the development of reciprocal
relationships. Feminist practices in ethnography are committed to understanding issues
from women’s perspectives, are influenced by feminist ethics (e.g., equality, equity,
liberty, etc.), and are concerned with forms of power and politics (e.g., Buch and Staller, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Kristin, 2008; Lewis and Mills, 2003; McCorkel and Myers, 2003; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; Undurraga, 2012). Together with the postcolonial and decolonial feminist lenses, my feminist-inspired approach to research enables my research to be a dialogue between myself and the Maya women, where power is shared, and knowledge is produced from their worldviews and experiences.

My position as a woman critical ethnographer developing an approach to ethnography that is motivated by my theoretical approach, philosophical paradigm and feminist research is inspired by Scheper-Hughes (1992; 1995) and her arguments that ethnographers should advocate for different ethnographic methods and writing that are morally engaged in ethical pursuits and questions of power. I cannot ignore the political nature of my research, and my postcolonial and decolonial feminist ethnography provides space for me to address the geopolitics of knowledge produced by Western researchers (me) engaging in research with ‘the Other’ (Maya women).

In sum, my ethnographic bricolage integrates postcolonial and decolonial feminist concepts into my critical ethnography, and, in so doing, a number of issues that need to be addressed in my research are identified. First, my ethnographic research needs to address the issue of power in research and the production of knowledge from this research. Relatedly, knowledge needs to be produced from the everydayness of the Maya women participants’ worldviews and lived experiences. Second, I am subjectively positioned in the research and, as such, I need to identify how my position in the field affects my research and the Maya women participants view of me. Simply put, a postcolonial and decolonial feminist ethnography identifies the need to address my potential position of power when engaging in research with the Maya women participants and my position of power when (re)presenting the women and their
knowledge. Translating this into my ethnography, I sum up these concerns into two key complexities – positionality and representation.

**Positionality and Representation in a Post/Decolonial Feminist Ethnography**

Integrating post/decolonial feminist thought requires deep engagement with how the _self_ is involved in the ethnographic research process. The many social, economic and cultural differences between myself and the Maya women, that is, my position of privilege as a white, university educated, middle-class, European woman together with the complex, sensitive nature of engaging in research with ‘the Other’ proved challenging. Thus, I grew concerned about my position of privilege in the field and my right, and ability, to represent the women of this research.

Positionality addresses differences in position, privilege and power in fieldwork; concerning, for example, gender, ethnicity, class and other social, economic and demographic factors that impact researcher-researched relations (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012). Positionality can be understood as the different, constantly shifting positions a researcher occupies in the field. Thereby, positionality brings to visibility how “identities and political positions are worked out within the postcolonial context” (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p. 20). From a post/decolonial feminist standpoint, the researchers’ positionality affects all aspects of the research process, and researchers need to be self-reflexive and address the dynamics of identity politics (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). Understanding my positionality involved reflexively addressing the influence of my positions and identities in the field, while ensuring my ethnography is a collaborative research process by trying to build reciprocal relationships.

Representations in ethnography are embedded in power relations and can produce imperialist tendencies in the representation of the participants and their
knowledge (Said, 1993; 1978; Spivak, 1988). Spivak (1988) outlines that resisting hegemonic forms of representation of ‘the Other’ is difficult, and many researchers end up reproducing the dominant forms of knowing they aim to dismantle. Said (1978) argues that there is an unequal relationship in academic activity, whereby Western academics claim epistemological authority over ‘the Other’ by suggesting that they must be represented as they cannot represent themselves. Concerns about representation require me to be continually reflexive throughout the entire research process, particularly in the analysis and writing of my thesis as I need to acknowledges the dangers in, and unintended potential of, speaking for ‘Others’ (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; Undurraga, 2012).

To this end, my ethnographic bricolage highlights the concerns and complexities in undertaking critical research in a post-colonial context with ‘the Other’, but also guides me through these challenges. My research has to be grounded in the Maya Women’s voices, experiences and knowledge. I discuss the complexities of addressing the issues of positionality and representation in the following sections. In the next section, I address the issue of positionality when discussing my data collection. I provide insight into how I accessed, entered and collected data by engaging in ethnographic research with marginalised Maya women’s groups guided by my post/decolonial feminist concerns. I address the issue of representation in the final section of this chapter, following the discussion of my data analysis strategy.
A Post/Decolonial Feminist Ethnography in Sololá, Guatemala

Gaining Access, Entering the Field and Conducting Fieldwork

The Highland region of Sololá, Guatemala, was chosen as the fieldwork location for my research for two reasons. First, the Maya people of Guatemala have survived colonisation, coloniality, Civil War and genocide, and because of this their way of life and ways of working lie on the margins of mainstream discourse. Secondly, I have previous experience volunteering with a social foundation, Maya Traditions, located there. From this experience, I learned first-hand that the indigenous Maya women living in this region are continually encountering discriminating and subjugating practices against them in their patriarchal and ethnically diverse post-colonial society, while also negotiating the challenges of socioeconomic marginalisation. The personal and organisational situations encountered by these women echo those of the muted subaltern ‘Other’ highlighted by Spivak (1988). The lives of the Maya women provided an opportunity to conduct research in a post-colonial context where mainstream organisation theories do not make sense.

My connection with Maya Traditions enabled me to conduct this research; Maya Traditions acted as the gatekeeper for my research. A non-profit social foundation, Maya Traditions works with eight Maya women artisan groups facilitating access to local and international markets for their traditional backstrap woven textiles. I provided Maya Traditions with an information sheet about my research, and they agreed to approach the women’s groups they work with to share my proposed research and gauge their interest in participating. The information sheet was translated orally to the women of each group. All groups were given time to discuss the research and, in time, all groups expressed an interest in participating.
Following this, Maya Traditions provided me with information about each of the groups, including, for example, their location, ease of access to their villages, the number of years they have worked with Maya Traditions, the number of women in the group, the language spoken, etc. Based on this information, two groups were chosen as primary participants. While undertaking data collection, I met with a variety of women from three other groups that work with Maya Traditions, but the two groups, *Waqxaqi’Kan* (‘the eight weaving day’, in Kaqchikel) and *Molaj Ixoqi’ Artesanas Mayas* (‘group of Maya artisan women’ in K’iche and Spanish), from the villages of Chuacruz and Panimatzalam, respectively, were the primary participants in my research and with whom I spent the majority of my time in the field. The two groups were chosen based on the relative ease of accessing their remote villages and their different relationship to Maya Traditions: the Chuacruz group has a very close relationship with Maya Traditions, working with the social foundation for nearly 20 years, and the Panimatzalam group had been working infrequently with Maya Traditions for less than two years.

I followed a purposive sampling procedure, using my judgement to consciously select the participants best suited to this research (Higginbottom, 2004). This approach to sampling is encouraged with interpretive approaches to research. I worked in-depth with two groups, not more, so to be able to spend as much time as possible with the women of these groups and build relationships with them, and also to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible of both groups. The purpose of my research is not to examine an exhaustive set of marginalised Maya women working together, but to explore how Maya women living and working in the margins of Guatemala organise together.
To conduct this research, I obtained a three-month tourist visa. Arriving in Sololá, via Guatemala City, on September 16th and returning to Dublin on December 6th 2013, I spent a total of 81 days in Guatemala, with eleven weeks of intensive in-field data collection. During my time in Guatemala, I rented a studio bungalow in the small Maya town of Panajachel, on the banks of the volcanic Lake Atitlan, in the heart of the Sololá Department. My entire time in Guatemala was an ethnographic study immersed in the field. Photograph 4.1 is an aerial view photograph of the Sololá Department, with markers identifying the town of Panajachel and the approximate locations of the Chuacruz and Panimatzalam villages.

**Photograph 4.1: Aerial Map of the Sololá Department**

Soon after my arrival, I arranged a meeting with the women of the Chuacruz and Panimatzalam groups to introduce myself and my research and confirm their participation and consent. Photographs 4.2 and 4.3 (overleaf) are photographs of both the Chuacruz and Panimatzalam groups taken on our first meeting, unfortunately not...
all group members were present for these photographs. The women’s villages are hidden along back-roads deep in the highlands and their homes, concealed by large swaths of corn fields, are scattered throughout their rural villages (Photograph 4.4 provides a visual overview of the Chuacruz village). The women of the two groups work from home making their products for the group. This resulted in the development of an informal schedule specifying who I would visit and when. I spent four to five days a week with women from each group, from early morning, usually 8.30a.m., until late afternoon, when I would have to get the last ‘chicken bus’ or pick-up (Photograph 4.5) out of their village before the tropical rains started and the cliff-faced roads became too dangerous and dark to travel. At an altitude of 2,100 meters (approx.), clouds rapidly descend in the late afternoon engulfing the region in mist and thunderstorms.

Photograph 4.2: *Waqxaqi’Kan*: The Chuacruz Group
Photograph 4.3: *Molaj Ixoq’ Artesanas Mayas*: The Panimatzalam Group

Photograph 4.4: Chuacruz Village

Photographs 4.5: Local Transportation: ‘Chicken Bus’ (L), Pick-up (R)
The women welcomed me into their homes and working lives. I spent my time individually with each woman in her home and I ate my daily meals with the women and their families. I also attended group meetings whenever the women gathered to discuss business. The women met regularly to discuss orders and payments, discuss different group projects, and meet with different local social foundations that support their groups. I also accompanied the women of the Chuacruz group on product order deliveries and to purchase thread and materials in Guatemala’s second city, Xela.

Further to my research with the women of Chuacruz and Panimatzala, as I was generating ideas, developing an understanding of the women and their work, developing my networks and generally feeling more confident in my ability to travel independently around the region, I met with women from three other groups working with Maya Traditions, as well as different local social foundations that work with the women’s groups. I interviewed and spent time with two women from the San Juan group, two women from Chirijox, and one woman from the very remote Quiejel group. Additionally, I spent time with a group that does not work with Maya Traditions, Asociacion Maya de Desarrollo. I also arranged formal interviews and met with four indigenous Guatemalan social foundations that work with the women’s groups supporting them in various capacities, including market access, supporting rural economic development, and promoting Maya cultural rights. The foundations were Maya Traditions, Oxlajuj B’atz’, Guillermo Toriello Foundation, and Aj Quen, all indigenous Maya organisations based in the Sololá Department.

In this way, I am doing more than an ethnographic case with two women’s groups, but generating a more holistic picture of marginalised Maya women’s organising. In addition to this, I lived in a predominately indigenous town and immersed myself in Maya culture and lifestyle: shopping in the market, travelling on
the local transportation of tuk-tuks, ‘chicken busses’ and pick-ups, eating from local street-food stalls (when I was not with the women) and generally absorbing my cultural surroundings as much as possible. In so doing, I was collecting rich data, along with developing a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of Maya life. Continuing with the bricolage metaphor, Till (2009) explains that ethnographers are often described as bricoleurs because they use multiple methods, thereby building a bricolage of data from whatever information and resources are available to them in the field.

**Positionality: Building Relationships during Data Collection**

The women and their families live an agrarian life: living off the land by way of subsistence farming, making their own clothes (the *traje*), and living in mud and brick, sometimes concrete, huts in small open compounds. The women and their families often struggle to pay bus fare to their nearest town market where many sell their agricultural surplus and buy additional household necessities. Rising at 5a.m. every day to peel, boil and grind corn to make tortilla paste, together with sisters and daughters, the women spend hours making tortillas and preparing meals for the family, while the men search for wood and animal feed in the forested mountains. Few of the women have received schooling, although all of their children, and in some cases younger siblings, have received at least primary education. As a condition enacted in the years following the Civil War, free primary education became accessible to all Guatemalans with the establishment of schools in every rural village. However, limited financial resources and high rates of teen pregnancies and marriages often hinder further education. With no industry and a stagnant local economy, the life of rural marginalised Maya women is centred on agriculture, weaving, cooking and attending to their family. As explained by Isabel:
Sometimes we laugh because the life of a woman is not easy. Women here get up early, grind the corn and make the breakfast, clean the dishes, get the children ready for school, clean the house, and wash the family clothes. Then we have to start preparing the lunch and after lunch we clean again. If we have time, we weave our orders [for the group] in the morning and afternoon, but we sometimes have to go to the fields to help the men with our agriculture. We also have to weave and sew clothes and look after the children in the afternoon. And then we have to start preparing dinner. After dinner, we have to wash the dishes again, and we also have to weave again, especially if we have orders. Women are the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed.

There was initial curiosity and anticipation in having me in their homes, but the women soon overcame this because they have endless tasks within the home and my presence was not going to disrupt them from their daily responsibilities. I welcomed this, and because of this my time, activities and data collection method varied with each woman. While I was with the women in their homes, they went about their daily business: cooking, cleaning, looking after their children, managing their livestock and agriculture, and weaving clothes for their family and products for their group. Regardless of their many responsibilities, the women were very welcoming and were willing to talk freely, and engaging with the women individually in their homes provided a space where personal relationships could be built. Further, I was able to observe them not only when they worked, but also explore the relationship between their work with their groups and their work in the home.

My data collection techniques typically included: observing the women in their homes as they went about their many responsibilities; taking fieldnotes and photographs detailing the women, their lives, their family and their work; informally interviewing the women, which usually happened when they were strapped into their backstrap weave or when they were cooking, typically the only times the women sit/stood still; and casual, informal conversations with the women and their family members throughout the day. All interviews and most conversations were audio
recorded with a digital voice recorder. Categories and questions of inquiry evolved during my time in the field. Instead of imposing questions based on colonialist representations defining the women and their work (Imas, Wilson and Weston 2012), I used basic exploratory questions such that, in their own words, the women explained who they are and what they do. My questions and queries became more in-depth as I spent more time with the women and developed further understandings of them and their work. Furthermore, as my relationship developed with the women, I became comfortable asking more personal questions, and I was able to probe further their understandings of themselves, their lives and their work. Appendix One provides an overview of the categories and questions of inquiry.

The women’s unwillingness to disrupt their daily routine enabled me to adapt to their daily life and the majority of my time with the women I acted as a participant observer, willing to help whenever or wherever I could. For example, I: helped the women prepare meals for the family; washed dishes; played with their younger children; sat with the women when they strapped themselves into their backstrap weave and as they worked weaving; peeled, cleaned and ground corn; split and peeled beans; followed them in their agricultural fields; and once spent an entire afternoon picking green beans in the rain. The women soon welcomed any help I could provide. I was attempting to understand their world and to do this I had to enter their world on their terms. The women grew comfortable with me and our mutual trust grew.

During my time in the women’s homes, I learned that my position as a participant observer and my personality were to play a significant role in addressing the issue of positionality and building relationships with the women and their families. As a white, university educated, heterosexual, middle-class European woman, I have encountered limited discrimination or marginalisation. Moreover, there are clear ethnic, social and
cultural dichotomies of privileged-poor, educated-unschooled, rural-urban and white-brown that greatly influenced my relationship with the women participants and their families. This placed me in an irreconcilable position of difference.

However, my position as a post-colonial Irish woman impacted my relationship with the women and how I conducted this research. It is this position that guided me through this research. The Maya women of this research saw me as a white European, but my position as an Irishwoman is significant. Ireland cannot only be understood in terms of a European frame of reference, but also in relation to its relationship to other colonial experiences (Cleary, 2003). Postcolonial theorisation is often focused on the issues of race and takes place within the context of the Global South. However, Ireland represents a unique case in that it was ‘white on white’ colonisation taking place in Western Europe (Cronin, 2004; Murray, 2005). Modern Irish identity and culture has evolved and emerged from centuries of British colonial rule, with colonialism leaving a very visible impact on Irish people, our cultural identity and our landscape (Kelly, 2013), much like the lasting impact of Spanish colonial rule on the Maya people of Guatemala, as detailed in the next chapter. My identity as an Irishwoman provides me with the capacity to empathise with Maya women and thereby build relationships.

Nonetheless, I was never going to be able to remove the physical, economic and social differences between myself and the women. Therefore, rather than attempting to erase our differences, I viewed them as important factors in developing our relationship. I used two further aspects of my identity to address the issue of positionality: my personality and my gender. The women and I share a commonality in our womanhood. My gender played a significant part in the women welcoming me into their homes, work and lives. As I spent most of my time with the women one-to-one in their homes, I used this initial sameness to build relationships with the Maya
women. As a woman, although a white, Western, urban-dwelling woman, nonetheless, I could still participate with the women in their Maya gendered divisions of labour, for example, preparing meals. Together with my gender, my personality enabled me to negotiate differences in positionality. I was willing to do whatever tasks were necessary in the home and eat whatever food was put in front of me. Differences remained between the women and me, but little actions, that may even seem mundane, can be significant in building relationships. I became an acceptable outsider; our differences were not barriers to rapport and trust. The women grew comfortable with me in their homes, their lives and their work, as noted in the following fieldnote extracts:

During lunch, at the Chuacruz group training, I receive lots of compliments from the women regarding my eating habits. “You eat like a Guatemalan!” says Maria Chiroy. Yolonda says, “All the women say you’ve been really good with the food and not fussy in eating what we make you. The women say this makes them feel a lot more comfortable. We’ve had visitors who wouldn’t eat our food or even eat with us, and some people get sick from our food.” The women ask me how many tamilitos I’ve eaten with lunch today. When I shyly say four, they all laugh and clap, and say “You’re just like us!”.

My flexible personal disposition and genuine interest in the lives of the women played a crucial role in addressing positionality and developing relationships. I was interested in the women, and they were interested in me. While our relationship was shaped by differences, we shared experiences and talked about our lives. My presence in their homes and lives even became welcomed by some of the women.

I sit with Alicia in her kitchen; it’s a very casual and relaxed environment. Alicia makes us a hot drink of atol while there’s still heat from the wood-fire cooker. I feel like I’m sitting in a friend’s kitchen having a chat. Being a similar age, and also being unmarried without children, Alicia and I have developed a close relationship. This is my last visit with any member of the Chuacruz group, and when we begin to say our goodbyes Alicia says, “It’s probably better if you don’t leave, and if you want, you can stay here with me! … The women in the group wouldn’t mind either. They have
spoken very positively about you, and they say you’re a good worker, you help them in their homes and it makes them feel comfortable. ... I am happy to get to know you and you’re a good person.” Although I’m looking forward to returning home, I’m sad to say goodbye. As we say goodbye, Alicia says, “I’m happy you’re telling our story, it’s important”. Alicia and I hug.

It was a long, and at times awkward, afternoon in the drizzling rain picking green beans with Maria, her husband and son in their fields. But as Maria walks me to the main road so I can get a ‘chicken bus’ back to town, I notice a dramatic change in our relationship. This morning she and her husband were trying to get rid of me, but now she is hugging me goodbye and inviting me back to visit them anytime. She tells me I’m the first Westerner she’s ever gotten to know or really talk to, and I’m not what she expected. She thanks me for accompanying them to their fields and spending time with her family. Maria and her family ask me a few questions about me and my research and thank me for trying to understand their culture. Maria says, “We’re happy you’re interested in our lives. We want the world to know more about the real life of an indigenous Maya.”

As a researcher subjectively positioned within the research, I occupied different positions with different women and my positionality was continually negotiated on a daily basis (Finlay, 2002; McDonald, 2013). Every day, I tried to subject myself to the same level of scrutiny as that to which I subjected the women participants. I had to reflect on different aspects of my self and positionality that could be considered power differentials and I often had to suspend or alter different aspects of my identity. My role as a researcher was continually contemplated and reflected upon, questioning my involvement, examining my relationship with the women, and negotiating complex power relations (McCorkel and Myers, 2003). I questioned and probed my concept of self, what I was seeing and why. I had to regard myself as ‘the Other’. I tried to continually identify potential, unknown biases and assumptions, and reflexively decolonise unintended colonial or Western thoughts about, for example, feminism, work, organising, working from home, religion, family, living versus surviving, etc. I frequently tried to position myself in the women’s world. Placing myself in the
women’s position helped me to be more honest regarding assumptions about myself and assumptions about the women.

In implementing a post/decolonial feminist ethnography, a researcher has an ethical commitment to her participants, but, in directly addressing the issue of positionality, I also developed close relationships with the women and their families. I foreground my social responsibilities and reflect on how power asymmetries are reproduced and reshaped during fieldwork. In this way, I am guided by my own sense of personal responsibility towards the women, instilling in me a personal obligation to respect the women, their work, and their families. In actively building relationships through our differences, I developed dialogical, equal relationships with the women:

I was looking forward to spending time with Micela and her family again; I’ve always felt very welcomed by them. Today, once again, I’m welcomed into her home; her sisters say they are happy to see me and I get a hug from Micela’s mam, Fransisca. ... After lunch, we sit around chatting about me and my work. All the women thank me for undertaking my research and being in their homes with them. Yolonda, Micela’s sister, says they’ve enjoyed spending time with me: “you make us feel comfortable and we like having you in our home”. Micela then says, “I’ve learned a lot in having you here”. And I reply, “I’ve learned more from all of you!” When I explain that I’ll soon be leaving, all the women smile and say I should stay, and I can stay with them if I don’t find anywhere to live. “You are welcome back to our home anytime and please God you will be able to return to Guatemala to visit us again and spend more time with the family.”

Maya Language Translator

The Maya population in this region learn Spanish in primary school. However, the majority of the Maya women participating in my research did not receive primary education and, given this, they only speak their ethnic Maya language. Even though Spanish is the country’s official language, there are 21 Maya languages spoken in Guatemala, each aligned to the 21 Maya ethnic groups. There are three Maya ethnicities in the Sololá Department – Kakchiquel, K’iche and Tz’utujil – although
their three different languages are closely related. The women from Chuacruz are Kakchiquel and the women from Panimatzalam are K’iche. As such, I required the use of a quadrilingual translator (English–Spanish–Kakchiquel–K’iche) to undertake this research effectively during my data collection. My translator was a young indigenous Maya woman from a neighbouring rural community, Nahualá.

My gatekeeper, Maya Traditions, secured the translator for this research. My translator, Luisa Maria Cuc Sac, had just returned from the United States after two years studying business and English through the USAID SEED scholarship programme. A staff member of Maya Traditions, Marisol Morales Calel, was a previous graduate of this programme. Maya Traditions recommended Luisa as the translator for my research because she is native K’iche, speaks Kakchiquel, learned Spanish in school and learned English during her university studies in the United States, making her language combination highly unusual in this region and ideal to act in the capacity required for my research.

Nonetheless, translation can cause difficulties in ethnographic research, not only with the impossibility of exactly matching one word to another, but also in understanding the culture of the language and its ties to local realities (Kim, 2012; Simon, 1996). Kim (2012) and Temple (2005) explain that there is no single, right way to tackle the issue of translation, but note the importance in understanding that the act of translation carries both epistemological and practical implications. Practically, I am never going to be able to ensure that all conversations, interviews or group meetings are exact translations nor be able to confirm that all words or phrases are translated. Additionally, having a translator in the field could inhibit the development of relationships with the women. Epistemologically, translation is strongly related to the postcolonial issues of representation and the production of knowledge (Kim, 2012).
While undertaking my fieldwork, I tried to address the practical implications by building personal relationships with the Maya women themselves. As noted above, I built relationships through differences by using my positionality and personality to help me in conducting my research. I ensured that I was talking with the women through my translator, not my translator talking for me. When acting as a participant observer, I initiated and undertook the required actions, for example, preparing meals, picking green beans in the fields, etc., not my translator. Having a translator with me did not prevent me from developing personal relationships with the Maya women through non-verbal and other meta-communication means.

Further to this, I developed a rapport with Luisa; she clearly understood why I was undertaking this research and she was also keen to explore Maya women’s organising. I probed Luisa during interviews to ensure she translated as clearly and fully as possible, and I also probed her following our time with the women in their homes and after group meetings to ensure I understood what was going on such that I did not miss or misunderstand anything, and also to ensure Luisa was not imposing her own interpretation. I had lengthy discussions with Luisa regarding observations and interviews, and I also informally interviewed her towards the end of my time in Guatemala. In this capacity, being a young Maya woman, Luisa also acted as a cultural guide and became part of my post/decolonial feminist ethnography; thus, she was more than a means for translation. Luisa helped me interpret and understand the local culture. In our discussions, we explored how the structures imposed by patriarchy and coloniality marginalise Maya women, and Luisa helped me identify how Maya women challenge this in the everydayness of their lives, and, in so doing, she helped me understand Maya women’s agency.
Within postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory, translation is more than a methodological issue; it raises epistemological concerns regarding interpretation and representation. Translation compounds the issue of representation and, from this perspective, translation focuses on how ‘the Other’ is translated and represented (Kim, 2012; Temple and Young, 2004). Not being able to speak any Mayan languages and only having basic-intermediate Spanish language skills, without a translator, it would have been very difficult to conduct my research effectively. However, being aware of the limitations imposed by using a translator to conduct ethnographic research, I was keen to ensure the identity of my translator would not compound the issue of representation. That is, I would not have conducted my research had I not been able to work with a translator who was first, a woman, and secondly, an indigenous Maya from the Sololá Department. Luisa’s cultural identity as a young, marginalised Maya woman living in rural Guatemala played a significant role in my research.

Finally, it is important to note here that by ‘translation’ I do not want to revert to the old colonial idea of western cultural and linguistic superiority (Bassnett and Triveni, 1999). Aware of this tendency, in the context of my research, translation is based on the notion of ‘contact zone’ developed by Pratt (1992), Vieira’s (1999) work based on Haroldo de Campos, who talks about a poetic of transcreation, and Bhabha’s (1994) idea of a third space in translating the experiences of ‘the Other’. I emphasise translation as an in-between space of multiplicities, exchanges, renegotiations and discontinuities that disturb linear flows and unsettle monological colonial truth. Thus, this research reflects what the women want to share using their own language to discuss their work and personal lives.
Thematic Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy implemented for my research is based on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following my critical constructivist paradigm and post/decolonial feminist ethnography, I undertake an abductive approach to data analysis whereby my analysis is guided by postcolonial and decolonial feminist theoretical considerations, yet patterns, themes and categories of analysis emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to collection and analysis. Thus, analysis for my research is data-driven. In this way, I interpret the data according to my postcolonial and decolonial feminist theoretical approach and ontological and epistemological positions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data and involves searching across the data to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) explain that the qualitative researcher is constantly on the hunt for concepts and themes that, when taken together, will provide the best explanation of ‘what’s going on’ in the inquiry. Data analysis requires a skilful interpretation and handling of the data, as data needs to be continually refined, synthesised and coded (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009). Coding is an analytical process used to identify patterns, elaborate upon insights, refine ideas and develop themes. It is an iterative analytical process that enables qualitative researchers to examine carefully the data collected, breaking down a larger whole into parts that will later be scrutinised again and broken down into different parts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004; Till, 2009). Thus, coding is the method through which themes emerge in thematic analysis.
I employ a three-stage coding process to my thematic analysis, guided by the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). My data analysis was a non-linear, iterative process that developed over time. As a highly reflexive process, I revisited the data at three separate stages and during each stage I gained a deepening understanding of the data, new connections were discovered, and new themes emerged (Berkowitz, 1997; Braun and Clarke, 2006). I used a Qualitative Data Analysis Software package, NVivo, as a tool for efficiency when undertaking the thematic analysis of my data. NVivo is not a tool that in and of itself conducts analysis, identifies ‘what’s going on’ in the data or draws conclusions. The software serves as a tool for data management and transparency, producing an audit trail, logging data movements and coding patterns, mapping of conceptual categories, etc. (Siccama and Penna, 2008).

**Data Analysis in Practice**

I began preliminary data analysis while I was undertaking my ethnographic research in Guatemala. Transcriptions of all interviews, conversations, fieldnotes and observations were written at the end of each day. Such discipline facilitated developing an overall sense of the field and enabled me to manage the large, and often overwhelming, volumes of data generated during my intensive three-month ethnography. As I compiled my data, I familiarised myself with my data. I began to develop ideas and insights about what was going on in my data, my queries and questions when engaging with the Maya women became more in-depth, and I wrote notes and memos documenting provisional ideas and themes emerging. Throughout my ethnography, I was immersing myself in the evolving experience of the field.

Following my in-field data collection, I input 52 lengthy transcripts into NVivo. Each transcript included interviews, conversations, fieldnotes, observations and
memos from my time with each of the Maya woman participants, attending group
meetings and interviews with social foundations. I learned how to effectively use
NVivo, readied each transcript and began my three-stage coding. Each transcript
contained considerable depth and detail, resulting in an abundance of data to be
analysed. I spent seventeen months, from January 2014 to May 2015, immersed in my
themetic analysis.

Stage one coding consisted of open coding, which entailed reading through all
of my extensive transcripts, line-by-line, to identify broad categories of interest. Open
coding is broad, data-driven coding, helping me ensure that I am not limiting my
potential insights by rigidly applying pre-established codes onto the data. Codes were
developed abductively, that is, while my data analysis is guided by the literature,
nonetheless, all codes that emerged came from within the data. Many codes emerged
from ideas that developed during my immersion in the Maya women’s lives. All data
was coded, and much of the data was input into multiple codes. This was the
brainstorming stage of my data analysis, which served to generate lots of ideas and
develop a deepening understanding regarding ‘what’s going on’ in the data. 75 broad
categories of interest emerged from open coding, and each code was allocated a clear
label and description. Appendix Two details the list of codes emerging from stage one
analysis.

Stage two coding involved more focused coding using a constant comparative
method, which involved reviewing all initial codes identified in stage one, re-ordering
codes by grouping related codes under categories, and organising all codes into a
framework. I reviewed all data within each code and asked myself ‘why did I
categorise this data in this code?’ and ‘what does this mean?’. At this stage, I was
beginning to see patterns emerge and codes were beginning to develop into themes
that provided a better representation of ‘what was going on’ in the data. I wrote notes and memos detailing my thoughts on the emerging themes, thereby immersing myself further in the data. In so doing, I was questioning what was going on in the data, why certain themes were emerging, and also questioning my own understanding and interpretation of the data. During stage two coding, I reduced the 75 broad stage one codes to 65 themes within six categories. The categories, which represent the framework for the themes, are: The Groups, Indigenous Maya Women, Indigenous Life, Ethnographic Research, Guatemala and Maya Culture, and The Groups and Foundations. Appendix Three provides an overview of the themes and categories emerging from stage two data analysis.

Stage three coding involved reviewing and refining all data categories and corresponding themes that emerged during stage two. During this stage of data analysis, I was continually seeking to: 1) consider whether all data within each category formed a coherent pattern; 2) consider the validity of each theme in relation to each category; 3) develop a further understanding of each theme and the story it tells; and 4) reflect on the themes emerging from the data. This data reduction and refining process follows Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis. The authors explain that the need for re-coding of the data through data reduction and refining is to be expected, as coding is an ongoing organic process. Themes within each set were reviewed and refined into new themes that were a better reflection of the story the data was telling. During my review of each theme and category, I wrote detailed notes explaining why they needed refining, thereby aiding my reflexivity. Additionally, I wrote a detailed narrative for each theme that provided insights into the story they tell. Upon this review, I reduced the six categories identified above into the following three categories that represented the primary inquiry of my research: Maya
Women Groups, Marginalised Maya Women, and Maya Way of Life. Furthermore, the themes within the three categories had been reduced from 65 to 39 themes that emerged as the primary findings of my research. Figures 4.1-4.3 are the thematic maps detailing the findings from my thematic data analysis. Additionally, Appendix Four provides an overview of the categories and themes emerging from stage three data analysis.
FIGURE 4.3: THEMATIC MAP: MAYA WAY OF LIFE

Maya way of Life

Marginalised Maya Economics and Income

MARGINALISED MAYA COMMUNITIES

COMMUNAL LIVING

MARGINALISED MAYA ECONOMICS AND INCOME

Religious Identity

THE MAYA ART OF BACKSTRAP WEAVING

MAYA SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESSION

Perceptions of Poverty

MAYA FAMILY FINANCES
As noted above, my data analysis strategy follows the procedure for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Table 4.2 identifies Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis and highlights how, in practice, I adapted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) procedure as a guideline for my thematic data analysis.

**Table 4.1: Thematic Data Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of Thematic Analysis as Outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006)</th>
<th>Adaption and Practical Application in my Thematic Data Analysis</th>
<th>Strategic Objectives</th>
<th>The Iterative Process of Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarise yourself with your data</td>
<td>In-field transcription of interviews, conversations, observations and fieldnotes; Immersion in the data; Development of insights and ideas regarding ‘what’s going on’ in the data; Development of further questions and queries for the Maya women participants; Import all transcripts to NVivo.</td>
<td>Strategic Objectives</td>
<td>Data Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating Initial Codes</td>
<td>Stage One Coding: Open Coding. Identify broad codes of interest; abductive data-driven coding; Coding of all data.</td>
<td>Data Description</td>
<td>Assigning data to refined concepts to portray meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for Themes</td>
<td>Stage Two Coding: Focused Coding. Re-ordering codes by grouping related codes under categories and organising all codes into a framework; Development of codes into potential themes.</td>
<td>Data Description</td>
<td>Refining and distilling more abstract concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assigning data to themes to portray meaning
### 4. Reviewing Themes

**Stage Three Coding: Data Refining and Reduction.**
Reviewing and refining codes into new themes that are a better reflection of the story the data is telling;
Developing further understanding of categories and themes emerging from the data.

### 5. Defining and Naming Themes

Development of thematic map for three categories emerging from research;
Writing detailed narratives for each theme and gaining insights into the story they are telling.

### 6. Producing the Report

Writing findings;
Extrapolating deeper meaning of themes emerging;
Relating back of the analysis to the research inquiry and literature.

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In Chapters Six and Seven, I enact phase six of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis procedure by presenting the findings that emerged from my seventeen months of thematic data analysis and three months of intensive ethnographic research. However, first I provide insight into how I addressed the complexity of representation during this process.

**The Challenges of Representation**

‘Research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.  
(Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Interpreting data when engaging in research with the ‘Other’ and writing about the ‘Other’ raises the issue of representation, particularly the risk of ‘Othering’. The Maya
women participants shared with me their personal and organisational lives, making themselves dependent on my interpretation and writing, and thereby becoming representationally vulnerable (e.g., Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). A post/decolonial feminist ethnography encourages researchers to question their position as (re)presenter of participants. As such, this approach to research views participants as partners in the research process to avoid the temptation to draw representations that legitimise my voice rather than the participants (e.g., Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; Sultana, 2007). For example, during my time with the Maya women, at the end of each day I reviewed my notes to develop a deeper understanding of the women’s lives and work, and the following day I discussed this with the women to gauge their opinion of my interpretation. In so doing, the Maya women became agents in the research process, ensuring that I was not re-imposing dominant structures that have oppressed them, but acknowledging their agency in the telling of their story.

I am motivated by a sense of responsibility to enable a dialogical voice to emerge through and with me; I am not writing about ‘the Other’, but with her (Gergen, 2003). In the development of the Maya women’s narratives our voices become intertwined. Guided by my post/decolonial feminist ethnography, my ethical commitment to the Maya women participants, and by engaging in reflexivity, I developed relationships with the Maya women. In so doing, I was able to think of, and see, the women, who are very different from me, not as ‘them’ or ‘Other’, but as women accentuating their own agency and exploring their own understanding of their organised existence. This helped me to understand the lives and work of the Maya women participants, but, moreover, it developed in me a sense of sameness and connectedness with the women.
My analysis of the data is guided by my critical constructivist paradigm, that is, my data analysis is inextricably linked to, and influenced by, my epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Throughout data analysis, I follow Denzin's (2005) model for engaging in research with indigenous persons, whereby I stress personal accountability, respect for differences, a capacity for empathy, and continuous reflexivity to ensure I am not speaking for the Maya women, but with them. I act against the authoritative stance of Western research and provide space for the Maya women’s agency, voices and knowledges, and within this space I am reflexive, socially located, and part of the research and text produced (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). I continuously reflect on my authority and standpoint as a person of power and privilege, and critique my own authority and power to control the knowledge produced. Additionally, I follow Krumer-Nevo and Sidi’s (2012) advice in resisting ‘Othering’ by providing the Maya women’s narrative in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. Contextualisation provides a space for the Maya women’s agency and voice, by exposing their everydayness, strengths and structures that oppress them in their organisational and personal realities.

Representation requires a reflexive examination of the context of discovery. Throughout data analysis, I engaged in reflexivity – from familiarising myself with the data in the early stages of analysis through to writing detailed narratives for each theme that emerged following stage three coding – and I continually questioned what I was seeing and why I was seeing it. I wrote notes and memos about themes that were emerging and, alongside this, I wrote further notes about the context in which it emerged in the field. This enabled me to, once again, situate myself in the research and the women’s lives. I tried to situate myself emotionally and socially in the marginalised Maya women’s lives. Further to this, I wrote personal self-reflexive statements at
various stages throughout my data analysis, once again, trying to subject myself to the same level of scrutiny that I was subjecting the Maya women participants. I wanted to ensure that, for example, whatever personal circumstances I was encountering at the time of analysis, personal opinions I had of individual participants, bias from my time in Guatemala, etc., were not influencing the themes that were emerging from the research.

I acknowledge that I write from a privileged position, but at the same time the voices of the marginalised Maya women are located with mine to tell their story; this is their story, not mine. My research is localised, grounded in the Maya women’s meaning of themselves and their work, and, through reflection, dialogue and collaboration, we explore their organising in the margins. This approach helps me to construct a historical, social and cultural representation of organisation that attempts to recover, in their own terms, their organisational discourses and practices. I do not separate myself from the women’s narratives, we built relationships through our differences and worked together to develop their story that demonstrates their agency. In so doing, we developed an emotional connection where the women came to see me as more than a tourist in their lives.

As I say my final goodbyes to the women of the Chuacruz group, a very simple, yet powerful sentence spoken by Yolonda stays with me: “Thank you for getting to know the realities of our lives, and not just stopping by to take our picture and hear our stories. The lives we lead and the stories we tell are different.” These words both scare and excite me, and they are a reminder of the power and responsibility of my ethnography.

There is no simple or direct way to address the ambiguous and complex issue of representation. It is a complicated and sensitive topic, one that requires honesty and transparency, but mostly an ethical commitment to both the participants and the research process. This research is motivated by the desire to share the women’s
knowledge and experiences so to alter the way we understand organisation studies discourse from marginalised Maya women’s experiences. I am aware that by being Western I represent a potential problem in the representation and discussion of these women as ‘the Other’, yet, I am also aware that by neglecting and ignoring their voices, their contribution to organisation studies discourse is limited. Therefore, rather than do nothing, I engage with marginalised Maya women and employ a post/decolonial feminist ethnography to enable me to reflexively decolonise my self and produce knowledge from the women’s experiences. My post/decolonial feminist ethnography is localised, grounded in the Maya women’s ontology and meaning of themselves, and through dialogue and collaboration the self-Other relationship is reflexively explored. I developed my post/decolonial feminist ethnography so I could collaborate with the Maya women participants to tell their stories and, with this, it is my hope that my research is not a dirty word for the Maya women participants.

In the following chapter, I provide contextual insight into the social, cultural and historical location of the indigenous Maya people of Guatemala. Following this, in Chapters Six and Seven, I present in-depth, ethnographic narratives from the Maya women participants. These narratives, developed from the analysed empirical data collected during the fieldwork, illustrate how the social, cultural and historical location of marginalised Maya women weavers impacts their personal and organisational lives. I apply decolonial feminist theoretical perspectives to these narratives to deconstruct and decolonise organisation studies through the experience and knowledge of Maya women living and working in the margins of the Global South.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE MAYA OF GUATEMALA:
SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle, or zoos. We are people, and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism.
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, one month before being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Porras and Riis-Hansen, 1992).

In this chapter, I introduce the Maya of Guatemala. Focusing primarily on Maya women, I provide insight into their social, cultural and historical location. Guatemala has a long, bloody and complex history. Referred to as a “heritage of conquest”, their history has a visible, present condition in the everyday life of Maya Guatemalans (Lovell, 1988, p. 26). According to the UN World Population Prospects (2012), 40 per cent of the population of Guatemala constitute various indigenous Maya ethnicities, with 41.5 per cent comprising of Ladinos (a mixture of indigenous Maya and European heritage), and 18.5 per cent of white European descent. Taube (2012) explains that the Ladino’s are viewed as closer to the ideals of Western progress and modernity and have economic and social advantage over the indigenous Maya population, while the white minority of Guatemala are the politically and economically powerful ethnic group.

The Ladinos and Indians are two distinct classes; the former march ahead with hope and energy through the paths that have been laid out by progress; the latter, immovable, do not take any part in the political and intellectual life, adhering tenaciously to their old habits and customs (Guatemalan National Census, 1894, as cited in Grandin, 2000, p. 130).

According to The Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations (2010), the Maya civilisation dominated the region for nearly 2,000 years before
Spanish colonisers arrived in the early 16th century. Considered the birthplace of the Maya civilisation, Guatemala still has a very active Maya population.

Maya is an umbrella term for a diverse range of indigenous people in Guatemala who share a cultural heritage. The Maya of Guatemala embrace 21 ethnic and linguistic groups, each with their own traditions and culture. Guatemala is discursively defined as a “multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation” (Bastos, 2012, p. 157). Having survived colonisation and Civil War, the Maya people of Guatemala and their cultural identity are resilient. Nonetheless, they encounter social and economic marginalisation in the everydayness of their lives.

The majority of Maya live in the Departments of the North and Western Highlands: Totonicapan is 98 per cent Maya, followed by Sololá (96 per cent), Quiché (89 per cent), Huehuetenango (64 per cent), Quetzaltenango (53 per cent), and San Marcos (29 per cent), with the lowlands disproportionately inhabited by Ladinos (MacNeill, 2014). The Highlands have the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion in Guatemala, with poverty highest amongst indigenous households and primarily rural (The World Bank, 2016). Essentially, poor, rural, indigenous households are highly dependent on agriculture for subsistence farming and employment (Alwang, Siegel and Wooldall-Gainey, 2005; The World Bank, 2003; 2016).

**The Colonisation of the Ancient Maya**

Coe (2005) explains that much of ancient Maya culture and knowledge was destroyed or lost after Spanish colonisation. However, archaeologists and historians are beginning to piece together how the ancient Maya once lived. Maya culture and
society spanned from modern-day Southern Mexico through Guatemala and Belize to North-Western portions of Honduras and El Salvador.

At the peak of Maya civilisation (approximately 500-1000 BCE), Maya society was one of the most advanced on earth, having developed a complex culture with knowledge of astronomy and mathematics and an intricate written language. It was also a brutal culture with warfare, slavery and human sacrifice commonplace. Although brutal, the ancient Maya was not a patriarchal society. In the Maya philosophical conception, the man-woman relationship is based on the principles of duality and complementarity, resting on equality and respect between man and woman and fluidity between man/woman (Lopez, 2006). Maya cultural traditions had male, female and third gendered (neither male or female and both male and female) deities and both men and women ruled throughout the many Maya kingdoms. Indeed, gender was not segregated according to sexuality; it was understood to be fluid (Joyce, 1997; Looper, 2002; Marcos, 1998).

By the time Spanish colonisers arrived in 1524, Maya civilisation was in decline, most Maya cities had fallen into ruin, and the remaining Maya were living in small towns and villages. Recent archaeological evidence finds that ongoing environmental constraints, such as droughts and deforestation, together with warring clans caused this decline (Coe, 2005).

Still, the conquest of the Maya was not easily attained. However, with epidemics of disease, cultural shock, inferior weaponry and hostilities between competing Maya groups, “subjugation by a more formidable adversary was ultimately the fate … of the brave and stubborn Maya” (Lovell, 1988, p. 30). Lovell (1988), MacNeill (2014) and Grasco (2005) explain that the Spanish policy of congregación (congregation: small
settlements run by religious orders) coerced indigenous families from their homes in the mountains into settlements built around churches on valley floors. This proved an effective form of colonial administration and control, forestalling rebellion by ensuring no substantial indigenous population remained outside the sphere of Spanish surveillance, facilitating conversion to Christianity, utilising a readily available workforce, and displacing Maya people from their lands for private ownership. Spanish colonisation entailed forced labour and mandatory conversion to Christianity. Arrests and torture were commonplace, and Maya artefacts and sacred texts were actively destroyed.

However, the diverse topography and terrain of Guatemala resulted in differentiated colonial experiences. In the South and East, where the indigenous communities were more encroached upon, Spanish and Maya mixed, creating the Ladino population. The remote and rugged North and Western Highlands proved a difficult and non-economically viable terrain for enterprising conquistadors. In the Highlands, the Maya were more resilient in the maintenance of their culture and traditional customs. Even so, these regions were colonised and ruled by Spanish Catholic congregaciones.

Colonisation imposed upon all Maya a Christian patriarchal and hierarchical society. Grasco (2005) explains that there were important differences between Spanish and Maya understandings of gender roles. Spanish colonisation brought with it the fundamental belief of the inferiority of women and their submissive position to men. The inequality of women was explicit in Spanish social and religious customs; women were prohibited from participating in political, professional and religious institutions. In contrast, the position of women in Maya society was highly regarded, and the division of labour between men and women was not hierarchical. Women occupied
important and leading positions as rulers, priestesses and healers. The Maya cosmovision respects men and women equally. The value of women is emphasised in the strong connection between women, the earth and the moon, manifest in their leading deity, the Moon Goddess. The Maya calendar is based on a cycle of 260 days, reflecting the gestational cycle of women and also the cycle of the moon (Krogstad, 2015). Lopez (2006) notes that many indigenous uprisings were organised and led by women, particularly the 1755 armed rebellion against a Mayor Governor in Chimaltenango who demanded indigenous women supply the Colonial Government with increasingly larger quantities of blankets and fabrics as tax. However, Spanish colonisation inevitably led to the submission and subjugation of Maya women (Grasco, 2005). The principles of duality and complementarity decreasingly guided the relationship and behaviour between men and women in indigenous Maya communities. Through the patriarchy embedded in Christianity and modernity/coloniality, a male chauvinist, machismo society emerged pushing Maya women further into the margins.

**Civil War: Maya Uprising and Genocide**

Throughout Guatemala, suspicion, distrust, hatred and fear bred under Spanish colonial rule and the marginalisation of the Maya and their culture did not diminish with independence from Spain in 1821 (Lovell, 1988; MacNeill, 2014). The country was then, and still is, ruled by an oligarchy of wealthy white, and some Ladino, landowners. However, in 1944 socio-democratic reforms were implemented by democratically elected president Juan Jose Arevalo and his successor Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Following 400 years of displacement and subjugation, there was a redistribution of land to the Maya population and Ladino peasants. Dubbed the ‘ten
years of spring’ (1944-54), Guatemalans enjoyed unprecedented freedom and hope from the implementation of social and nationalist reforms (Grandin, 2000). However, Guatemala’s progression towards the left was short-lived. Following the nationalisation of the American-owned United Fruits Company, the largest landowner in Guatemala, as well as the wealthiest and most powerful organisation in Guatemala, an American-backed coup reversed the land-reforms and socio-democratic restructuring. This was cast as a victory against communism by the American government and landowning Guatemalans (BBC, 2012; Grandin, 2000).

This coup sets the stage for a Maya uprising and brutal 36-year Civil War. Grandin (2000, p. 198) explains that “1954 signalled the beginning of what would become the most repressive state in the hemisphere, a state responsible for the torture and murder of two hundred thousand of its citizens”. The social and economic dislocation of the Maya and peasant Ladinos encouraged a guerrilla warfare response. Maya insurgents began fighting government military and right-wing militias for socioeconomic justice and indigenous rights (May, 1999). As explained by Lovell (1988, p. 45), “The Guatemalan government, at the command and in the service of a powerful few, declared war on its own citizenry, especially its indigenous peoples”. From 1960 to 1996, Civil War raged in Guatemala under a series of military dictators based on a campaign of unprecedented terror. Any potential opposition, including labour unions, students, intellectuals and political leaders were targeted. However, the government campaign primarily focused on the country’s rural, indigenous population, ultimately claiming “the lives of tens of thousands of indigenous Mayas, mostly who probably never knew who Karl Marx was, let alone understood or agreed with the ideals he upheld” (Lovell, 1988, p. 45).
Most rural indigenous communities became ‘suspect communities’ as military and militia forces failed to distinguish between ‘insurgents’ and ‘indigenous’. These communities became targets of mass killings and torture, the destruction of personal property, the burning of crops, the killing of livestock, and home to ‘the disappeared’ (Grandin, 2000; Green, 1994; Lovell, 1988; May, 1999; Sanford, 2008). Referred to as La Violencia (the violence), the late 1970’s to the mid-1980’s represented the most brutal years in Guatemala’s recent history. The most virulent aspects of Ladino elitist nationalism culminated into a counterinsurgency that singled out the rural Maya population in a campaign of repression and murder (Grandin, 2000; Lovell, 1988). La Violencia was justified by the Guatemalan government claiming the army was “scorching communists” in a successful “policy of repression”, however, the primary outcome was the massacre of the inhabitants of 626 Maya villages (Sanford, 2008, p. 546). The indigenous Maya represented the quintessential ‘Other’ in both physical and cultural terms for the elitist Ladino and white Guatemalan population, who argued that the Maya population was hindering Guatemala’s progression towards modernity and Western development (Smith, 1990).

Sanford’s (1997; 2000; 2001) comprehensive ethnography of Maya women during the Civil War provides detailed insight into the everyday life of ordinary rural Maya women during this time of terror and repression. The response of Maya women varied: some protested peacefully, some organised and participated in popular organisations, some joined in combat with the guerrilla movement, others participated in non-combat roles where they prepared food and searched for supplies, some fled to the mountains or the United States for refuge, and some suffered in isolated silence. Sanford (2000; 2001) explains that the publication of Rigoberta Menchú Tum’s (1983) autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, challenged
representations of Maya women that negated the dynamic and varied political response of Maya women to Guatemalan state violence. This book came to represent the antithesis of stereotypes of Maya women as silent, traditional, static subordinates without politics or agency.

In 1996, and moderated by the United Nations since 1994, the historic Peace Accords – designed to “unite a fragmented society and transform a militarised State that had abused human rights massively during the conflict, perpetuated social inequalities and systematically excluded indigenous peoples” (MINUGUA, 2004, p. 5) – were signed by the Guatemalan army and leftist guerrillas, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) (Holiday, 2000; Sanford, 2008). The United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA, 2004, p. 5), which monitored the Peace Accords until 2006, encountered a “tough uphill struggle” and resistance from powerful groups in Guatemala threatened by change when implementing the Peace Accords. For ten years, the Peace Accords monitored socioeconomic issues, indigenous rights, resettlement of refugees and the displaced population, and electoral and constitutional reforms (Holiday, 2000). During this time, Guatemala’s Historical Clarification Commission declared that the military had committed genocide, finding that 83 per cent of those killed during the Civil War were members of the Maya community (MINUGUA, 2004; Sanford, 2008).

Maya Cultural Diversity and Resilience

Despite everything endured by the Maya people of Guatemala, they have proven resilient in maintaining their cultural traditions throughout colonisation and Civil War
As noted by Lovell (1988, p.48), “while conquest may darken their lives, it has yet to extinguish their culture”.

Maya cultural identity is complicated and continually transforming in response to history and politics. Smith (1991) explains that the reason why Maya culture is so resilient is because it has never been monolithic. The fragmentation of Maya identity allows for a variety of adept responses to changing circumstances preventing the assimilation of all Maya communities at once. The 21 Maya ethnicities and languages in Guatemala reflect pre-colonisation political and ethnic Maya divisions. Many modern Maya communities have different religions, different economic and trading systems within their communities, and different Maya communities specialise in different methods of craft production and corn farming (Smith, 1991). Maya culture is pluralised and localised, rather than generic and monolithic.

Notwithstanding the fragmentation in Maya cultural identity, many Maya nationalist organisations have emerged in Guatemala following the Civil War to unite and make visible the presence of the Maya people (Montejo, 1997). The Pan-Maya Movement promotes Maya culture as a whole. This movement is a political process of redefining Maya identity within a global context and is a means of self-representation for the Maya population of Guatemala, and, in so doing, the Pan-Maya Movement challenges the ontology of modernity that has become ingrained in the everydayness of the Maya of Guatemala (Aljazeera, 2014; Fischer and Mckenna Brown, 1996; Fischer, 1996; Montejo, 1997; Warren, 1998). Pan-Mayaism argues for a common Maya identity, while also recognising that it is their diversity that makes Maya culture strong and resilient (Fischer and Mckenna Brown, 1996).
Maya Religions

During colonisation, the vast majority of indigenous Maya were converted to Christianity. However, the resilient Maya mixed their Catholicism with elements of Maya spirituality and, in so doing, many Maya traditions have survived through their links to Catholicism (Bastos, 2012). The Maya cosmovision is not the same as organised religion. In its most basic form, it is a practice of social solidarity, a holistic worldview that connects life, nature and time, and upholds the importance of ancestors to maintain identity and knowledge. Modern Maya Catholics see no incompatibility between the teachings of Catholicism and basic elements of Maya spirituality (Bastos, 2012; Bell, 2012; Burgos, Camey, Diaz Lara, Otzoy, Molina, Ponce and Veldman, 2011; Martínez Salazar, 2014).

However, religious demography has changed significantly in the past few decades and new religious groups have flourished throughout Guatemala. A variety of Christian groups are gaining prominence in Guatemala, for example, Mormon and Jehovah Witnesses, but an influx of American Evangelical missionaries has converted over 30 per cent of the population. The majority of Evangelical churches are less tolerant of indigenous practices incorporated into their religion and discourage indigenous members from traditional practices by denouncing them as ‘witchcraft’ or ‘devil worship’ (Bastos, 2012; International Religious Freedom, 2012; Martínez Salazar, 2014).

The diversity in the understandings and practices of religion by the indigenous Maya contributes to the pluralistic nature of modern Maya cultural identity. Thus, ethnicity, not religion, is the most salient category of identity for many Maya. Protestants, Catholics and Maya spiritualists identify themselves as Maya first and then by their religion. Religious differences do not interfere in everyday life in Maya
communities (ethnographic observations; Fischer, 1999; Warren, 1998). As noted by Alicia from the Chuacruz group:

*The Maya people are many different religions. ... But for me, Maya is our identity. ... A few of the women in the group are Evangelical, but most are Catholic. The religion of the women doesn’t matter to the group. ... And the religion of the people doesn’t matter to the community.*

**Mayan Languages, Backstrap Weaving and Traje**

Language is the primacy of Maya ethnicity and, thereby, Maya identity. Maya identities are ideologically constructed through language practices (Aljazeera, 2014). A key factor mainstreaming discrimination during the Civil War was language; the Maya population were seen as an obstacle to modernity and Western development because of their pre-modern, ‘archaic’ languages (Smith, 1990).

Following the Civil War, the preservation of Mayan languages is being promoted in an attempt to support a unified Maya identity (Fischer and Mckenna Brown, 1996). Maya intellectual and activist Demetrio Cojti Cuxil (1990, p. 12) argues that “Maya people exist because [we] have and speak [our] own languages”. In this way, the preservation of Mayan languages is inextricably linked to the preservation of Maya identity, and act as a linguistic barrier to aspects of modernity encountered in the everydayness of Maya life (McKenna Brown, 1996). Despite the diversity in Mayan languages spoken, the 21 Mayan languages are crucial for the preservation of culture for a group of people who have been socially and culturally marginalised by a dominant group (Jiménez Sánchez, 1998).

Together with language, modern Maya cultural identity is evident in the preservation of traditional Maya dress (the *traje*). Fischer (2001) explains that both the wearing of the *traje* and the speaking of Mayan languages promotes cultural distinction from the Ladino population. Mayan languages and *traje* are the antithesis of
modernity/coloniality and signify a shared cultural identity between Maya people. The *traje* is the traditional clothing of the Maya people and is a powerful expression of social identity, and thus acts as a visual barrier to aspects of modernity encountered in the everydayness of Maya life. Maya women make their *traje* through backstrap weaving, a traditional Maya art-form of producing textiles. When aged between eight and ten, Maya girls are taught by their mothers how to backstrap weave (Hendrickson, 1995). In backstrap weaving, which is a key component of everyday life, Maya women make their *huipil*, their traditional blouses, and the weaving of their *huipil* is highly symbolic as the design, colours and choice of thread will produce the final product that will represent the culture, history and identity of a woman and her community (Hendrickson, 1995). Not only do the textiles play a role in the daily life and identity of Maya women, but the process of weaving itself is related to the Maya tenants of gender and culture. Photograph 5.1 illustrates the backstrap weaving of a *huipil*. The process of backstrap weaving and the backstrap woven *traje* are embodiments of Maya culture passed on through generations that symbolise the cultural creativity and resilience of Maya women (Hiller, Linstroth and Vela 2009; Tedlock and Tedlock, 1985).

**Photograph 5.1: Backstrap Weaving a Huipil**

(Maria Chiroy (L) and Dominga and her mother (R))
Like the Mayan languages, the traje, particularly the huipil, differs within each Maya ethnicity, with different patterns, designs and colours representing different Maya ethnicities and communities. The traje provides a marker for ethnic and communal belonging, as well as a visible boundary from the Ladino population (Hendrickson, 1995; Hiller et al. 2009). Maya women are easily identifiable by their distinct and colourful dress, whereas Maya men appear indistinguishable from Ladino men in their wearing of jeans and t-shirts. Few Maya men continue to wear their traje; men in traje are considered non-masculine and of low status by both the Maya and Ladino populations (Hendrickson, 1995). As noted by Mercedes:

*I am proud being an indigenous woman. Maya women wear our traditional clothes … we make our own clothes. Maya men have lost this; most men no longer wear their traje. … It’s the responsibility of Maya women to keep this part of our culture alive.*

**Maya Social and Economic Dislocation**

While Maya cultural identity has remained resilient and, in so doing, the Maya of Guatemala have resisted integrating aspects of Western modernity into the everydayness of their lives, they are fully integrated into other aspects of modernity primarily in the acceptance of capitalism as a socio-material form and the Western cultural construct of ‘the economy’ (Escobar, 2010; Fischer, 1996). Yet, a history of colonisation, subjugation and Civil War has produced a socially and economically dislocated Maya population in Guatemala.

Having been denied the right to political participation and cultural self-representation, there is now an organised Pan-Maya Movement that promotes a united cultural identity and social mobility for the Maya population. However, few activists involved in this movement are ‘men of maize’, that is, few are peasant farmers and
artisans who constitute the majority of Guatemala’s Maya population, and much of the Pan-Maya Movement suffers from miscommunication, multiple agendas, and insufficient means of achieving their goals (Smith, 1991; Montejo, 1997; The World Bank, 2003).

Nonetheless, working together with the Pan-Maya Movement and various international agencies, for example, the World Bank and United Nations, the Guatemalan state has enacted a series of cultural and social changes, including: recognition of Mayan languages, bilingual education, free access to primary education for all Guatemalans, freedom of religion, and increased access to basic utility services. While there have been significant advances regarding access to education, water, electricity and transportation services, little has been done to address poverty-related problems that affect the majority of Maya people (Bastos, 2012; Bastos and Brett, 2010; International Religious Freedom, 2012; The World Bank, 2016). The World Bank (2016) found that although Guatemala has made significant progress in achieving macroeconomic and democratic stability after the Civil War, many indigenous households have not experienced significant improvements in their economic living conditions. This is strongly influenced by the limited non-agricultural employment opportunities in the Highland regions (Hamilton and Fischer, 2005).

While the World Bank (2016) concludes that Guatemala has become the biggest economy in Central America through prudent macroeconomic management, it also finds that the country has one of the highest economic inequality rates in Latin America, with the worst poverty, malnutrition and maternal-child mortality rates in rural and indigenous areas.
Maya Women Living in the Margins

Maya women are the most systematically excluded and discriminated against demographic in Guatemalan society. Notwithstanding the resilience of Maya culture and Guatemala’s recent socioeconomic progress, marginalised Maya women are victims of triple discrimination: as poor, indigenous women (ethnographic research; Lopez, 2006; MUNUGUA, 2004). Maya women live in the shadow of colonisation, enduring social, economic, ethnic and gender discrimination in the everydayness of their lives. A legacy of colonialism, marginalisation and discrimination has reduced Maya women to peasants and, in so doing, their knowledge, authority, economic and even gender powers have been removed (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). The poetry of Maya writer Calixta Gabriel Xiquín outlines the ethnic and gender discrimination encountered in the everydayness of marginalised Maya women’s lives, and yet, at the same time, Maya women celebrate their cultural heritage and role as women.

…and while she [Maya women] must face struggles in the present, and has faced them in the past, she also provides hope for what is to come. She is a complex imperative member of her culture, community, and world, and cannot be seen separately from that world (Krogstad, 2015, p. 47).

Xiquín credits the historic resilience of Maya culture to the resilience of Maya women: “[Maya] women refuse to allow Maya men, Ladinos, the state or scholars to define them or their past” (Krogstad, 2015, p. 56). Even so, Maya women continue to be presented by Western academics and local agencies as passive victims without political agency. O’Donnell's (2009, p. 147) critical analysis of various published research conducted with Maya women survivors of the Guatemalan Civil War argues that much research reinforces the victimhood of Maya women and highlights their vulnerabilities:
…this sense of helplessness that dominates much of the writing on Maya women is an unconcealed attempt to deny the many ways in which Maya women were effective actors in the struggle and continue to remain agents in the reshaping of Guatemalan politics.

Arias (2013, p. 222) argues that a “new framework within the geopolitics of knowledge, one demanding respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference anchored in gender and ethnic difference”, is vital to create a space for the voices of Maya women. To this end, the following chapter presents the narratives of the Maya women participants framed with a decolonial feminist theoretical lens, thereby providing space for them to demonstrate their agency and to speak for themselves about their experiences of being Maya women living and working in the margins.
CHAPTER SIX

SPEAKING BACK: “THE MAYA WOMAN CAN DO EVERYTHING.

... I THINK INDIGENOUS MAYA WOMEN ARE VERY STRONG WOMEN!”

In this chapter, I introduce the marginalised Maya women participants and provide a space for the women to voice their own understanding of their identity and gender. Here, ‘speaking back’ challenges colonial discourse’s construction of these women as ‘the Other’ and contests the homogeneity of the singular Global South woman by facilitating a space for these women to represent themselves. To this end, I provide the women’s narratives to demonstrate how they speak about themselves and their experiences of being Maya women living and working in the margins. This forms part of a move towards decoloniality by demonstrating their agency and capacity to articulate their gendered and cultured identities. As such, this is a space for Maya women to voice their own construction and contextualisation of their identity as women from their social, cultural and historical perspective.

Framed by decolonial feminism, as outlined in Chapter Three, this chapter seeks to contribute to the decoloniality of gender by challenging commonly held assumptions regarding the capabilities, struggles, experiences, and identity of marginalised Maya women. Thus, theorising from within the margins, I centre Maya women’s conceptualisations of gender and Maya culture within a decolonial feminist framework. I do not seek to examine the conceptualisations of ancient Maya gender and identities that pre-existed modern European gender systems nor is this about promoting a return to an ancient idealised past. Rather, I seek to demonstrate that Maya women have the agency to construct their own discourse from their own social, cultural
and historical location. The marginalised Maya women of this research do not identify themselves as (indigenous) feminists; rather, they share their ideas and experiences, in so doing, challenging commonly held assumptions regarding their identity, agency and capabilities. Effectively, ‘speaking back’ affords the women agency, as their narratives tell their story of the lived experience of the gendered colonial difference. The women are condemned to exclusion in the majority of spaces, and this chapter gives legitimacy to their experiences by identifying who they are and what it means to be a Maya woman.

In what follows, I provide descriptive insight into the everydayness of the lives of Maya women living in the socio-economic margins. The chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, the narratives of the Maya women participants provide insight into their lives as Maya women and their understanding of what it means to be a Maya woman. Thus, the focus of this section is on how the Maya women identify themselves as women and how this is impacted by their cultural, social and historical location. Here, the agency and capacity of Maya women living in the margins is demonstrated by highlighting their strength and resilience. The second section draws on the concepts of modernity/coloniality and the coloniality of gender and provides insight into the coloniality of Maya women by exploring how the meaning of womanhood and the women’s identity is framed within a patriarchal, modernity/coloniality context. In the third section, I provide descriptive insight into familial and community collaboration and the cooperation between the women working together in the groups. This section demonstrates the capacity of Maya families, communities and women to collaborate to address the challenges of living in the socio-economic periphery. Then follows the concluding section that highlights the contributions of the marginalised Maya women participating in this research to the
theoretical development of decolonial feminism and a movement towards the
decoloniality of gender.

Being a Maya Woman Living in the Margins

The Everydayness of Being a Maya Woman: “The life of a woman is not easy”

My research is shaped by my relationship with the Maya women participants, and, during my time with the women, our relationship developed from a professional, cautious one into collaborative research built on reciprocal dialogue. The women and I shared experiences and talked about our lives. Mealtime is central to the familial social experience in the Maya women’s homes, and women enjoy their time preparing and cooking family meals together. It was during this time that we talked about our experiences of being women in our different countries and cultures, and the women talked freely with me about their opinions on womanhood and what it means for them to be an indigenous Maya woman. Together we created a casual, relaxed environment; I helped prepare food and peel vegetables and the women laughed at how poorly I made tortillas. Preparing family meals together, we explored the role, expectations and experiences of being a woman living in the margins. Isabel sums up the life of many Maya women:

*Sometimes we laugh because the life of a woman is not easy. Women here get up early, grind the corn and make the breakfast, clean the dishes, get the children ready for school, clean the house, and wash the family clothes. Then we have to start preparing the lunch and after lunch we clean again. If we have time, we weave our orders [for the group] in the morning and afternoon, but we sometimes have to go to the fields to help the men with our agriculture. We also have to weave and sew clothes and look after the children in the afternoon. And then we have to start preparing dinner. After dinner, we have to wash the dishes again, and we also have to weave again, especially if we have orders. Women are the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed.*
The women accept that this is their life and their responsibility as Maya women. Indeed, they argue that being a Maya woman means looking after your husband and children, being a good cook and maintaining your home. As explained by Carmen, Dominga and Marcela, respectively:

*An indigenous [Maya] woman stays at home, working in the kitchen and taking care of the children. ... It’s more difficult [being a Maya woman], and living in a small community we don’t have a lot of opportunities. But it is also good because [we] learn about the kitchen, how to work and take care of the family.* (Carmen)

*It’s very important [to be in the home] because all [Maya] women need to learn how to wash the clothes, make tortillas, work in the kitchen, sweep the floors and do all of the work of the house. This is important to me. ... When I leave the home [to go to group meetings] my mum tells me that I shouldn’t go because I have many things to do in the home.* (Dominga)

*Working from home is important for me because this way I can be with my family and take care of my [special needs] brother and [elderly] mum. And for the other women, it’s important for them to be in the home to take care of their children and husbands.* (Marcela)

The women take great pride in their homes and families, and this brings the women of the home together. Within the home, there is a strong sense of camaraderie between women. Maya women have many responsibilities in the home and all women in the home work together and support one another. As explained by Micela: “We help each other around the house and when cooking, and we help with each other’s [group] orders.” Maya families grow as families grow older; when a son marries, he and his wife move into the family compound and build their own hut. Generations of families are found within an ever expanding open compound. Grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters and in-laws work together in the home and make products and clothes together; they are a community of women working together in the home. Photograph 6.1 illustrates Maya women working together in the home making tortillas. Caterina and Dominga, respectively, explain:
We help each other, me, my daughters and daughters-in-law, we all work together. If I wake up early, I will set the fire in the stove and the girls will wash the plates and organise the home. We cook together and we help each other. (Caterina)

All [the women of the house] work together, we help each other. (Dominga)

Photograph 6.1: Working Together in the Home Making Tortillas

(Marta and her daughters (L), Rosa and daughter-in-law Sara (top R), and Carmen and daughters (bottom R))

The women’s homes don’t have much, but they take great pride in their homes. There are no Western amenities, making simple, everyday household work a challenging, time-consuming experience. Still, each home has recently received access to regular electricity and running water, however, water is restricted to one location in the family home, the traditional Guatemalan sink located in the centre of the open compound.
Marisol talks about the life of a Maya woman, “It’s very hard being a [Maya] woman. You need to organise your time. The role of indigenous women means we have many things to do. ... And the women of the home work together to achieve this.” The women need to organise their time to manage their many responsibilities in the home, but also so they can create time to participate in their groups. As explained by Flori:

*If women organise themselves well they can work well in the group and at home; women need to get up early and be organised to do the chores of the house. If women are not organised they will not do well in the home or in the group.*

Maya women, particularly the matriarch, who in this research was usually the member of the group, must be organised so to be able to: provide for her family and manage whatever income is generated between the family members to feed her family every day; she must also manage income to pay for school fees, books, pens, bus fare, etc.; she has to cook all meals for her family ‘from scratch’ using basic utensils and open wood fires, taking hours to prepare and cook each meal; she has to hand-wash all clothes, bed sheets, nappies, etc.; she has to look after the family’s livestock; together with the men of the house, she must grow and harvest family crops; she has to make and mend clothes for her family and make products for her group; and she also must maintain a clean home amid dust, floods, hurricanes and roaming farm animals. Simply put by Candelaria and Isabel, respectively, “There are not enough hours in the day for me!” and “I am responsible for everything”.

The everydayness of life in the home is difficult for the women, and the women work together and support one another so to overcome these difficulties. Their remoteness, the high altitude and their agrarian life creates a tough environment for the women and requires demanding physical labour; the work of the Maya woman is physically straining on the body. Every day is physically demanding. As explained by
Maria Chiroy: “[Life is difficult for Maya women] because of the work in the home, having to take care of the children and weaving. There’s so much to do, and it’s difficult. It’s difficult on the body.” Mercedes also talks about how physically tired she is every day:

*Sometimes the body has to have a break. Sometimes, when I’m so tired, I lay on the bed for 10 minutes, but I can’t sleep because my head is spinning and I’m thinking about everything I have to do. And most times I just don’t have time for a break.*

Aura explains how years of weaving and the burden of a Maya woman’s responsibilities leaves her exhausted and in great physical pain:

*I am very busy. I don’t get time to take a break or rest, only if I’m sick. When I’m healthy, I work all the time. I have to take care of the necessities of the home. I have to wake up early and go to bed late. I am always very busy. From all the work I am doing, I have a lot of pain in my back and legs. I’ve been working very hard for many years and from an early age, washing clothes, weaving; it’s all very hard on the body.*

**The Strength of Maya Women: “A Maya woman can do everything”**

The women recognise and accept the many challenges they have to endure in the everydayness of their lives and from this they draw their strength. Katerina explains that “an indigenous [Maya] woman can do everything: take care of the children, work, weave and sew.” And Candelaria explains that Maya women are stronger than men:

*[Maya] women are able to do more things than men. If you leave a man maybe he can do a few things, but not everything, men may be stronger physically, but women are actually stronger. Women can do more things.*

The women view their domesticity as a strength and their work in the home is not an obstacle to empowerment; indeed, their domesticity engenders their emotional strength and physical endurance. The women are leaders in their home, and, in the majority of households, the women are the main providers, as their work in the group
generates the primary income for their household. Participating in their group does not inhibit their work in the home; the women balance their responsibilities in the home and their work in the group for the betterment of themselves and their families. Managing these responsibilities is a reflection of the strength and resilience of Maya women. Candelaria identifies the strength of Maya women over Ladina women in Guatemala:

...that’s the difference. The Maya woman is stronger than the Ladina woman. Some Ladina women have workers that do everything and they only eat; some don’t work or even work in the home. Ladina women get sick easier because they are not as strong as the Maya woman.

Antonia reflects on the strength of Maya women:

"I think that indigenous women are stronger than Ladina women. The Maya woman can do everything: we cook, do everything in the home, and work the land. In my case, as a widow during the war, I raised three children and managed the home and started the group. I think indigenous Maya women are very strong women!"

The women draw on the strength of their Maya ancestors as their source of strength. As explained by Candelaria: “Maya women are strong. I am strong like my ancestors. My ancestors were strong women and I am of them, not different.” The women have an enormous sense of pride in their ancestral heritage. Although their culture, customs and religious practices have changed, the Maya women claim a strong connection with the many generations of Guatemalan Maya women that have gone before them. What follows is a variety of quotes from Maya women explaining their sense of pride in, and source of strength from, their foremothers:

"I am happy and proud to be an indigenous woman, I was born like this and so were my ancestors. I can’t buy or change my personality or culture. This is who I am and this makes me strong. (Marcela)"

"Being a Maya woman means more than just being a woman. [It means that] I have equal rights. I have a rich culture, and my ancestors had a lot
of knowledge. Maya women are the same as other women, but we are also part of a great culture. Being an indigenous woman, I am proud of my culture. I have rights. I can do anything I want. And I have the power of my ancestors. (Marisol)

For me, being an indigenous woman is a gift. I am Kachiquel, so I am happy to know I have wise ancestors, but we have also suffered a lot. (Anna)

I am proud to be an indigenous woman and this makes me happy. Sometimes I suffer because I don’t have a lot and life is difficult. But Maya women work a lot and work hard. (Caterina)

The women’s source of pride in their ancestral heritage is also demonstrated through their preservation of their traditional dress (the traje) and languages. As noted by Dominga: “For me, a Maya woman wears her typical Maya clothes and speaks the languages of her ancestors”. Wearing their traje provides the women with a sense of identity and connectedness to their ancestors; their traje is a source of pride. In the different Maya communities covered in this research, Maya women have their own patterns, colouring and design of traje that distinguishes their community from others. Yolonda Chiroy and Sara, respectively, explain:

I am proud of being an indigenous woman. Every town has their own culture, their own food, their own dress, and different languages. Guatemala has many Maya cultures. (Yolanda Chiroy)

Being a Maya woman is about having respect for our culture, our languages, our traditional dress. (Sara)

Language, together with wearing the traje of your community, provides a sense of identity for the women. As noted in the previous chapter, there are 21 recognised Maya languages in Guatemala and hundreds of styles of traditional dress. Maya is an umbrella term for several related languages and people. Maya culture is not monolithic; each community visited had different cultural customs, languages and traje, yet they were all proud of their collective heritage. As noted by Yolonda Caljua:
For me, it’s beautiful to be a Maya woman, to wear our clothes and speak our languages. All Maya people are proud Maya, we are different, but of the same. And being a Maya woman, I represent my community, I speak my language and wear the traditional clothes of my town.

The women wear their traje and speak their languages with pride, but it is also a responsibility. As well as Civil War and genocide, Maya culture is not unaffected by modernity. Few men wear their traditional clothes and younger generations are choosing to speak Spanish over their indigenous language. Mercedes explains: “It’s our responsibility to preserve and maintain our culture. ... [Maya] men have already lost this.” Maya men still wearing their traditional clothes are seen as peasant farmers not wanting to move towards modernity, whereas Maya women are expected to wear their traje to promote their cultural identity. This is a responsibility the women accept and take seriously. Promoting and preserving their cultural identity is viewed in harmony with modern Guatemalan society, not in opposition. Maya boys attend school in jeans and t-shirts, but Maya girls attend school in their traje. Maya women working in banks and offices in large towns wear their traje, not formal, Western office clothing. Spanish is the universal language in Guatemala for persons to communicate with others outside of their homes and communities, and school is taught in Spanish. Still, at home and between neighbours, the Maya only speak their indigenous language.

A long history of Maya persecution has not eroded Maya pride. As noted by Mercedes:

I am proud being a Maya woman. We wear our typical clothes with pride. You see many tourists in the big towns wanting to buy our clothes and I’ve seen some American women wearing our clothes! These people want it, but they cannot have it, they are not Maya. I appreciate it. This makes me proud.

This is not to romanticise Maya women’s sense of pride or to say that all Maya women want to proudly and vividly display their culture and identity. Some younger generations of Maya women rebel against this, wanting to ‘fit-in’ with modernity and
demonstrate their connectedness to the Western world by wearing Western-styled clothing, usually bought, like men’s clothes, second- or third-hand from piles of clothes amassed on tarpaulin on market floors. However, young Maya women not wearing their *traje* are frowned-upon by the women, as noted by Dominga:

*I think that if a girl doesn’t wear her traditional clothes she is ashamed. If she is studying perhaps that girl wants to show people that she is studying by not wearing her traditional clothes and not speaking Kaqchikel. She thinks she is better than other Maya women.*

Candelaria explains the impact of this on her and her community:

*I don’t like it, and it’s a negative thing for our community. We want to keep the culture, but some girls want to kill it. Some girls in the town wear jeans and only speak in Spanish, but I can’t understand them; I don’t speak Spanish. A lot of men and women here don’t speak Spanish; this makes us feel bad.*

This highlights the pressure on young Maya women struggling to balance their cultural identity with globalised, Western modernity. For example, Luisa, my translator, did not originally wear her *traje* when first accompanying me to the women’s homes and villages. However, this soon changed when a number of women in the Chuacruz group complained that Luisa not wearing her *traje* made them feel uncomfortable. When I discussed this with Luisa, she said:

*I’m proud being a Maya woman. I don’t have to wear my traje to show that I am Maya or demonstrate my pride. But some women are more traditional, so I’ll wear my traje from now if it makes them feel more comfortable. … Maybe they see me differently because I can speak English. Maybe wearing my traje will remind the women I’m just like them, even though I’m going to university and I speak English.*

Following the Civil War, Guatemalan Mayas gained access to free primary education. Thus, younger generations learned Spanish and, particularly in remote rural areas, became exposed to the possibility of a non-agrarian life. Alongside this, rapidly
growing tourism interested in Guatemala’s rugged landscape and its ancient Maya architecture exposed many Maya to new persons, cultures and ways of life, primarily contemporary, globalised, Western modernity. Together with higher levels of educational attainment, greater exposure to Western modernity and the exponential rise in American Evangelical missionaries, the culture and life of marginalised Maya women living in remote rural areas is not unaffected.

**Maya Women’s Resilience: “Maya women work hard. If an indigenous woman says she can do it, she can do it!”**

Being a marginalised Maya woman could be viewed as a juxtaposition: Maya women bear the responsibility to maintain what remains of their cultural heritage and identity, but are also affected by the changing landscape of modern Guatemala. The role of the marginalised Maya woman in her society and community is changing, and this impacts her identity. There are increasing opportunities for women to leave their homes and participate in their community and wider society. The majority of the women participating in the groups are unschooled and, when founding or joining their groups, they had to endure many challenges and judgements from neighbours and family members simply to leave their home to attend meetings and sell products. The role of the Maya woman, as imposed upon her through generations of colonisation and Western coloniality/modernity, was to stay in the home. As explained by Maya members of the Aj Quen foundation:

*The role of the woman has changed from the founding of the organisation in 1989 to today; the [Maya] woman is different. Their lives have changed. Now [Maya women] know more and they know their rights. Maya women and girls now go to school. Before the men didn’t allow the women to leave their homes, let alone go to meetings; they thought it was a waste of time. Now the woman is part of the economy of the family, and they have their own income. They help their husbands with the needs of the home.*
Higher levels of educational attainment by younger generations of Maya women motivate more women to seek employment opportunities outside of the home, and many women encourage this as an option for their daughters. As noted by Caterina and Isabel, respectively:

*I want all of [my children] to graduate, and if they have possibilities to go to university, it is better. Now it is not enough to have graduated from diversificado (secondary education), you need to go to university. I want them to be educated and have a better life than I have. I didn’t have the opportunity to go to school, and I was married at 14.* (Caterina)

*I want [my children] to live a better life than I have lived. I don’t want them to waste their studies. I don’t want them to be weaving everyday like me when they could be professionals.* (Isabel)

Being a professional is an all-encompassing phrase for a non-agrarian worker – in this context agrarian work primarily means agricultural work for men and weaving for women. Maya women are encouraged to become educated and seek professional employment, while at the same time they must be a ‘traditional’ Maya woman, which means not only wearing her traje and speaking her language, but also maintaining all the responsibilities of the woman in the home, as noted above. Marcela notes how this is beneficial for Maya women: “Women now have the same rights as men; we have more value. Women can go to school and have more opportunities now.” However, Anna notes that in reality this is difficult for Maya women:

*It’s very difficult being a professional indigenous woman! Maya women have to work triple to be at an equal level in society. We have to study harder, work harder and still have all the responsibilities in the home. Professional women and women working in groups have to get up very early and manage the home and then work or go to work. They have to manage their time, but we are accustomed to doing this.*

While the role of the marginalised Maya woman is changing, not all households and persons embrace this equally. The evolving role of Maya women is subject to the
perspective of patriarchs regarding the position and opportunities for women outside of the home, as well as the financial situation of the family to be able to afford education beyond free primary school for all children. Alicia explains:

…it depends on the family. If the family knows the woman has rights they will treat her equally, but, if not, there is not a lot the woman can do, and it’s difficult. And a lot of children don’t go to school beyond primary school. It’s difficult.”

Mercedes notes that while the role of the Maya woman is in transition, circumstances are different for different women:

*Times are changing for women, well, actually, there are some women whose husbands won’t let them go out alone and these women approach us [the women in the group] and ask us what they should do. They also ask us if and how we are earning money. I know women that are in this situation. But there are also women that are like me and their husbands have no problem with them being the way they are and working in the group or outside the home, and whose daughters are studying to be professionals.*

The woman’s position in the home is not the only argument against Maya women becoming educated and working outside of the home. There are many concerns regarding the impact of this on their position as keepers of Maya culture. As noted above, when Maya women are in the home they weave and, as discussed in Chapter Five, backstrap weaving forms a large part of Maya culture. When women spend time outside of their home, this reduces their time spent weaving, and thereby affects their making, and potentially wearing, of their *traje*. As noted by Dominga:

*Most of the women in this community are studying and some are professionals, and a lot of these women don’t want to weave. … It’s good that they are receiving an education because they will have better lives, but it’s also negative because they don’t want to do the work of the woman. … Maybe it will affect the culture; maybe we will lose it. The backstrap weave is the culture of Sololá; weaving is important to our culture.*
Yolonda Caljua explains that she, like many of the women, wants her daughter to be educated so not to be an artisan weaver. Nonetheless, she shares a similar sentiment to Dominga: “I want my daughter to be a professional, but I also want her to weave. I don’t want to lose the culture of weaving.” Maria Chiroy explains that

[in the past] women couldn’t participate, women didn’t have the right to participate. ... We didn’t have the opportunity to go to school, and we didn’t have money. ... Now, things are changing for women, but, for me, it’s a negative change because girls now are not weaving or wearing our traditional clothes; they are wearing different types of skirts and some are wearing jeans! These are bad changes.

Katerina and Elena, respectively, think this is going to change their culture:

Our community and culture will change. There will be more professionals with different careers. Children are studying different careers, so they will be doing different things. Girls in the future probably won’t be weaving. (Katerina)

Because girls are more educated, it’s affecting our culture. I think fewer girls are weaving. (Elena)

Marta explains that Maya women have to do both, that is, weave while also being a professional, if their culture is to survive:

It’s good for women to weave; they have to know how to weave even if they are professionals. The women who weave will die in the future and weaving shouldn’t die with them. ... A lot of the women here feel the same, we don’t want girls to lose their weaving skills and culture, being an artisan is important. It’s important to maintain our culture.

Marisol staunchly argues that it is possible for a Maya woman to do both, if she wants, and this will not affect Maya culture. Noting that Maya women have endured and overcome so much, Marisol claims that education can only benefit Maya women and their culture:

But the culture hasn’t changed! Education is very important and has helped women. ... In the past, women were more private. Parents would
say that the woman needs to be at home to do the chores, and the men can go to school. Now things have changed, and men and women are the same. However, in some areas, this is not working and women are not going to school or leaving their homes. But in Panimatzalam, indigenous women are working in the banks of large towns. Education is changing women. Now we have rights and opportunities. ... The culture hasn’t changed. I don’t know who was responsible. I don’t know who decided to start sending girls to school. I think my father saw the necessity. He heard of other places where children were studying, and he didn’t really like the way they were living, so he wanted something different for his children. So my parents gave us studies. The culture is still there, but they gave us opportunities so we can improve ourselves.

Maya women have endured and so too has Maya culture. The slowly changing lifestyle and role of Maya women will not drastically or rapidly alter either. Maya women have endured change and are resilient. The changes and challenges they encounter will not alter who she is or what it means to her to be a Maya woman. Simply put by Antonia, “Maya women can do everything!”, and explained by Alicia:

A Maya woman can work outside the home and still work inside the home and look after her family and home, while also helping to develop her community. Maya women are able to do many things. We have rights, we have a voice and we have a vote. Some people say indigenous women have no rights, but we have a voice. Maya women work hard. If an indigenous woman says she can do it, she can do it!

Living in the Shadows: Being a Maya Woman Living in the Margins

When seeking to understand the lives of Maya women living in the margins and what it means to them to be a woman, it must be framed within their social, cultural and historical context. In this section, I have presented rich descriptions and narratives of the real lives of marginalised Maya women. Being a marginalised Maya woman means many things to the women; primarily, it means looking after the home and family, while also meeting the need and increasing expectations to contribute to the economy of the family, either working as a professional or a backstrap weaving artisan. Moreover, being a marginalised Maya woman means maintaining Maya culture by
continuing to weave and wear their *traje*. The women embrace their many roles and responsibilities because, for these women, this is what a Maya woman does and who she is. Her domesticity, cultural identity and various responsibilities establish her identity as a contemporary Maya woman, and moreover, this gives her strength.

This section gives legitimacy to the experiences of Maya women living in the margins by identifying who she is and what it means to her to be a woman. This serves to challenge the homogeneity of Global South women, as discussed by Mohanty (2003a; 2003b) in Chapter Three, and create a space for the narratives of marginalised women living in the Global South to voice their own experiences and demonstrate their agency. The narratives also follow Spivak’s (1988) call for the plurality and heterogeneity of the representation of women; I do not seek to ‘explain’ the women’s experiences from my reality, but from the perspectives and experiences of women that have been ignored and Othered in feminist and organisational discourse. These women are assumed victims of a gendered cultural and socio-economic system, however, their narratives provide insight into the resilience of Maya women and how the women draw strength from their culture and their domesticity. There are many complexities that characterise their lives and identities, and the women cannot be defined simply by their gendered identities and their being from the Global South; they must be understood within their temporal, cultural and social location.

Being a Maya woman living in the margins is complex, and her role in her society is in transition. The women’s primary responsibility is in the home and preserving their cultural identity, but this is not seen as an obstacle to empowerment. As simply put by Flori: “*It is not an obstacle for women to work in the home or have responsibilities in the home*”. The women embrace their evolving role and position, and it is this ability to adapt that has contributed to the resilience of Maya women.
living in the margins. Marginalised Maya women are, if anything, resilient. Their evolving role is an effect of their position living in the shadows of modernity/coloniality and Maya traditions. The reality of Maya women’s lived experience reflects this complex position filled with contradictions and tensions. These Maya women living in the margins have taken control of their own lives, and should no longer be assumed as victims in need of saving, but as women with strength and resilience and the capacity to create and organise.

**The Coloniality of Marginalised Maya Women**

Adding further depth to the lived experience of Maya women, this section explores how the meaning of womanhood and the women’s identity is framed within a patriarchal, modernity/coloniality context, that is, how their complex history of colonisation impacts the everydayness of the women’s lives. In this section, I provide the narratives of the women and discuss their lived experience in the context of modernity/coloniality, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

As the women and I shared experiences and talked about the meaning of being a woman and womanhood in our different social and cultural contexts, we also discussed our lives and the role of men in our lives. The women spoke freely about living in a patriarchal society and the gendered division of labour in their home and society. As noted in Chapter Five, colonisation imposed upon the Maya people of Guatemala a hierarchical and patriarchal society, and through modernity/coloniality a machismo society confined Maya women to the margins. The universality of a European ontology of modernity enforced upon the Maya people of Guatemala during colonisation eradicat
association of cultural and economic interests of, first, Spanish colonial control and, later, the dominant white and Ladino social classes within an independent Guatemalan nation. Coloniality imposed racial and gendered social classification, resulting in Maya ethnicity being a symbol of inferiority and gender being a tool for domination. The coloniality of Maya women living in the margins of Guatemala is found in the discriminatory discourse and practices reflected in social and economic structures, thereby creating the culturally, socio-economically and politically marginalised. As explained by Anna:

If we talk about discrimination, there is discrimination of three types here in Guatemala. First, there is discrimination against the poor people. The Maya people, we are poor. We are poor because of our history in Guatemala and the political system that discriminates against us. All poor people think about is food; they don’t often think about education and school for their children. And because of this, some parents living in poverty don’t see the value of education because they can only think about food. The second form of discrimination is against indigenous women. Many people think that we can’t do anything and that we don’t have value. Many people say this about Maya woman, and a lot of women believe this. The third form of discrimination is against the woman; how men discriminate against women in Guatemalan society. Many men say that women can’t do anything and that women should just stay in the home.

In my conversation with Anna, we further explored the coloniality of Maya women. Anna, a Kaqchikel woman and director of Oxlajuj B’atz’ (Thirteen Threads), a Maya social foundation working with and supporting backstrap weaving groups, was the only participant in this research to discuss and directly acknowledge Guatemala’s complex history of colonisation and the coloniality of Maya women. Caught-up in the everydayness of their challenging lives, few women cared to discuss their recent or ancient history or the lives of Maya women prior to colonisation. Colonisation is part of an ancient past, and the women are struggling to survive in a contemporary Guatemala recovering from genocide and Civil War and newly impacted by
globalised, Western modernity. This section does not seek to examine the conceptualisations of ancient Maya women and their identities that pre-existed modern European gender systems; rather, it seeks to explore the coloniality of Maya women, and, in so doing, explores the women’s narratives to provide an outline of how their history impacts their identity as modern Maya women.

When discussing with Anna what it means for her to be a Maya woman, she spoke briefly, but passionately, about the coloniality of Maya women. Anna does not argue for a return to an ancient, romanticised past, but highlights the impact of the coloniality of Maya women and uses our discussion as a move towards decolonisation and a re-evaluation of gender:

This is not part of the [Maya] culture that the woman stays at home. Before in the Maya culture, women worked doing important jobs like midwife or healers with natural medicine. These women may not have been paid for their work, but they were valued in the community. However, times changed and Guatemala was colonised by another culture. ... Our culture was good, not really good, but doing well. But then we were colonised and a new culture was brought in by people of different colour. They were white and we were brown, so we were discriminated against. The men from this culture didn’t value the work of the Maya woman, so they made the Maya women stay at home and said only men could work; they changed this part of our culture. Only men were allowed to have money, and there was a lot of sexual abuse against women. The men from this new culture didn’t value women, and, because of this, they changed our culture. They separated the roles of men and women and assigned new roles to indigenous women. ... The Maya Cosomovision consists of men and women, like day and night. After colonisation, they changed the way we think and introduced Christianity. In Christianity, Adam comes before Eve, so they say the woman is a lesser person and not valued. At this time, they changed the way of thinking of men, and changed our culture. So women working from home and being in the home is not an original part of Maya culture; it is now in the culture, but it came from a different culture [which] introduced new ideas about how to live and think. Colonisation changed our culture.

Together with the colonisation of their culture, Maya women’s gender was also colonised. However, for the Maya women of this research, this understanding of
gender is part of an ancient past; their gender and culture is not defined by its coloniality. As discussed in the previous section, modern Maya culture is represented in the preservation of their languages, the wearing of their traje and the Maya woman’s responsibilities in the home. None of the women, including Anna, engage in Maya religious practices or follow the Maya Cosmovision; they are staunch Christians, either Catholic or Evangelical, and indeed spoke negatively about the very few people in their community who still participated in Maya religious practices. As exemplified by Yolonda Caluja: “I don’t know why the few families practicing the Maya religion won’t join our church”. This was further emphasised by Rosa and Alicia, respectively, claiming that Maya culture is Christianity:

Our language, our traje and our religion is our culture. (Rosa)

For me, [Maya culture] is a way of talking to God. ... Maya culture is about religion. [Our] culture is [our] religion. ... The Maya ceremony is not the same as Catholicism or even the Evangelical; they don’t go to church, they don’t pray, they don’t visit sick people or go to different communities to pray for sick people. We celebrate as a community in our church. (Alicia)

Following this statement, Luisa, my translator, then says “They are different”, to which both Alicia and Luisa nod in agreement. Christianity provides the women with a sense of belonging, a connectedness to God, and is also an important part of community. Going to church and participating in church groups are the only social outlets in rural, remote Maya communities. Thus, religion provides an opportunity for the women and their families to engage with neighbours. There is a clear separation between what Maya culture was and what it means today in practice. Colonisation imposed a Christian ontology and, with this, a patriarchal society that, over generations, merged with Maya cultural customs to become what the marginalised
Maya women of this research identify as their contemporary Maya culture and gender roles.

An ontology of Christianity and modernity has replaced the Maya Cosmovision of duality and complementarity between men and women. Coloniality of Maya women is perpetuated by a Christian patriarchal society ingrained in contemporary cultural and social practices. None of the women speak of a return to an ancient cultural, social or religious past, but they do speak of their position in their patriarchal society. The women recognise that they live in a hierarchical and patriarchal society, and their identity and sense of self is framed within this context. Erica explains her understanding of the position of Maya women:

*It depends on the woman if she wants to be independent of her husband. Regardless, women have to do the orders of her husband. Together we learn to express ourselves in the group, so it depends on the women if she wants to use this in the home.*

This simple statement sums up the position of these Maya women living in the margins. Their groups are an empowering space for them; not only do they discuss products and sales in their groups, but it is a space where they share ideas and discuss different personal situations they are encountering. Simply by leaving their homes to attend meeting and sell products, the women are re-evaluating the ingrained colonial understanding of gender. As explained by Rosa:

*Sometimes men tell women that they can’t do things and that only the men are able to do many things or allowed to leave the home. If women don’t meet to discuss ideas and learn from other [women], they will not know the many things women can do.*

Nonetheless, generations of gendered and racial social classification makes clear the Maya woman’s social position: she is subordinate to men and secondary to the white and Ladino population.
Gradually, Maya women living in the margins are becoming more involved in their communities and participating in conversations outside of the home. As explained by Alicia and Yolonda Caljua, respectively:

*We have rights, we have a voice and we have a vote. Some people say indigenous women have no rights, but we have a voice.* (Alicia)

*It was more difficult before, but now girls are allowed go to school and maybe can become professionals, but it’s still difficult. Maya women are not equal; men and women are treated differently.* (Yolanda Caljua)

Guatemalan law permits universal suffrage, and Maya women are involved in the electoral process. Nonetheless, women are constrained by exclusionary social practices, as described by Caterina:

*Times are changing for women, but Maya women are still not equals. For example, there are no Maya women involved in politics and no women are involved in the municipality. It’s not the same for Maya women. It’s difficult for women to become involved in politics. We can vote, but women don’t become involved in politics because they have low self-esteem.*

The social and political marginalisation of Maya women has impacted their self-esteem and self-worth, and so too has the undervaluing of their role in the gendered division of labour. The women live an agrarian life, and the gendered division of this labour contributes to the lack of recognition of the women’s participation in the process. The women are seen largely as domestic agrarian workers and their involvement in the agricultural process is controlled by patriarchal power relations, that is, men are responsible for the agriculture and women simply assist them with the process. Further, the women’s work in the home is also unrecognised. As explained by Carmen:

*The men receive payment for the work they do. If he works for another man or on another person’s land, they pay him. Even if a man has been working in the fields all day or out in the mountains searching for wood, at the end of the day, he comes home with food or wood. I work all the time, cooking,*
cleaning, washing, weaving, but I don’t get paid, and nobody recognises this work. … And the work of a woman is never done!

As explored in the previous section, the women define themselves through their domesticity and preservation of their cultural identity. However, as detailed here, these are two characteristics that are undervalued by Maya men and wider white and Ladino Guatemalan society. The coloniality of Maya women is the result of generations of marginalisation and the mainstream undervaluing of how Maya women identify and define themselves, resulting in Maya women often undervaluing their own worth. Simply put by Flori: “It’s difficult for Maya women; most women have no self-esteem”.

Maya women are Othered in their own society and community. The following story from Yolonda Caluja emphasises the ingrained and systemic patriarchal domination in the everydayness of women’s lives, and, ultimately, how they are undervalued in their community and by their society. It is also important to note how Yolonda uses Christianity in her defence of women:

I used to teach a class to some women in the community, teaching them how to read and how to write, but there was a problem because some people only came to learn to write their name and they wouldn’t come again to class. But this didn’t matter anyway because the COCODE [Community Development Council] stopped the rest of the women from attending the class. They didn’t want the women learning. They thought it was a waste of time and said only men can work and women should be in the home. I said to the COCODE that it is not a law of the church that women can’t work or study, and the woman is not a slave to the man. But my husband told me not to look for problems. … The men in the community don’t want women on the COCODE. Some women approached the COCODE with projects and ideas for the village, but they wouldn’t listen to them. There was a group in town fighting with the COCODE saying that women should be able to participate. When the COCODE changed their board of directors recently, they said they invited women to join, but no woman wanted to.
Marginalised Maya Women Decolonised

The coloniality of marginalised Maya women has reified an image of passive, obedient women. For too long, generations of marginalised Maya women have lived with repression, poverty and racial and gender discrimination. These marginalised Maya women, survivors of genocide and racism, living in the socio-economic and political periphery within patriarchal homes and communities, are not passive, docile victims in need of rescuing. The women live in an ‘in-between world’ (Lugones 2007; 2008), a world full of uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions. Using a decolonial lens to understand the everydayness of this world identifies the complexities of the women’s lived experiences. These women defy coloniality/modernity by refusing to abandon their languages, traje and backstrap weaving practices. Their agrarian life, domesticity and Maya traditions are argued as backwards and anti-modern by the dominant social classes, but viewed by the women as a source of their strength. While respecting their gendered divisions of labour, from which the women also draw their strength, simple acts of social engagement (for example, participating in their groups) resist systemic patriarchal practices. Undervalued by their society, and often by themselves, the marginalised Maya women of this research may be traditional and domesticated, but at the same time are empowered, resilient women leading their cultural survival and contributing to the economy of their household by creating weaving groups that are also open spaces for women in their community.
The Maya Way of Life:

“Everyone works together … That’s what we do here”

In developing a descriptive picture of the women and their lives through their narratives and experiences, this section moves from exploring their identity and meaning of being a Maya woman living in the margins within their historical, cultural and social location to providing insight into the everydayness of their lives in their homes and communities. During my research, I spent time with the Maya women participants in their homes and with their families, and, subsequently, found myself absorbed into their daily life and family routine. I was not only welcomed into their groups, but also into their family homes by the women and their entire families. Occasionally, I spent time alone with the women in their homes, depending on their personal circumstances, time of day, day of the week, etc., but mostly I was surrounded by family members as interested in me as I was in them.

Family Support and Collaboration: “We work together … otherwise families will suffer”

As previously stated in the first section of this chapter, extended and ever-growing families live together communally in open compounds. Being surrounded by family is more than a way of life for Maya women living in the margins; it is a means of survival. Contemporary Maya culture is a work culture. Everyone in the home works, and, although there are gendered divisions of labour, everyone works together. From a young age, children help their parents and elder siblings. When children are not in school, or if they are not attending school, they work with their family. Boys help their fathers with their agriculture and girls support their mothers in the home, learning to weave, cook and look after the home. As noted by Carmen:
We have so many children; it’s difficult. It’s expensive. The children have to work, and we have to work together. This way we also teach the children how to live and survive, and they will help to support us in the future. ... With the boys, their father teaches them; they go with him into the mountains to search for wood and they work with him on our land. And the girls, I am in charge of teaching them to weave and cook, and they help me in the home and with my orders for the group.

As there are limited social engagements in remote rural communities, younger children occupy their time running around corn fields with roaming farm animals, siblings and neighbours, and older children work with their families. Yolonda, Micela’s younger sister, who works at home with the other women of the family and also works in the home making beaded jewellery and wallets to sell to tourist shops, explains her situation: “I am happy working in the home; I have nothing else to do. I can’t study because we cannot afford to go to school, so I like to keep busy and help my family. This is what we do.” Luisa, my translator, further elaborates when I later ask her about the situation of children working and if children ever socialise outside of the home:

Only when you’re in school do you have friends or socialise. When you’re not in school or if you have to leave school, you stay in the home, particularly if you’re a girl. It’s difficult to stay in contact with friends here when you’re not in school. It really all depends on where you live. Here, in these communities, there is nothing to do and nowhere to go, so children work, everyone works together in the home to support the family. Like Yolonda said, that’s what we do here.

This family-centred and work-centred lifestyle continues through to adulthood and throughout generations. In marginalised Maya homes, families are dependent on each other; all family members help each other in their work and support each other financially. Everyone contributes in the home and those earning an income pool their monies for family and household necessities. The women and their families live on the periphery of their society and, as such, families live communally in their homes,
sharing beds, resources and responsibilities. Luisa, my translator, states simply: “We all live together, so we have to support each other. Family is so important here. Everyone contributes to the expense of the house. We help each other.” Photograph 6.2 illustrates Micela and her sisters working together in the home making products and organising thread, but first, Micela explains her situation in more detail:

We give all our money to my mum to cover the costs of the home. My sisters help me with my products for the group. We all work on the products together, so the money belongs to the house, not the individual person. My mum manages the money to pay the necessities of the home, and if we need anything, we ask our mum for money. ... My brothers work in Guatemala City, doing different things and working in shops, and they send their earnings home to support the family. ... I’m the eldest, so when my sisters and brothers were young, with what little money I had from my [product] orders with the group, I helped pay for their studies so they could go to school. But, unfortunately, it wasn’t enough. My family has no money, and they had to leave school.

Photograph 6.2: Micela and her Sisters Working Together

The everydayness of life in the socio-economic periphery is challenging; there are limited means of earning an income and the limited economy in marginalised communities is reliant on agriculture. Owning agricultural land is a prerequisite for survival, as explained by Yolonda Caljua:

Most people own their own land, but sometimes people have to sell their land, for example, if they get sick and they need money or old people that don’t have children to look after them. These people don’t have anything.
They don’t have land to grow corn! Because of this, they will have no food. If they can, poor people try to rent land to grow crops.

Limited resources emphasise the importance of family. When material possessions and financial capital are removed, what remains is the support of family. Thus, having persons to support you financially and throughout life is vital for survival. Those without this support worry about their security and future. As explained by Maria Chiroy, a widow with one son living in Guatemala City, who takes care of her elderly mother and lives in her brother’s house:

I worry about my future. I live here in my brother’s house with my mother and I don’t own any land. Maybe the day will come when I have to leave. My brother has lots of children, so what will I do when his children return from working in Guatemala City and want to live here with their families? I don’t have any money to build my own home [on their land]. ... My son lives in Guatemala City. He left when his father died and moved to Guatemala City to work. He’s married now with a family. I know my daughter-in-law will not look after me in my old age. I wish I had a big family with lots of daughters, that way I know I would be looked after later in life. I will be alone in the future.

Understandings of poverty are relative to family and resources. Persons that have familial support and own their own land to subsistence farm are not “poor poor” (Yolonda Caljua, Flori, Rosa). As noted by Rosa:

We are not really poor poor. We are not miserable. It’s very difficult, but we have land and my children are having an education. We all work together to achieve this. We are not really wealthy, but we are not really poor.

And Caterina also emphasises the importance of family working together to ensure her family is not living in poverty:

We have achieved this because we work together. Men and women have to help each other, otherwise families suffer. I want my children to have a better life than I did, so we all work together to achieve this.
Having a family and owning land are fundamental to marginalised Maya families living in the socio-economic periphery. With a stagnant economy, most marginalised Maya families rely on agriculture. Depending on the size of land owned and the size of the family, agriculture is used first for subsistence farming, with excess sold in markets, and those with larger plots of land grow crops for export. Aura and Isabel, respectively, explain the local economic situation:

*There’s nothing here. There’s no employment. There are many students that have graduated from diversificado that don’t have jobs; most of them just work on the land or in the home.* (Aura)

*No, there are no jobs; there are no opportunities to work. ... My son-in-law maintains our land, but it’s not a lot, so he is looking for work as a worker for other people [on their land], but he can’t find any work. If he can find work, he will only earn Q50 a day (€5 approx.), but you can’t find work every day.* (Isabel)

Rosa explains her situation:

*It is very difficult. Now there are many people graduating from diversificado and there are very few professional jobs. My three oldest boys graduated from diversificado, but they don’t have work. They would have to go to university and move away to get a good job. It is now a requirement for most jobs that you have attended university and we can’t afford that! So the boys have no opportunities and they have to work the land. We grow crops and sell them for export. But when they are not looking after our own land, they try to get work on the land of other people.*

The everydayness of life on the periphery is challenging. Families work together pooling their resources and finances to address these challenges together. As said by Caterina:

*It’s difficult. Living here is difficult and we don’t have enough. But there are three families working together and contributing to the expenses of the home, me and my family, and my two sons and their families. ... It’s still difficult, but it makes it easier.*
The remoteness of their homes and communities limits social interactions outside of the home, and the dependency on subsistence farming reinforces a way of life centred on family; communal living and familial support is the way of life for marginalised Maya families.

Community Cooperation: “If the community ask you to do a job, you have to do it. It’s your responsibility as an adult to work for your community”

Family is the most important ingredient in marginalised Maya communities, but, beyond the family compound, communities work together for their betterment as a whole. Engaging in community development is the responsibility of all adult Mayas. In every rural community, there is a town committee, the COCODE (El Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo), the Community Development Council, a volunteer body of members of the community, elected during village assemblies, working together to develop their community. For two years, COCODE members must volunteer their time to community development projects and engage with members of the community. Marisol explains the reasoning behind the COCODE:

“You have to do it because it is part of your responsibility as a Maya. We say in Guatemala, ‘when you are 18 you have to start working for your community’. If the community asks you to do a job, you have to do it. It’s your responsibility as an adult to work for your community. ... The community selects the COCODE members and they work for the community for two years, and then after two years the community selects another group.

The communities inhabited by the Maya women of this research are rural, remote and on the periphery of their society. Generations of marginalisation and land appropriation by the dominant classes reduced Maya communities to peasant societies, and, emerging from Civil War and genocide, inhabitants of the socio-economically marginalised agrarian communities cooperate to develop their communities.
For example, during this research, Chuacruz was implementing ‘the water project’. The Chuacruz COCODE sought additional water resources from the local municipality to secure greater access to water throughout the remote village. Although organised by the COCODE, it is the responsibility of all community members to participate in the project. Members of the community that are professionals must make a monetary donation to pay for the project and households that do not have the funds to donate to the project must volunteer their time to the physical construction of the project. In this way, everyone in the community shares ownership of the project. As explained by Yolonda Chiroy:

*The COCODE asked the municipality to bring more water to the community, but everyone has to participate if we want to receive the water. If you have the money, you have to pay Q300 (€30 approx.) and if not you have to send a man to help with the project, to help with the infrastructure and other things. The community is working on the project every day for the next few months.*

In Panimatzalam, the least remote community and the only community encountered during my research that had women members on the COCODE, Flori is a member of the COCODE. It is her responsibility to engage with community members in a social worker capacity and provide community conferences about health and hygiene, sexual education, self-esteem, domestic violence, etc. Photograph 6.3 (overleaf) is a photograph of Flori (centre) at a Panimatzalam COCODE meeting in the local school, but first, Flori explains her position as a member of the COCODE:

*[Panimatzalam] is a little more developed than other communities that are more rural. ... [But] men need to know how to treat their wives and their children. There is a lot of violence in the home and to the children, so I talk to them about this. And I talk to the women in the community too, about esteem, violence, sexuality, health. ... I’m a volunteer. I give gender, domestic violence, health, and sexual education classes to people and children in the community. I don’t get paid for this. The people in the community had an assembly and they chose me. It’s like an election. I will do this job for two years. ... I think this is important for the community.*
feel proud of myself because I help the community. I am not working for payment; I offer my help.

Photograph 6.3: Panimatzalam COCODE Meeting

COCODEs work at grassroots level, developing the infrastructure and prioritising the needs of their community. COCODEs work to implement social change, but change as deemed suitable by the community for the community. The COCODE makes decisions for their village, prioritises needs, and is responsible for the day-to-day governance of their community. Providing a united front to government and local municipalities for remote marginalised communities, COCODEs strengthen the capacity of communities and demonstrate the agency and knowledge of Maya women and men living in the margins.

Maya Women Working Together: “The women in the groups see things differently”

Generations of economic and ethnic inequality created the need for Maya people to change their material condition of existence. With limited governmental support, Maya families living in the socio-economic margins cooperate in the home and in the community, encouraging community development and ensuring familial survival.
However, as noted above, marginalised Maya women live in an ‘in-between world’, a world full of uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions. The complexities of the women’s lives are not just found in their identities, but also in their homes and communities. Families work together and, within their communities, they are expected to cooperate, and the COCODE provides a space for community collaboration as deemed suitable to the community’s needs. However, this cooperation does not extend to Maya women working together in the community or outside of the home. The women of this research work together in groups making backstrap woven products. Yet, their work together in the group is not encouraged by their communities and, indeed, women working together outside of the home is disparaged. Backstrap weaving artisans usually work individually in their homes, making products commissioned by neighbours or to be sold to tourist shops. However, the women of this research collaborate and cooperate in a group outside of the home.

Backstrap weaving is the Maya skill that the women used to survive the Civil War. The groups were established in the mid-to-late 1980’s, during the most brutal and repressive years of the Guatemalan Civil War. The groups were established by the women, mostly widows, as an imperative for survival. These women had limited options but to work together by pooling resources and knowledge to earn an income during chaotic and confusing times. The groups were formed to overcome extreme poverty and meet the needs of women in the community. Thus, the women collaborated for their collective needs, as noted by different women in different groups:

[The group was established] because of the war. Antonia started the group because she was widowed. During the war, a lot of women were widowed, so they had no husbands helping them with the needs of the home. (Alicia)
We founded the group because of our needs. All the women were working weaving and it was very difficult to find a market. So, we came together to make products and find a market together. (Caterina)

The group started with five women, because of the war. The men, during the war, were hiding in the mountains. If men were found in communities during the war, soldiers would take them and kill them. So, the men had to hide and the women had to provide for their families. (Yolonda Caljua)

Established specifically to create opportunities for women and to create a community for women, the groups provided a space for the women to better themselves and provide a future for their children. During a group meeting, Antonia, the founder of the Chuacruz group, explains to me: “I wanted to create a community for women where we could better the future of our children by having an income, but also as a place where we could better ourselves.” Marisol turns to me and says: “Antonia is quite famous in the region for fighting for the group. People didn’t understand the idea of groups and why the women were participating and working together.”

The years passed, the war ended, and communities continued to wonder why the women still insisted on working together in their groups. Women’s groups are unfamiliar to marginalised Maya communities, and it is unusual to see Maya women working together outside of the home. Yolonda Chiroy explains the situation:

It is different. People in the community work by themselves and only families work together. In general, in the community, people work individually; people only work with their families. In the group, we have to give our time to each other and attend meetings and conferences. People in the community found it very strange that we were working together, and they thought we were wasting our time going to meetings. Now there are a lot more groups, and it has become a more usual way of working. [Working in groups] is good because we are acquiring knowledge.

Neighbours, both men and women, think the women are wasting their time by participating in their groups. As noted earlier in the chapter, their work in the home is a priority for marginalised Maya women. As such, when women are not engaging in
activities directly related to the home or agriculture, or directly earning an income, they are assumed to be involved in activities that are wasting their time. Being in the group requires the women to participate in group meetings and engage with the social foundation that places orders with the groups and buys their products in bulk. As such, their participation in the group is not at all times directly related to earning an income. Dominga explains her position and how her participation in the group is not favoured by her mother:

“My mum often asks me where I am going and why I’m not working on the orders. She doesn’t understand why I have to go out so often. I often have a meeting with foundations one day and a group meeting the next day. We don’t get paid for the meetings; we only receive payment for orders. Sometimes I ask myself why I am doing all this because it takes time away from my orders, that’s how we earn our money, and I even considered leaving the group. … I think my mum thinks [being in the group] is a waste of time. My mum’s expressions tell me this. But for me, it’s not a waste of time. I am learning more, and I get to go out [of the home] two or three times a week. … [My participation in the group] is the first time my mother heard of a woman working in a group. Before, women didn’t have the right to participate. They didn’t go out; they stayed at home all day. I asked my mum if she wanted me to leave the group, but she reluctantly told me to stay in the group. … And it’s not just my Mum; I have heard that when people know we’re going to meetings that they say we are wasting our time and not really working.

It is difficult for the women to participate in the group and manage their responsibilities in the home, but, as noted earlier in this chapter, the women organise their time around this because they recognise the benefits of working together. As explained by Elena:

“It’s beneficial for women to work together in groups. For example, if a woman is working alone, she can’t talk to anyone if she has a problem. In a group, we come together to discuss and solve problems, and different people have different ideas.

Working together in groups, marginalised Maya women support each other and motivate each other, and the women are very understanding of their different personal
situations and needs. Working together, the women not only motivate each other to participate, make good quality products, and experiment with different designs, but they also support each other by sharing information and knowledge. The benefits of the women working together in their groups are explained by a number of the women:

*I think that being in the group changed the lives of many Maya women. The women in the group can now go out, go to meetings, they can speak a little Spanish, and we’ve acquired more knowledge, so we’re more confident.* (Yolonda)

*Being in the group has changed me; I know a lot more now and I’m more independent.* (Caterina)

*It’s good for women to work together in groups. Sometimes, neighbours don’t understand why we are in a group, and they say we are wasting our time. But, for me, it’s good for women to be in groups because you learn many things and acquire more knowledge. ... And in the group we are making money.* (Candelaria)

*I have many ideas now. I’m happy, and I think more. We work well together, and we are like sisters.* (Arua)

While some in the community speak negatively about their participation in the group, Flori simply states: “I don’t think people know or understand the spirit of groups.” And Marisol explains:

*Some people in the community don’t understand what it means to work in a group, or they’re not interested. They say, ‘why should I spend my time in a group from which I don’t have any [financial] benefits’. Maybe they just don’t understand or maybe they just don’t want to be in a group. But, the women in the groups see things differently.*

**Collaboration: The Maya Way**

The women collaborate in their groups like the family collaborates in the home; together they endure challenges, support each other, share resources, share responsibilities, and work together to earn an income that otherwise is difficult to generate in marginalised Maya communities. There are similarities between the
communal living in the home and the cooperative work in the group and, indeed, the women’s work in the group is based on how they work in the home. There is fluidity and flexibility between the women’s work in the group and their responsibilities in the home. Nonetheless, their working together in groups is viewed negatively by some neighbours and members of their community.

The collaboration in the COCODE is different to that of the collaboration between the women. COCODEs are dominated by men, meet irregularly, and work towards developing the infrastructure and well-being of their community, whereas the women are working towards their own personal and professional development and, in so doing, are challenging the ingrained coloniality and patriarchal norms of their communities.

Their in-between world, filled with uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions, highlights the complexities of the women’s lives. Challenging patriarchy, the women leave their homes to work together towards their own and their family’s betterment, thereby defying coloniality/modernity that identifies these women as docile and domesticated. Yet, the women prioritise their domesticity, thereby valuing the coloniality of Maya women and what they have come to understand as contemporary Maya culture and what it means to be a Maya woman. While there may be some conflict at the community level, together, the COCODE and women’s groups’ challenge the neoliberal, individualistic ways of working as imposed through coloniality/modernity. Although not completely unrelated to neoliberal modernist practices, the women, their families and their communities inhabit a negotiated space on the edge of modernity where their cooperative practices demonstrate their own understandings of contemporary Maya culture within their social and historical location.
The women working in their groups, families working together in their homes, and the COCODE demonstrate that the Maya women, families and communities living in the socio-economic margins are not passive victims of domination, but have actively responded to the complex and difficult situations they encounter in the everydayness of their contemporary lives. Maya people living in the margins, and their culture, have survived colonisation and coloniality by being resilient and adapting their culture and ways of working to suit their needs. As poignantly noted by Mercedes:

*There are always going to be differences in a group, and people are not always going to agree with what we do. Women working together outside of the home is unusual, but we work together like a family works together, and we work together for our families. ... We are dynamic and active, just like Maya culture!*

**Indigenous Feminism in Latin America:**

**Contributions from Maya Women Working Together in the Margins**

In this chapter, I have explored the Maya women’s gendered and cultural identity, demonstrating their agency, strength and resilience, and their capacity to collaborate to address the challenges of living in the socio-economic margins. The Maya women’s narratives expose their everydayness and explore their familial and communal lives. In so doing, this chapter facilitates space for the women to represent themselves and voice their own understanding of what it means to be a Maya woman in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. The Maya, particularly Maya women, are too often thought of in relation to their ancient past. However, here, the Maya women and I have provided insight into their contemporary social and cultural location, as impacted by their long and complex history, and, in so doing, have demonstrated the agency of Maya women living in the margins and highlighted that the women are not
relics of an ancient past or part of a homogenous group of Global South women in need of rescuing.

This chapter is a move towards decoloniality. Living in the margins of the Global South, the women, their families and their communities live under the false promise of modernity and failures of their government. They suffer a loss of dignity and human rights, first by colonisation and, subsequently, by white and Ladino elites continuing the imperialist project by perpetuating modernity/coloniality. The power structures, both within their society and in the West, that attempt to oppress, homogenise and institutionalise indigenous women, their families and their way of life remain. The women are not indigenous feminists, and their families and communities are not part of indigenous movements or protests; they are merely seeking to survive in the present. Nonetheless, they defy modernity in the resilient preservation of their culture and their collaborative practices inside and outside of the home. Grounded in their experience of subalternity, the Maya women’s groups, their families and Maya communities draw on their local realities, knowledge, worldviews, and understandings of community to develop their own solutions to the consequences of coloniality/modernity and their subsequent marginalisation.

As demonstrated in their rich narratives, the marginalised Maya women maintain characteristics of indigenous feminist practices that encourage the reevaluation of their understanding of gender. While the women do not directly follow the indigenous Abya Yala philosophical movement, as discussed in Chapter Three, they are challenging the coloniality of gender that has rendered them voiceless in their communities and wider society by cooperating and organising together to find their voices and construct a more harmonious life in their homes, groups and communities. Furthermore, their work together in their groups, the work of the family in the home, and the work of the
COCODE are founded on indigenous worldviews of community and cooperation. In contrast to individualism, as promoted by modernity, Maya women have reclaimed the value of community and collective action. Collaboration in the home, at a community level and between women reflects their experiences of living in the margins, having to work together to survive, but, more than this, it makes reference to indigenous epistemic and ontological traditions that express the idea of an integrated life with others and commitment to community (e.g., Espinosa Miñoso, 2009; Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014). The women and their families know how to live and work in a community with others, both giving and receiving, in order to contribute to the common good of their family, group and community.

The Maya women are moving towards a process of decolonisation in their re-evaluation of coloniality/modernity and the coloniality of gender. The women discuss their gendered and ethnic identity in relation to colonial oppression and patriarchy, but do not elicit equality and duality between men and women. Prejudice and subjugation of Maya women remain in marginalised Maya communities and wider Guatemalan society. The women’s gendered identity and ontology are located in contemporary Maya culture, which is founded on patriarchal and hierarchical discourses of Christianity and modernity. Indigenous feminists in Latin America challenge patriarchy and coloniality imposed upon them through the universality of a Western/Eurocentric ontology and promote their indigenous epistemology of dualism and duality between men and women (Bastian Duarte, 2012; Hernández Castillo, 2010). The voices of indigenous feminists in Latin America reclaim their indigenous epistemologies and stride towards decoloniality. However, while retaining some of their ancient Maya worldview, Maya women living in the margins do not locate
themselves within this indigenous feminist movement and, indeed, draw their strength from their domesticity and Christian spirituality.

As noted in Chapter Three, feminism in Latin America is of bourgeois, Ladino/white/Mestizo and urban origins, which perpetuates Eurocentric ideologies of feminism and, by extension, is a continuance of the colonial project in Latin America (Mendoza, 2002). Indigenous feminism is an emerging movement that challenges the mute and under-represented state of indigenous women in Latin America, questions the assumptions of Western development models and capitalism, and calls for environmental stability, the safeguarding of their cultural heritage and socio-economic equality, while asserting their identity as contemporary indigenous women activists resisting coloniality/modernity, patriarchy and racial domination (Dulfano, 2016). The everydayness of the lives of Maya women living in the margins does not mirror the actions or concerns of indigenous feminists in Latin America. They experience their identity, gender and consciousness of self in the margins of exclusion and through the prism of coloniality/modernity. This is not to say that they are passive, mute women, obediently accepting the gendered, ethnic position imposed upon them by modernity/coloniality, but, simply, that they do not identify themselves as indigenous feminists. Their narratives demonstrate their strength and agency, as well as their capacity to challenge their socio-economic position in their home and community, and resilience to resist modernity in their cultural preservation.

This research is located in the homes and communities of marginalised Maya women, and, as such, does not seek to examine indigenous women’s movements on a broader national or regional level; rather, it seeks to understand marginalised Maya women’s gendered and cultural identity in the context of their social, cultural and historical experience so to bring their voices and experiences into feminist and
organisational discourse. This research makes a strong contribution to the emerging discourse of indigenous feminism by including the voices and experiences of Maya women living in the margins. Dulfano’s (2016) review of indigenous feminism in Latin America explains that indigenous feminist discourse is a move towards decoloniality, but notes that much of this discourse has pinged from discipline to discipline and ranges from auto-ethnographic experiences to reviews of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Indigenous feminist discourse and theorisation is a complex, emerging discipline, with diverse conceptualisations of ‘indigenous feminism’. Nonetheless, this research contributes to the ambition of indigenous feminism by challenging the condition of subalternisation imposed by coloniality/modernity that oppresses indigenous women and how they are represented and interpreted, producing images of docile victims and ignoring their identities and agency. By way of a further contribution to the emerging discipline, the findings suggest that we need to adopt a more diverse and inclusive indigenous feminist discourse locally, based on social and cultural practices and the perspectives of indigenous women living and working in the margins.

This chapter brings us into the lives of marginalised Maya women who live in an in-between world filled with complexities, an ambiguous space where they negotiate conflicting ideologies and experiences of gender and culture. This research finds that marginalised Maya women and their lives do not fit neatly into one ‘world’ or theoretical discourse, and argues that their voices need to be heard if we are to construct a more plural understanding and representation of the knowledge and lived experiences of marginalised indigenous women. Thus, the findings call for a feminist border thinking framed from the perspectives of marginalised Maya women. As explained by Faria (2013) in Chapter Two, border thinking enables the coexistence of
different ways of life and different ways of knowing, creating a pluriversal space for
diverse ways of ‘seeing and doing’ that recognises and values knowledge and
experiences produced from the lived experience of the colonial difference.
Contributing to the deconstruction and decolonisation of feminism and organisation
studies, this research gives legitimacy to Maya women’s understanding of gender,
identity, community and family as constructed from outside the border.
CHAPTER SEVEN
EXPLORING MAYA WOMEN ORGANISING IN THE MARGINS

Moving from a discussion, in the preceding chapter, of Maya women’s gendered and cultural identity in the context of their social, cultural and historical location to how this impacts their organising together in groups, in this chapter, I explore the process of organising from the experiences of Maya women working in the margins and the impact of their organising together. The women’s gendered and indigenous identity impacts how they experience their lives and their organisation/organising. In what follows, I present the women’s narratives to give legitimacy to the experiences of marginalised Maya women and their capacity to create and organise. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theorisation in organisation studies, as discussed in Chapter Two, this chapter contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by recognising the knowledge contributions the Maya women participants can make to the discipline. Contributing to a pluriversal understanding of organisation/organising, the findings discussed in the following sections challenge the epistemic coloniality in organisation theorisation by creating a space for an alternative understanding of organisation/organising that is locally constructed from within the margins and the perspective of Otherness. To this end, this chapter recognises marginalised Maya women’s capacity to create organisations based on their own way of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising and, thereby, is a space for the Maya women participants to voice their organisational knowledge and experiences.

In the sections that follow, I explore the processes and practices of Maya women organising and how this is impacted by their condition of being poor, indigenous, and women. First, from the narratives of the Maya women participants, I provide
Maya Women Organising

Working from Home: “Working at home is very important … [it] is how the group works”

As noted in the previous chapter, there is fluidity and flexibility between marginalised Maya women’s work in their groups and their work in the home. The two blend into one and there are no formal boundaries between the women’s lives in the home and their lives in their groups. The women prioritise and value their domesticity, and, because of this, their participation in their groups is organised around their home lives. Photograph 7.1 illustrates Carmen making a product order for the group at home surrounded by her daughters. The women work from home making their products for
the group, often with the help of female family members. Working from home is a vital aspect of how the groups work. As noted by Micela and Marcela, respectively:

*The women will not work from a central location; they only want to work from home.* (Micela)

*Working from home is important for me and the group; this way I can be with my family and take care of my [special needs] brother and [elderly] mum. And for the other women, it’s important for them to be in the home to take care of their children and husbands.* (Marcela)

**Photograph 7.1: Carmen Working from Home with her Daughters**

Working from home is part of working in a group and making product orders in the home is part of the women’s work in their homes. As explained by Yolonda Chiroy:

*Working at home is very important for the women and is how the group works. When working from home, the women can take care of the children and home. Our work is divided in two: working weaving and working on the chores of the home. Women in the home help each other with their chores and weaving orders. For me, I don’t have a specific time that I weave, but I usually cook, wash and do the chores of the home first.*

Maya women working in groups must balance their home life with group participation. The women cooperate in the group and organise together, just as they
cooperate and organise together in the home. As previously discussed, the women work together and share the responsibilities of the home and the weaving of products for the groups. As Micela explains: “My sisters help me with my products for the group; we all work on the products together”. Maya women support and depend on each other. As such, the women’s organising in groups reflects their ways of working. That is, the groups are organised such that they understand the personal situation of each woman member and encourage the support of the women’s families in their participation. As explained in further detail by Maria Chiroy:

*It’s more difficult for me. I can only take a few [product] orders because I have no one helping me in the home, my mum is too old to help [me] with the orders from the group, and I’m responsible for most of the chores in the home. … It’s easier for the women with big families and daughters and daughters-in-law. … Carmen took more orders last time because she has her daughters helping her in the home and making the products. … Santa (Carmen’s 20-year-old daughter) also attends group meetings for Carmen when she cannot make them; it’s better when you have daughters helping you.*

How Maya women work in the home mirrors how they work together in their groups; the women collaborate and share responsibilities in their homes and their groups.

**Social Collaboration: “We are all treated equally and we all work equally”**

Fairness and equality govern how the women work together. All women must contribute to the group and share responsibilities, and everyone is treated equally, as noted by Mercedes, Yolonda Caljua and Isabel, respectively:

*Everyone is equal and treated the same.* (Mercedes)

*We all work the same and give the same time.* (Yolonda Caljua)

*We are all treated equally, and we all work equally.* (Isabel)
All members must contribute to the group and participate in the group. Women cannot receive an order without attending meetings and participating in the group, as explained by Marcela: “Everyone has to participate. If women don’t attend meetings, they don’t get the threads or materials [to make product orders], and then they won’t receive payment.” While participation is voluntary, it is a requirement to receive a product order and, thereby, payment. No woman receives a salary from the group, only a payment per order produced.

The groups are informal, democratic, member-based organisations, built on social collaboration and managed by all women in the group. They have a rotating ‘board of directors’ elected by the women members, usually every two to five years, or as deemed appropriate by the group. Ranging from between five to seven women, the directors manage the group for their elected period, including, for example, arranging group meetings and meetings with social foundations, managing accounts, orders and payments, leading the group through any problems they may be encountering, etc. Additionally, there are ‘representatives of orders’ in each group. Each representative works directly with a social foundation that places bulk product orders with the groups. These women, for example, manage the order specifications and deliver complete orders to the foundations. All women have responsibilities in the group. Depending on their capabilities and personal circumstances, each woman is given a role in the group by the group, such as, monitoring and measuring a sample of product orders to ensure consistency in quality. The group understands that elderly members have a limited capacity to engage, and these women will be given limited responsibilities, for example, they make tortillas and atol (a corn based hot drink) for when the group has visitors.
Given the groups were formed in the mid-to-late 1980’s during the Civil War, and because membership is lifetime, there are a number of elderly women in the groups. In practice, these women have limited engagement with the group, but, as fair and democratic organisations serving all members, they receive a few orders to maintain themselves financially. These women are old and tired, but, like all the women, they will be in the group until they die or pass on their position to their daughter or grand-daughter. All the women in the group understand the position of older members and accept the ageing process as part of the group.

Cooperation and support permeate the group and how the women work together. The women understand each other’s personal situations and needs, as well as their capacities and capabilities. The management and organisation of the groups is a very fluid, naturally-occurring process. All women participate because it is their responsibility to participate. This follows the model of the COCODE, as discussed in Chapter Six, that is, all women members have a responsibility to their group, just as community members have a responsibility to their community. Matea, Elena and Aura, respectively, discusses how the groups work:

*It's not up to the directors to do everything in and for the group, all the women have to help, this way we learn.* (Matea)

*I’m a director, but I can’t write or read, so the women of the group help me.* (Elena)

*All the women help each other.* (Aura)

The groups are a space for the women to support, and learn from, each other. However, the ageing profile of the groups and their being small and informal, dominant voices emerge during the organising process, resulting in some women contributing more. For example, Alicia, who is currently not a director, explains her position in the group:
I give a lot of my time to the group. The women say I’m the leader of the group. ... I don’t receive any payment for all the work I do in the group ... [But I give extra time to the group] because I know the women need my help and have many needs.

Carmen discusses Alicia’s position in the group:

I think Alicia likes all the work she does for the group. She is young and doesn’t have any children, and can speak Spanish and read and write very well. And she is also the niece of Antonia [the founder of the group], so she knows the group very well. ... We are all happy with the work of Alicia.

While dominant voices may emerge and different women have different roles in the group, all women participate freely and have a voice in the group. The groups are a space for the women to talk freely about the group and their lives. The women work from home making their product orders, but they meet regularly “whenever we have needs”, as frequently said to me by various women. Group meetings are held in the courtyard of different women’s homes, sometimes that of one of the directors, but usually in whichever woman’s home has the largest courtyard space. However, for the Chuacruz group, their meetings are held in their ‘group’s centre’, illustrated in Photograph 7.2 (overleaf), which was built from a donation by a Canadian charity sourced by Maya Traditions. Soon, the Panimatzalam group will also have their own group centre, slowly being built by various international donations secured by Aj Quen. The women primarily meet to discuss product order specifications and divide orders and payments, and they also meet with the social foundations that financially or socio-culturally support the group. But, moreover, the group meetings provide a space for the women to engage with one another. Meetings are friendly, honest and democratic, and they are much more than group meetings for the women; they are an opportunity for marginalised women living in rural, remote communities to learn from each other, socialise and escape the responsibilities of home. Meetings never start on
time and take much longer than their original specified period of time. Women often complain about this, but choose not to challenge or change the set-up of group meetings because meetings, and waiting for meetings to start, are an enjoyable ‘downtime’ for them.

**Photograph 7.2: Chuacruz Group Meeting**

During group meetings, orders are divided equally and fairly between the women by the directors, as Isabel notes: “We divide orders and payments equally”. The ‘representative of orders’ discusses the details and design specifications of the products as ordered by the social foundations, and, following this, the women discuss who wants each order, who needs it and who deserves it. As discussed by Micela, Candelaria and Carmen, respectively:

> We divide the orders equally; every woman receives an equal amount. But it depends on the size of the order; some women say they don’t want many orders [because they know they won’t have the time to make it] and we will give it to the other women because some women will want more orders. (Micela)

> We know each other’s needs, so if one woman wants more orders and one woman wants less, everyone understands, and it’s OK. (Candelaria)

> I have many little children and lots of necessities, and I have my daughters that help me [make my product orders], so I always ask for more orders. ... [But] I only ask for more if some of the women say they can’t do it because they don’t have the time. (Carmen)
The groups are socially collaborative organisations that reflect the needs of the women and are organised based on these needs. Espousing inclusionary and participative action, Maya women organising in the margins stands in contrast to the exclusion and discrimination that generations of Maya women have experienced in the everydayness of their lives. Marginalised Maya women have constructed their own ways of working and organising together that gives women autonomy and strengthens their voices and agency. Rosa gives her opinion on her group and women working together:

*It’s very important to work from home; it’s a very important part of the group. But if you only stay at home, you don’t learn anything new. By being in the group, we acquire knowledge and learn many things. Being in the group doesn’t mean that you are leaving your home and family. Women in the group need to have a plan for the day. The women in the group need to be organised to participate in the group and manage the home. ... Lots of women have problems in the home, but when the women leave the home and participate in the group they forget about their problems. I like to call the group a ‘special place’. ... All the women that participate in the group and attend the meetings enjoy [being in the group] ... We all enjoy being in the group...we are all equal and we all have a voice.*

**Forming, Funding and the Future:** “We know how to work and organise together. This is [our achievement and] how we develop [ourselves and] our group”

The groups formed during the Guatemalan Civil War, and they have continued forming and organising in the decades that have passed, always as democratic, participatory organisations. A recent outcome of the women’s organising together is the formalisation of their groups into civil associations, which has resulted in some changes, as noted by Marcela: “[Being an association] is almost the same, more or less. ...it’s a bit more work, and now we have to pay SAT [tax].” Aj Quen further explain: “Associations are democratic organisations ... everyone participates and has a voice. ... An association can receive donations, but must not be working for profit or
personal gain.” The groups transitioned into registered civil associations – not-for-profit organisations with no individual owner(s) – so they can continue to work with the social foundations (also registered not-for-profit organisations, however, social foundations usually have an owner(s)). As explained by Yolonda Caljua:

_The only difference for us in being a small business [association] is paying tax [per product sold]. We never paid taxes before, but now, with the social foundations, we have to start paying tax so we became an association. If we didn’t [become an association to pay tax] the foundations wouldn’t work with us anymore._

Most of the ways of working throughout the rural, remote Maya communities are informal and unregistered, with most people working individually and few interested in formalising to Guatemalan government standards. Petronila, Maria Chiroy’s elderly mother and an original member of the Chuacruz group, explains the Maya ways of working: “People never worked together. Even now, few people understand groups. … Most people still work individually … [And] tax is new. We never had to pay tax; I don’t think many people pay tax.” The women are proud of their groups’ transition into civil associations; they were the first women’s groups established in their communities and surrounding areas, and now they are the first business associations. As noted by some of the women:

_I am happy the group is an association; I think it [gives the group] more power._ (Antonia)

_I am proud that we are an association. … We’re the only association in the community and wider area._ (Yolonda Chiroy)

_[I think] being an association gives us more opportunities and we are more important now being an association._ (Josefa)

Regardless of these changes, the women continue to organise and work as they always have, with flexibility and fluidity between the home and group, and with
equality and inclusionary, participative action within their group. The women work together to negotiate the challenges of living in the socio-economic periphery. During group meetings, the women discuss different ideas regarding their groups’ development, for example, debating different textiles that they could learn to make and new designs they could develop, recruiting new members that are younger and can speak Spanish, and diversifying into different projects. Various ideas for future and continued development of the groups are discussed, as follows, by some of the women:

*I have ideas; lots of the women have lots of ideas. We don’t know if they’re good ideas or bad ideas, but we have ideas!”* (Rosa)

*If we want to do something [in the group], we say it to the group, but if other women don’t want to do it, we can’t do anything.* (Marcela)

*First we have to discuss [an idea] with all the women and see if they want it, so everyone gets to decide.* (Candelaria)

*We are doing different products; we are trying to work with [Western] fashion. All the women want to do new products and new designs with new colours, and we are using different types of threads and materials. We think buyers want different types of products and new designs.* (Marcela)

*[But the] problem is Spanish; we don’t really understand Spanish and only a few women can speak it very well ... we can’t sell in new markets or to new buyers.* (Caterina)

*We want young women to join the group; young women speak Spanish. But we have lots of requirements. The women have to be active and want to volunteer their time. They have to participate.* (Alicia)

*[But the] problem with young women joining the group is that they will probably get married and have to leave the group when they move to their husbands’ family home. ... This just happened to us. Christina, Matea’s daughter, just got married and left the group. She helped us a lot. She was young and had lots of ideas, but she left the group when she got married, and she moved to a different community.* (Dominga)

*I was thinking I would like the group to get involved in different agricultural projects. We could buy lots of piglets. I don’t think it would be too expensive, and each woman could raise two pigs in their homes,*
and we could then sell them to the butchers when they’re fully grown. (Antonia)

We would like to have an office in the group centre. (Alicia)

[And] organise tour group to visits our centre. We could make connections with hotels and tour operators ... and have tourists visit us and buy our products. We could talk to them and tell them stories and maybe make food for them. (Yolonda Chiroy).

We’ve talked about establishing our own shop. There are lots of tourists, not here, but we could sell directly to tourists in, maybe, Pana. (Micela)

Buying products from a store is different from buying products directly from the person who made it ... I think tourists might like that! (Yolonda Chiroy)

The women live in the margins where they formed their groups, and it is in the margins where they continue to survive and struggle to earn an income. The women discuss ideas to develop their groups because they are confronted with the challenges of declining product orders. Social foundations have been reducing their orders with the groups as they struggle to sell the women’s backstrap woven textiles in an international market slowly recovering from an economic recession. As noted by Maria Chiroy, Caterina and Isabel, respectively:

We haven’t had an order over in a month. A few years ago we had orders every 15 days. (Maria Chiroy)

We don’t earn enough. ... We don’t always have orders; some months we do and some months we don’t. In the beginning, we had a lot more orders; we had orders every month. (Caterina)

We [used to have] a lot of orders and more income, [but now we] don’t have enough orders to make sufficient money. (Isabel)

While the women may not earn a sufficient income from their work in their groups, they pool their knowledge and skills to earn funds that otherwise would be very difficult to generate in the margins. With the income earned from their groups the
women can purchase “household needs”, as noted by numerous women, for example, pay utility bills, purchase household and food supplies, support their children’s education, etc. Flori explains the importance of her earnings from the group: “*My income from the group can sustain my family with food for one or two days. It has also helped pay for my children’s education, like buying books that they need for their studies.*” However, different women have different personal circumstances. Carmen explains her position: “*We have some orders, but it’s not enough to sustain ten children!*” Not only are their orders declining, but, now that the groups are registered associations, each woman has to pay 5 per cent tax on the payment she receives for each product. Additionally, to sustain the group, each woman has to invest 5 per cent (approximately) of the payment she receives for each product into the group. The groups, as organisations, were never developed to make a profit, nonetheless, they require capital, which the women members must fund. The groups maintain limited capital, as the women can only invest limited funds. Dominga explains the financing of the Chuacruz group:

*Yes, we have to give 5 per cent to the group to help cover the needs of the group. [But] 5 per cent is not enough because the group doesn’t have money. We only have a little money, so the group only has a little money. We’ve discussed giving 10 per cent, but the women complained. We earn so little that we cannot afford to give 10 per cent. It’s difficult for the women.*

The funds retained by the groups are used for the day-to-day maintenance of the group, for example: to pay for bus fares to meet with social foundations and deliver products; to pay for women’s lunches when they are away for the day engaged in group activities and to pay for food when they have visitors; to maintain an inventory of thread and raw materials to use for product orders; as well as the sustainable future of the group and potential implementation of ideas for group development, discussed
above by the women. For example, the Chuacruz group recently used its capital to pay for its part in the Chuacruz ‘water project’, discussed in Chapter Six, and funds are also required for the maintenance of their group centre.

As the groups are democratic organisations governed by fairness and equality, trust and transparency are maintained between the women regarding the contribution of earnings to the group and group finances. However, in the past, there have been instances of mistrust between the women and misuse of group resources. Isabel, from the Chirijox group, recalls an incident of misuse of funds by one of the group’s founders:

*One of the founders, a director at the time, was a very bad person. The women of the group weren’t happy with her and we had a group meeting and asked her to leave. … We found out that she was using the funds from the group for personal use. … This was our money for our group, and she was using it for personal use! We were very mad.*

There are disagreements between the women regarding their organising together and the use of funds invested into the group. Although their groups are well established, and the women are used to organising together, this is still an unusual way of working for marginalised Maya women. As noted by Mercedes and Alicia, respectively:

*We have problems, but not big problems. Some people say they will not do the work and sometimes they don’t want to participate. They are irresponsible, and they don’t do the work. But these are little problems.* (Mercedes)

*Some of the women say they are going to leave the group when we have problems. … Sometimes we have little problems and the women argue. … Our organising together is unusual. Maya women don’t work together here, so it can be difficult sometimes. … But time passes and they think about this, and they come back to the group. This is because we all see the benefits in being in the group. If a woman leaves the group, she won’t have the benefits.* (Alicia)
The women and their groups have endured and overcome many challenges. As discussed in Chapter Six, the Maya women live in an in-between world, a world filled with uncertainties and ambiguities, and their groups are a negotiated space within this world where they are continually organising and forming amid socio-economic challenges. The future of the groups is as uncertain and ambiguous as the in-between world within which they live. The groups were established as a means of survival for marginalised Maya women and to create a community for women, and their future is rooted in their marginalised indigenous communities where they work together. The women know that by continuing to organise and work together they will endure, and their groups will survive. As explained by Dominga, Maria Conception Cumes-Morales, and Mercedes, respectively:

*Whatever happens in the future, we will never stop working ... We will give the best of ourselves to achieve this.* (Dominga)

*We will always look for more opportunities ... We will never say we are finished or have had enough; we will always have lots to do.* (Maria Conception Cumes-Morales)

*[The future] will be difficult, [but] life is difficult. ... We will never stop working.* (Mercedes)

Marginalised Maya women and their groups are resilient. Despite enduring the challenges of a declining market, limited financial resources and organising in the margins, the women are happy with their groups and how they work and organise together. As previously noted by Mercedes, Maya women are “*dynamic*”, and so too are their groups. By organising together the women continue to develop themselves and their groups, as noted by Isabel: “*We know how to work and organise together. This is [our achievement and] how we develop [ourselves and] our group.*” Alicia further explains: “*We are working together, and we work hard. Our vision for the*
Indigenous Organising: Developing an Understanding of Maya Women Organising

Smith (1999, pp.86) explains that “indigenous peoples can be defined as the assembly of those who have witnessed, been excluded from, and have survived modernity and imperialism.” As such, indigeneity could be viewed as a category and an experience that emerged from the colonial encounter. Indigenous theorising ascertains that all indigenous people, from Western Settler Nations (e.g., Canada) to Global South nations (e.g., Guatemala), remain colonised people, as their various indigenous epistemologies have been silenced by the epistemic coloniality of knowledge (e.g., Jack et al., 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2009; Smith, 1999).

Within indigenous theorising, it is difficult to define ‘indigenous organising’. There is enormous variety in indigenous peoples and their epistemologies, and their different understandings of organisation/organising emerge from their different social, cultural and historical location (Smith, 1999). As discussed in Chapter Two, there is little indigenous theorising in mainstream organisation studies. What little indigenous theorising there is can be found in the literature that comes from Western Settler Nations (e.g., Henry and Pene, 2001; Finlay, 2008; Tedmanson, 2008), and is based on the lived experiences in the West. Thus, there is a dearth of indigenous theorising in organisation studies from the Global South perspective.

To this end, I look to decolonial theory to help me develop an understanding of ‘indigenous organising’ from the narratives of the Maya women participants. Thus, my understanding of Maya women organising is framed within a decolonial theoretical
perspective. To clarify, I am not focusing on the women’s organisations, the groups, as a unit of analysis, but their organising together based on their social, cultural and historical experiences. Maya women organising is not based on Western-styled organisations or the notion of victimhood of marginalised indigenous women. Their organising is rooted in their identity as resilient indigenous women. theirs is fluid, flexible and socially collaborative organising, implemented on a day-to-day basis to suit their social and cultural condition as marginalised, indigenous women. Maya women have their own way of conceiving work and engagement, and are actively engaging in organising practices that reflect their position as poor, indigenous women. In so doing, the women have a different way of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising.

As socially collaborative organisations based on fairness and equality, the organising of the Maya women’s group is an intersection of their gendered and cultural identity. In being Maya women, their organising espouses Latin American indigenous philosophies of harmony and equality. That is, as opposed to individualism and neoliberalism, they value the collective, cooperative space of their group, where they work together to develop themselves and preserve their Maya identities by engaging in traditional weaving practices. At the same time, they also challenge the coloniality of Maya women by leaving their homes to work together. Their organising together is a negotiation of their indigenous and colonised gendered identities, where their groups value their domesticity, but also reinforce ancestral indigenous values of community and equality. Their groups create a space for equality in their unequal society.

Maya women organising in the margins can contribute to the decolonisation of organisation studies by bringing into the discourse alternative experiences of organisation/organising based on their gendered and cultured identities. In so doing,
they offer an alternative to the dominant organisation/organising narratives that privilege the paradigms of masculinity, heterogeneity, and white Western-ness.

**Transformative Participation:**

**The Impact and Benefits of Maya Women Organising**

The Maya women successfully organise in the margins. Working together to find their voice, they become a cohesive whole that affects change. Being the most systematically marginalised group in Guatemala, the discrimination encountered by the women based on their condition of being poor, indigenous, and women encourages the women to organise together to create an emancipatory space. The groups act as alternative spaces for marginalised indigenous women in Guatemala, empowering them, as well as enhancing their participation in employment in a fair and democratic way. Their organising together promotes autonomy and participation through equality and respect, while also providing the women and their families with vital economic benefits. In this section, the women share their experiences and benefits from participating in their groups and organising together. The women’s narratives are divided into two sub-sections that provide insight into the economic and personal benefits of group participation.

**Economic Survival: “…with the money from the group we can feed ourselves and our families”**

The groups were formed during the Guatemalan Civil War to help the women survive extreme poverty. As discussed in the preceding chapters, there were, and still are, limited economic opportunities in rural, remote communities in the Highlands of Guatemala. Isabel and Maria Chiroy, respectively, explain:
There are no jobs here. There are no opportunities for anyone. (Isabel)

No, there are no jobs, no jobs for anyone. (Maria Chiroy)

Maya women living in the socio-economic margins have been condemned to poverty.

Dominga explains her situation:

My father died [during the war] when I was three years old. I wanted to study, but my mother didn’t have the money. ... [So] I had to leave school when I was young. ... I worked; my mother told me I had to start weaving and making money.

However, weaving alone as an individual woman, that is, not part of a group, provides an inadequate income. Social foundations will only work with groups and do not place product orders with individual women, and, since backstrap weaving is a skill learned by nearly all Maya women, there are limited opportunities to sell backstrap woven products to neighbours or in local markets. Caterina and Isabel, respectively, explain this situation:

If I wasn’t in the group, I would be weaving on my own and trying to sell products house-by-house. But, all women here weave, and no one has any money to buy anything anyway. ... As an individual you don’t have a market to sell to ... the social foundations only buy from groups. (Caterina)

It’s not the same working alone; you have to pay money to go to the market and buy thread and work really hard to sell your products. You have to go door-to-door to try and sell your products or pay bus fare to tourist towns to try and sell on the streets to tourists. And then these people offer very low prices for the products; this price might only cover the cost of the thread, not your labour or work. There are so many women that weave, there’s a lot of competition. So, it’s difficult for women who are not working together in groups. (Isabel)

Dominga, who had to leave school to work as a backstrap weaver, explains why she joined the group:

The benefit for me is that I have work. And now I also have experiences. Working alone and never leaving the home, you don’t learn anything. I
decided to join the group for my family; I saw the needs of my family, and I thought joining the group would help my family. So the best benefit for me is the money earned.

While their earnings are limited and their orders are in decline, the income earned from the group is vital for the survival of the women and their families. As noted by Marcela, Alicia and Maria Quisquina, respectively:

With the orders and with the money from the group, we can feed ourselves and our families. (Marcela)

I've benefited a lot. Through the orders I’ve earned money. It’s difficult to earn money here, so it’s helped me and my family a lot. (Alicia)

The money I have earned [from the group] means that I could raise my family. (Maria Quisquina)

Their earnings from their groups are the primary income for most of the women’s households. Rosa explains her financial situation: “Sometimes my husband and sons don’t earn any money from our agriculture, and we don’t have any money. What are we to do? The money from the group helps me and my family.” Maria Quisquina’s eldest son explains how important her earnings from the group are for their family:

We really rely on her income from the group. We only have a little agriculture to sustain the family. And we [her children] don’t earn much income. We organise threads into designs and patterns and then sell them to stores, but it’s only for very little income.

Maria then notes:

My husband died during the war, and I had to raise my children alone. We had no money, nothing. Before I joined the group, I didn’t even know a Q20 or Q50 note existed! It’s not a lot of money [that] I earn from the group, but it’s very important to me and my family.

Erica explains how her participation in the group has benefited her and her family: “[The money I earn from the group] is not enough, but it’s better than nothing.
When my child was sick, I could buy her medicine. I've also been able to buy my children some clothes.”

In working together in their groups, the women are working themselves and their families out of poverty. In so doing, the women in the groups have become vital to the household economy. The social foundation, Aj Quen, explains the importance of the women earning an income from their participation in groups:

For the women working in groups, their lives have changed a lot, and their role in the household has changed too. These women have their own income and have become a very important part of the economy of the household. They help their husbands with the needs of the home, and, in some cases, they are the primary earners in the home. These women are helping their children by paying for their education and they have an income for the family and the needs of the home. ... Maya women only used to eat once a day, some women still do, but the women in the groups are having two or three meals a day. The women develop in the group, and the group empowers them. The women are showing themselves, their families and their communities how important Maya women really are.

In working together in groups and earning an income, the women are challenging their condition as poor, indigenous and women. Centuries of marginalisation, discrimination and living in the social-economic periphery has motivated these women to find support in the establishment of their own organisations. Their organisations enable the women earn their own income and find their voice, and, in so doing, they are reconceptualising their position in their homes and communities and challenging their condition of being poor. Living in poverty requires full dedication to supporting and feeding a family, with little time dedicated to learning and legitimising demands as indigenous women. Indigenous women living in the margins have little time to question their statehood or challenge their marginalised and discriminated position, as illustrated in the following quote from Candelaria: “Maya women don’t have time for anything. We can only think about the needs of our families. ... I have to look after my
“family, my home and do all the cooking and cleaning.” As discussed in Chapter Three, postcolonial feminist theory highlights that Western feminist theorists refer to these women as ‘backwards’, with little regard for or understanding of their different social, cultural or historical positions. Marginalised, indigenous women ‘comply’ with this truncated image because centuries of colonisation and coloniality resulted in their marginalised status and their living in poverty, thereby offering little opportunity to engage with their rights as Maya women. Living in poverty offers marginalised indigenous women little time to think of anything but poverty. The Maya women participants of this research demonstrate that by organising together they can overcome their position of poverty, and, in so doing, challenge their discriminated and marginalised status as Maya women.

**Maya Women’s Collective Agency:** “[Now] I think about the rights of women and being an indigenous woman. I think indigenous women have to participate; people say we cannot, but we can”

Centuries of ethnic hierarchy and patriarchy have imposed upon Maya women preconceived notions regarding what they can and cannot do. As noted in the previous chapter by Carmen: “A Maya woman stays in the home, working in the kitchen and taking care of the children.” Defined by their gender, Maya women are confined to the home. Maya women value their domesticity, but, by organising together in groups, the women have created a space where they can engage with other women and learn from each other. Emancipating themselves from the confines of their homes, Maya women gain more confidence and begin to question their condition as indigenous women. As explained by some of women:

*If you only stay at home, you don’t acquire any knowledge. But, by being in the group, you get out of the home and learn many things. (Rosa)*
I am confident going out now; I am not afraid anymore. Before joining the group, I was afraid to leave my home and community. ... [Now] I know more, and I am not afraid to talk. (Dominga)

When I first joined the group, I didn’t want to leave my home to attend meetings or meet with social foundations. I was scared, but now I’m confident, and I can leave the house by myself. (Elena)

The women are more independent now because they can go out and do many things by themselves. (Yolonda Chiroy)

Before [joining the group], I was afraid to talk, but now I am talking and I’m talking to lots of new people, like you. If I wasn’t in the group, I wouldn’t have the confidence to talk to you. (Isabel)

I have changed in my way of thinking and also my way of speaking. I used to be very shy, but in the group you have to talk, so now I can speak in public. Through the group, I am leaving behind my shyness. (Alicia)

When the women work and organise together, they also learn from each other. Rosa, Mercedes and Yolonda Caljua, respectively, discuss what they have learned from working with women in a group:

I have learned many new things. There’s always something to learn when you’re working with other women. (Rosa)

I think the first thing I learned was how to socialise with other women and how to share with people. (Mercedes)

I think I’ve learned how to become a leader from working with the women in the group, and this has helped my self-esteem. (Yolonda Caljua)

Candelaria, a founder of the Panimatualam group, and Maria Conception Cumes-Morales, the daughter of another founder, discuss the benefits of the group for the women members and why a small number of women in Panimatualam came together to start the group:

We started the group when we saw the needs [of the women] in town, but, besides that, the women wanted to learn. ... It’s good for women to be in groups. By being together, we know more and learn more, and we can earn
money ... When we talk to other women in the community, they don’t believe us! (Candelaria)

My mother started the group, and she taught us [her children] everything she learned from being in the group. Each night, over dinner, she would talk about what she learned. ... Maybe through the group [women] have changed. We know now that the Maya woman has rights. And we can express ourselves more, and we talk in meetings. (Maria Conception Cumes-Morales)

Caterina explains how she’s benefited from her participation in the group and how her experiences in the group encouraged her to question the subjugation of her position as a Maya woman:

I am grateful to be in the group, not just for the income, but to learn and better myself and my family. ... Being in the group makes me think and gives me ideas. ... I want my daughters to be like me, participating and always learning. ... [Now] I think about the rights of women and being an indigenous woman. I think indigenous women have to participate; people say we cannot, but we can. I used to be afraid to participate before I joined the group, but I’ve changed since I joined the group. Now I’m even on the board for parents at the children’s school. ... Here women only have children, lots of children; they don’t think about it. We have to change the way we think. In this community we say that God will give me as many children as possible. This isn’t saying anything bad about Maya people. Families are suffering, men are drinking, and women aren’t eating. Some families can’t afford to buy salt and sugar.

Leaving their homes and socialising with other women builds the women’s confidence. The groups are a space where they learn by sharing formal and informal knowledge, but mostly it is a space for them to find their voice. This space provides the women with the opportunity to question their role in society and challenge discriminatory practices that have silenced them for centuries, thereby making them more aware of their full potential and the contribution they can make to society.

The women are also encouraged by their engagement with social foundations. Local social foundations have worked with most of the groups since early in each of their establishments. Many of the social foundations were established towards the end
of, and following, the Civil War to support the rural indigenous population. These organisations seek donations and grants from international aid organisations and donor nations for rural economic development in indigenous regions. Supporting local economic development, the social foundations collaborate with the women’s groups and provide them with a reliable income by buying their products at a fair price and selling these products on the international market. Simply put by Isabel, “[If we] didn’t have [the] foundations, we wouldn’t have any work!”

Social foundations encourage the empowerment of indigenous women and are the only Guatemalan organisations or institutes working with Maya women and their groups. As explained by the programme coordinator at Aj Quen: “The government doesn’t work with us or any of the women’s groups. The government doesn’t recognise or support the work of social foundations or the groups.” Aj Quen provides insight into their work and engagement with the women’s groups:

*We work with the women and sell their products. Recently, we had a big order with Oxfam in Belgium and this charity also made a big donation to Aj Quen that we use in our work with the women’s groups. ... We [also] try to develop the integrity of the women. We talk to the women about our culture and our land. All the indigenous ethnicities of Guatemala have to come together and work together. Maya people have to know about the Constitution of Guatemala and the rights of indigenous people; they need to learn about local and national politics. Aj Quen works with the women to get them involved with local politics, encouraging them to work with the municipality and get involved with their COCODE.*

Yolonda Chiroy explains why the women in the groups enjoy working with the social foundations, and Caterina provides insight into how she’s benefited from working with the foundations:

*We like working with [the] foundations. It’s better for us to work with foundations than try and sell our products by ourselves. Because of the foundations, we have a market for our products. And the foundations help us a lot. They don’t only help a few women; they help the whole group. We*
have to participate in meetings with the foundations. In meetings with foundations, we learn about our history and culture, and we talk about the rights of Maya women. (Yolonda Chiroy)

The group is happy working with the foundations because they are helping us and our group is benefiting. [Most of the women] don’t have an education, so we learn from the foundations. I have learned a lot from our work with foundations. ... Maya Traditions has provided us with training about natural medicine and nature, and I’m using this knowledge now. I use the plants to heal my children. ... This has saved me a lot of money. Before, when the children were sick, we would have to spend a lot of money in the pharmacy, but now I know what plants to use to help [heal the] sickness. I started doing this because I didn’t have money. Our work with the foundations is really beneficial. ... I am practicing what I am learning. ... I have learned a lot about being a woman and the rights of Maya women. I teach my sons that they can’t tell their wives to stay in the home all day. Women have to participate. Some people say that women only leave the home because she wants to be with another man. But it’s not like that. (Caterina)

From working with the social foundations, Caterina has learned to draw on her Maya worldview of equality that identifies complementarity between genders, as well as between people and nature, and defies modernity in her practice of natural medicine that was used by her Maya ancestors.

The relationship between the groups and the social foundations is informal. Both are indigenous organisations established for the benefit of indigenous people. As noted by Anna, the director of Oxlajuj B’atz’: “It’s important to have personal relations with the women in the group. We make sure that the staff of Oxlajuj B’atz’ are of different Maya ethnicities; we have women working with us that are K’iche, Kaqchikel and Ixkel.” The social foundations encourage the deconstruction and decolonisation of the Maya women, promoting discourses and practices that give legitimacy to their experiences as Maya women working in the margins. Photograph 7.3 (overleaf) illustrates a meeting between the Chuacruz group and Oxlajuj B’atz’ about Maya women’s rights. Anna, the director of Oxlajuj B’atz’, further explains:
We are working to overcome all the discrimination encountered by Maya women for being poor, indigenous, women. ... By buying their products we help the women address the issue of poverty, but we also work with them to empower the women and help them understand what it means to be a Maya woman so they can overcome the discrimination they encounter from men and for being Maya.

**Photograph 7.3: Chuacruz Group Meeting with Oxlaju B’atz’**

Mobilising together and working with indigenous social foundations, the Maya women are building their knowledge and confidence, and demonstrating their collective agency. The women are beginning to question their position in society and build their socio-cultural autonomy. They are redefining the role of Maya women by organising together, earning an income, and embracing their identity as indigenous women, and, in so doing, are challenging an ontology of modernity that has discriminated against them and marginalised their voices. Encouraged by the social foundations, the women are exercising their self-determination – their right to participate, their right to self-organise and govern themselves, and their right to learn and engage in society – while also embracing what they have come to value as their identity as Maya women, for example, their domesticity. The groups demonstrate the agency of Maya women and their desire for cultural and economic self-determination.
Organising for Change

The women’s groups embody poor, indigenous women’s struggle for emancipation. Through their organising together in groups, Maya women are becoming economically independent. Additionally, the groups provide them with a space to resist and create. In the creation of their own organisations, Maya women have found a voice and created a space to explore further their identity as indigenous women. Maya women working together in groups are mobilising for change. However, this is an unintended outcome of their organising. Their groups have enabled the women to not only weave their way out of poverty, but also to adopt a more participative approach within their societies. While the groups were established, and continue to work, as organisations designed to economically benefit their members, by working together, the women have also created an emancipatory, empowering space where they share experiences and knowledge and learn from their engagement with social foundations. Simply put by Caterina, “[Being in the group], I am thinking more. Before, I was enclosed in the home, and you cannot learn anything new when you’re in the home all day.” Their groups have enabled the women to start asking questions, exploring their womanhood and developing their own understanding of what it means to be an indigenous woman. As previously noted by Caterina: “I have learned a lot about being a woman and the rights of Maya women.”

The women’s agency is strengthened through their organising together. Drawing on their collective agency, the women are organising for change; they cannot continue to live under their conditions of coloniality, patriarchy and poverty. The women are starting to reconceptualise their relationship with men and their position in society. As noted by Antonia:
We talk about our rights. We know about our rights as indigenous women. It’s not easy for men to tell us what to do. The women won’t listen to men if they tell them they can’t do it or they can’t go to meetings.

Their groups are a transformative space for marginalised Maya women living in poverty; a space to earn, to learn, to engage, and to question.

Communitarian Organising: Maya Women Organising in the Margins

In this chapter, I have provided insight into the Maya women’s organisations, specifically their process of organising and the impact of their organising together. A long history of discrimination and marginalisation has spawned the emergence of Maya women organising in the margins; an alternative way of working together and ‘seeing and doing’ organising/organisation founded on social collaboration and collective action to support Maya women’s economic independence and socio-cultural rights.

During my time with the women, I found myself comparing the women’s groups to cooperative organisations. Both are democratic, member-owned organisations working towards socio-economic benefits for their members and their local community (Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, 2008). There are volumes of academic research and policy reports that encourage the cooperative business model for socio-economically disadvantaged nations, regions and communities, and, with this, there is data demonstrating how cooperative organisations support poverty reduction and social inclusion (for example, Birchall, 2003; Birchall and Hammond Ketilson, 2009; Birchall and Simmons, 2004; COPAC, 2008; Jones, Smith and Wills, 2011; Jussila, Byrne and Tuominen, 2012; Mellor, 2009; Overseas Cooperative Development Council, 2010; Simmons and Birchall, 2008).
When seeking to develop an understanding of ‘Maya women organising’, it would be easy to define their groups as cooperative organisations and fit my research with the volumes of data already produced that outline the benefits of this way of working. Thus, while similarities can be drawn between cooperatives and the women’s groups, my post/decolonial feminist lens encourages me to decolonise my way of seeing and thinking. Much like the Maya women’s organising, cooperative organising is driven by cooperative working practices that mutually benefit workers seeking ways to maximise local control over economic and social development. However, this approach to organising emerged in Europe amid the industrial changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a reaction to increased market pressure from a changing economic system, and much of its current theorisation and practice remains in a Western ontology (Fairbairn et al., 1991; MacPherson, 2008; Wilhoit, 2005).

Similarly, community organising is a form of community and citizen participation often used as a vehicle for activism aimed at bringing about improvements in social well-being. Community organising is a process by which a community, working cooperatively and democratically, identifies needs and takes action at a local level. An elusive and broad term, community organising covers a vast array of community activities ranging from improvements to local infrastructure and access to affordable housing or education, to social action and civil rights movements (Brown, 2006; Ross, 1967). Like cooperative organising, similarities can be drawn to the organising practices of the Maya women’s group and community organising; however, the purpose of their organising differs. The Maya women’s organising together is primarily driven by economic development and survival; the benefits to the women and their community, while substantial, are by-products of their organising
together. The work and organising of the COCODE, as discussed in Chapter Six, is more comparable to community organising than that of the Maya women’s groups.

To say that the Maya women’s organising are based on cooperative organising, or even community organising, imposes mainstream Western organisation studies terminology and ways of understanding organising/organisation upon the women and their groups. Thus, I argue that the Maya women experience their organising/organisation from the perspective of Otherness. Having no formal education and no direct engagement with Western organisations to encourage them towards a cooperative organisation model, the Maya women have created their own organisations and way of organising. As noted by Ibarra-Colado (2008, p. 934), many marginalised indigenous communities in Latin America have learned how to survive in the worst conditions and how to create something from nothing; this is the “real art of management and organization”. The Maya women constitute their own representations of organisation that promote their own values and beliefs and facilitate their needs living in the socio-economic periphery.

The findings discussed in this chapter follow Dussel and Ibarra-Colado’s (2006) and Ibarra-Colado’s (2006) call for the decolonisation of organisation studies and their argument that there is need to create space in organisation studies that recognises the importance of the ‘Other’s’ capacity for intellectual autonomy and their own seeing, doing and thinking. Grosfoguel (2011) notes the difficulties in building theory that is not permeated by Western thought or epistemically located in the West. Thus, to understand Maya women organising in the margins, organisation studies must move towards border thinking. Border thinking, as discussed in Chapter Two, is another thinking by those in the Global South who build agency from their colonial difference and Otherness. Border thinking encourages organisation theorists to recognise that
Maya women are contributing to new knowledge production about alternative ways of organising from their gendered and indigenous identity and position of socio-economic exclusion. In effect, border thinking in organisation studies supports the decolonisation of the discipline by highlighting that hegemonic Western tradition of organisation/organising thinking dictates and defines how and what should be practised, while at the same time demonstrating the importance of thinking from difference, that is, the knowledge and experiences of organising from outside the border (Faria, 2013).

Maya women organising is created in an in-between space, a space between indigenous worldviews and contemporary social and cultural life constructed by coloniality. In this in-between space, a space filled with ambiguities and contradictions, Maya women balance coloniality/modernity with their own ways of ‘seeing and doing’ organisation/organising. The women, their lives and their organisations are characterised by plurality, in which they negotiate tensions and contradictions. The social, cultural and historical context in which Maya women have constructed their groups marks the specific form their organisations take, as well as their conceptions of organising. That is, the groups are characterised according to the women’s condition of being poor, indigenous, and women.

Maya women organising can be understood as a space for the collective reflection of women to recognise their experiences of exclusion as Maya women and to exercise their self-determination. Maya women are constructing emancipatory experiences of work and, in the process, are beginning to rewrite their womanhood.

An ancestral, patriarchal society, exacerbated by colonial and post-colonial repression, renders indigenous women voiceless and their identities appropriated by
both Western and male narratives. The women struggle within their society and community to change elements that exclude and oppress them, and through their groups, the Maya women demonstrate their full potential and the contribution they can make. Maya women assert themselves and strive for solidarity and social collaboration in their groups. For Maya women, domesticity and maternity are not opposed to participation and active citizenship. Their domesticity is reconciled with participation, leadership, equality and income-generating work. Maya women organising is orientated by Latin American indigenous worldviews with which the women respect each other and reclaim the value of community, where they are at one with the community of the home and the community of the group under conditions of equality and cooperation. In sum, combining this understanding of Maya women organising with the discussion of indigenous feminism in Latin America in Chapter Three, namely communitarian feminism, I call Maya women organising in the margins ‘communitarian organising’.

Communitarian organising differs in its organising practice and purpose, as well as epistemological and ontological location, from cooperative and community organising, and there is limited engagement with the term communitarian organising in organisation studies. Nonetheless, the term is used sparsely throughout the literature in the discipline. McDonald Foster (1998) calls for the inclusion of the communitarian philosophical perspective in organisation theory to challenge the individualist approach ingrained in Western organisations, and to encourage corporate socially responsibility in Western organisations operating in the Global South. Relatedly, Parker, Cheney, Fournier and Land (2014) use the term communitarian organising when developing their manifesto for alternative organising. Parker et al. (2014) argue that through working collectively and cooperatively individuals can become more
empowered and enact a desired change, and thus, one of their principles for alternative organising is underpinned by communitarianism. While communitarian philosophy and the term communitarian organising have been briefly introduced into, and theorised within, mainstream organisation studies, my theorisation of communitarian organising is developed from within the Global South through empirical research with marginalised indigenous women’s working groups. Thus, my theorisation of communitarian organising is an indigenous communitarian organising enacted locally and orientated by Latin American indigenous worldviews. In the next, and concluding, chapter, I discuss further communitarian organising and its contribution to organisation studies.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: “WE HAVE A VOICE, BUT NOW, WITH YOU, OUR VOICE IS LOUDER”

My ethnographic doctoral research explores the work and lives of marginalised, indigenous Maya women working together in backstrap weaving groups in the rural, remote Western Highlands of Sololá, Guatemala. The work and lives of marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South are located outside of the dominant Western discourse of management and organisation. There is limited empirical engagement with marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South within the organisation studies discipline. As a result, we know little about how they construct their identity as women and their organisation/organising experiences in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. My ethnographic research takes us into the lives of Maya women, their families, their groups and their communities, and explores the everydayness of their work and lives so to document their contribution to the discipline. In so doing, this dissertation provides space for marginalised Maya women to voice their own understanding of gender, identity and work from within the context of their social, cultural and historical location.

My intention for this dissertation is to facilitate the ‘speaking back’ of marginalised Maya women, such that they can take ownership over their identities and their way of working and organising, and bring this into mainstream discourse. Applying postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory to organisation studies challenges an ontology of modernity and broadens our understanding to include different ways of ‘seeing, doing and thinking’.
By way of recap, in the literature review chapters, I position organisation studies in within the critical lenses of postcolonial theory, decolonial theory and feminist theory to illustrate the limited engagement with indigenous organising/organisation knowledge in the organisation studies discourse. With this, I pursue a line of argument that there is a need to create a space in organisation studies that recognises the importance of ‘the Other’s’ capacity for intellectual autonomy and their own ‘seeing, doing and thinking’. In particular, the writings of feminist theorists in organisation studies have become generalised on the grounds of white Western women’s experiences, with the knowledge and experiences of marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South invisible and written out of this discourse. In my methodology chapter, I provide space for a different organising/organisation knowledge from the perspective of ‘Otherness’ by building postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory into my ethnographic approach. My aim is not to provide an exhaustive account of marginalised, indigenous women’s experiences of work and organising/organisation, but rather to provide insight into the work and lives of a small number of Maya women’s weaving groups in the context of their social, cultural and historical location.

In the following reflections, I further discuss and interpret my empirical findings, provide insight into the implications of my dissertation, outline the challenges and limitations of this research, and provide direction for future research.

**Communitarian Organising:**

**Moving Towards Border Thinking and Transmodernity in Organisation Studies**

Within the critical management studies field of organisation studies, the lack of voices from women in the Global South, particularly indigenous, marginalised, black,
peasant, lesbian women in Latin America, has been recognised (e.g. Alcadipani et al., 2012; Alcadipani and Faria, 2014; Misoczky, 2011; Jack et al., 2011). Yet, the full contribution these women from the Global South can make to organisation studies is under-theorised and under-researched. Positioning organisation studies within the critical lenses of postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theory enables me to explore how marginalised, Maya women’s cultural, social and historical location constructs their identity as women and their work experiences.

My work has been strongly influenced by Eduardo Ibarra-Colado, the seminal Mexican organisation studies academic, and I now look to Ibarra-Colado (2006; 2008) when reflecting on my contributions to organisation studies. My research provides insight into the lives and work of the Maya women participants, a specific time and space that is not found within mainstream organisation study discourse. Working with the Maya women participants, I bring to organisation studies discourse a detailed account of work and life from the women’s perspectives and produce original knowledge about an alternative way of organising built in the periphery and brought to the centre. Bringing this original knowledge from the Maya women’s life in the periphery to the academic centre in the West, I do not wish to challenge dominant theories of organising in the West, but to encourage the acceptance of another way of organising in the mainstream discourse that is equally valued. My research with Maya women and their families offers an alternative – it addresses imbalances in the discourse and gives more prominence to the acts of those organising and working together in the socioeconomic and academic margins. Simply put, from my examination of indigenous organising, I argue for the need to think in terms of Otherness.
Thus, the findings from this research are a move towards decoloniality, that is, in this case, the decolonisation of organisation studies and feminist theorisation in the discipline. Decolonial feminist theorising in organisation studies recognises the specific experiences of work associated with traditional, non-modern and alternative ways of organising by women in the Global South to produce original indigenous knowledge so to break the mechanical transfer of organisation knowledge from the West (Ibarra-Colado, 2008). The findings of this research contribute to decolonial feminist theorising in organisation studies by building a theorisation of how Maya women organise in the margins, namely communitarian organising.

Communitarian organising is founded on Maya women’s indigenous worldviews, with which the women respect each other and reclaim the value of community, where they are at one with the community of the home and the community of the group under conditions of equality and cooperation. Together with this, communitarian organising is orientated by the everydayness of life as a Maya woman living in the socio-economic margins. Thus, in contrast to individualism, as promoted by modernity, Maya women have reclaimed the value of community and collective action to address the challenges of living in the socio-economic margins. Developing work practices that are based on communitarian organising, Maya women weave their indigenous worldviews of community and collective action with their contemporary gendered and cultured identities that prioritise their domesticity and Christianity. Communitarian organising enables fluidity between the home and the group, a requirement in the working practices of Maya women, while also acting as a catalyst for change by challenging the coloniality of gender that has restricted Maya women to their homes and rendered them voiceless in their communities and wider societies. In effect, communitarian organising represents the lived experiences of Maya women.
working together in groups; they live and work in a world in-between modernity and indigenous worldviews.

The narratives of the Maya women, in Chapters Six and Seven, demonstrate that they live and work in an in-between world and the limited engagement with marginalised, indigenous women in organisation studies results in a limited understanding of this world / these worlds. So, to facilitate an understanding of the lived experiences of Maya women and the integration of communitarian organising into organisation studies, I turn to border thinking. Border thinking contributes to the decolonisation of organisation studies by enabling the coexistence of different ways of life and different ways of thinking (Faria, 2013). Border thinking is an epistemic move toward pluriversality through which organisation theorists can conceptualise the coexistence of many organisational epistemologies. In so doing, border thinking moves organisation studies from modernity to transmodernity. My research with Maya women’s group and my theorisation of communitarian organising is a contribution to organisation studies that encourages a “new transmodern world where each community decides on its form of existence (and organising) in respect for others” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 479).

Transmodernity recognises the epistemic contributions from ‘the Other’ to modernity. The perspective of transmodernity in organisation studies enables Maya women and their communitarian organising practices, who/which have been rendered to the margins in organisation studies, not to be seen as “miracles arising from nothingness”, but rather as a return to the status of Maya women as producers of knowledge (Misoczky, 2011, p. 347). Border thinking recognises the value of knowledge produced from the perspective of Otherness, and transmodernity recognises that this knowledge has been produced in a world in-between modernity
and indigenous worldviews (Faria, 2013). Dussel (2002, p. 234), the Argentinian philosopher who developed the concept of transmodernity, argues that “there are present-day cultures that predate European modernity, that have developed together with it, and that have survived until the present with enough human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality that will emerge after modernity and capitalism”. Transmodernity is a reinterpretation of modernity that calls for the fundamental contents of modernity to incorporate the social, cultural and historical experiences and knowledge of colonised, indigenous people.

This research explores how marginalised Maya women construct their identity as women and their work experiences in the context of their social, cultural and historical experiences. And, in so doing, finds that the identity of Maya women and their work experiences are formed in a negotiated space, a world in-between coloniality/modernity and indigenous worldviews. From this space, Maya women contribute new forms of theoretical knowledge, and, in so doing, broaden, deepen and contribute to the decolonisation of the organisation studies discipline. However, to fully recognise this contribution, organisation studies must move towards border thinking. In effect, the findings of this research contribute to the reconstruction of organisation scholars’ understanding of our discipline, that is, towards an understanding that respects differences and moves from a universality of modernity to a decolonial, transmodern organisation studies discourse.

**Implications for Organisation Studies and Research**

Having conducted this research and interpreted my findings, now what? Or as is often asked by the academic community, ‘so what’? In this reflection, I outline the
implications of my research that can contribute to the theoretical development of
critical management studies and research practice.

**Decolonial Critical Management Studies**

The primary implication of my research is directly linked to the findings discussed
above. As already noted, postcolonial theory, part of the critical management studies
field in organisation studies, recognises the lack of voices from the Global South,
particularly Global South women, in organisation studies discourse. However, it is
only when decolonial feminist theory is brought into critical management studies that
the dearth of empirical work *with* marginalised, indigenous, black, lesbian, peasant
Global South women is lamented. In other words, moving from postcolonial feminist
theory to decolonial feminist theory in critical management studies is to move from
theorising *about* marginalised Global South women to theorising *with* marginalised
women *in* the Global South. The implication of this research is not just in its
contributions for theorising with marginalised, Maya women from their social, cultural
and historical Global South context, that is, the development of the concept
communitarian organising, but in its move beyond critical management studies.

There is no doubt that critical management studies has a transformative,
emancipatory stance in organisation studies. However, I argue that critical
management studies as a discipline needs to be reframed from the perspective of
decoloniality. From undertaking this research and drawing on the concepts of border
thinking and transmodernity, it becomes clear that another performative critical
management studies that fosters the decolonisation of critical management studies is
required. That is, from the perspective of transmodern pluriversality, it is arguable that
critical management studies can reinforce the Eurocentric mechanisms of the
geosociopolitics of knowledge (Faria, 2013; Ibarra-Colado, 2008). As discussed throughout
this dissertation, Euro-American modernity caused many of the problems in the Global South and, through critical management studies, Euro-American management and organisation academics agreed to take responsibility for the problems imposed upon the Global South. As simply put by Faria (2013, p. 290), the “poison and antidote would come together”. Thus, critical management studies is framed by and in the West, and debated in English-language conferences, making the West the source of the solution to the problems for those in the Global South as opposed to the solutions coming from those within the Global South. Indigenous knowledge has been overlooked in critical management studies, and the knowledge contribution from the Maya women’s groups to critical management studies contributes to the decolonisation of this movement.

This research is written from the perspective of the colonial difference and through border thinking makes visible the knowledge and experiences of marginalised, Maya women. In so doing, my research contributes to the decolonisation of critical management studies and moves the discipline towards the outside of the border in order to highlight the lived experiences and work practices that have been rendered invisible by Western modernity. Based on my analysis of Maya women organising in the margins, I suggest that the future of critical management studies needs to understood as a dialogue between scholars and people of different regions and cultures to learn from each other to reconstruct our understanding of organisation/organising, and, thereby, protect alternative ways of organising and respect differences.

A Post/Decolonial Feminist Ethnography

What enabled me, a white, Western woman, to undertake this research and develop findings from outside the border and the perspective of Otherness is the development and implementation of my post/decolonial feminist ethnographic approach to research.
A post/decolonial feminist theoretical approach reconfigures a critical, reflexive ethnography to recognise the cultural, social and historical location of participants and reflexively examine the self-Other relationship in this context. The post/decolonial feminist approach to research reveals how the act of research is a political and personal engagement, within which a researcher must demonstrate an ethical commitment to the participants and engage in reflexive acts that examine their assumptions, anxieties and authority.

Another original contribution to knowledge is the development of my post/decolonial feminist ethnography and how I undertook my ethnographic research with the Maya women participants and their families. From this I suggest the we, as critical scholars, need to do research differently. We must question our methods, ethics and epistemologies, and rethink how we speak ‘of’ or ‘for’ ‘the Other’, indeed, we need to embrace differences, contradictions and complexities when undertaking research with ‘the Other’ (e.g. Fine, 1994).

Post/decolonial feminist research is influenced by gender studies, cultural studies, development studies, among others, yet this approach to research has gained limited attention in organisation studies. The issues of positionality and representation, crucial to the success of a post/decolonial feminist ethnography, are significant implications for organisation scholars not used to considering the ethical choices of how we position ourselves in relation to ‘Others’, that is, the self-Other relationship and power relations in the field, or the ethical considerations of which voices will be heard in the research account and how this is managed after in-field research. A post/decolonial feminist researcher needs to be ethically engaged with participants to understand how we experience our relationships and how to (re)present participants and their knowledge. The benefit of this approach to research is that organisation
scholars need to consider deeply the personal, political and ethical considerations of their research, which can result in more transparent and informed research accounts that recognise the lived experiences of those who have been marginalised in mainstream academic discourse.

In a post/decolonial feminist ethnography, the researcher and participants are embedded in the research process, and organisation scholars must come to recognise our influence on the research and the ethical implications of our research.

‘Giving Back’: Non-academic Implications

Beyond the academic, my research has personal implications for me, but, moreover, has implications for the Maya women participants. Exploring positionality when undertaking this research means my research is shaped by my relationship with the Maya women; I was critically located in the field, and my relationship with the Maya women was “knottily entangled” (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Negotiating positionality encourages me to understand the participant-researcher relationship as more than just a dichotomy of insider-outsider, sameness-difference, but as one of mutual influence in which power is shared and the self-Other explored through a collaborative dialogue (e.g., Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Fine, 1994; McDonald, 2013). In other words, I cannot, and should not, ignore the impact the empirical process has on my participants and me. While a post/decolonial feminist ethnographer has an ethical responsibility towards the participants, I developed personal relationships with the Maya women and their families instilling in me a personal responsibility to ensure the women, their lives, and their knowledge and experiences are respected. I take this responsibility seriously and take it with me beyond academia into my personal life where I am committed to ‘giving back’ to the Maya women who shared their personal and work lives with me so openly and honestly. I am enormously indebted to these
women and their families, and I continue to be actively engaged with the local social foundations that work closely with the women, their families and their groups.

The telling of ‘their story’ forms another, small part of my ‘giving back’. On various occasions throughout my time in Guatemala, the women thanked me for undertaking this research and taking the time to get to know them and their ‘real lives’, as exemplified in the following few quotes:

Yolonda: *Thank you for getting to know the realities of our lives, and not just stopping by to take our picture and hear our stories. The lives we lead and the stories we tell are different.*

Micela, and her sisters: *Thank you for spending time with us. ... We’ve enjoyed getting to know you and learning about your life, and we’re happy you’re learning about Maya women and our lives too.*

Candelara: *It’s good you’re getting to know the real lives of indigenous women; few people understand us and our lives.*

Flori: *Thank you for being here. It’s good to know that people are interested in us and our lives. ... It motivates us, and it’s good for our work in the group.*

Maria Morales Quino: *Thank you for spending time with us and trying to understand our culture. We’re happy you’re interested in our lives and are going to publish your research; we want the world to know more about the real life of the indigenous Maya.*

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated the knowledge and agency of Maya women and their capacity to create and organise. While my research may not have a direct impact on the Maya women, their groups or their families, it empowers them by demonstrating to the women that their lives, knowledge and experience matters. I consider the sharing of their stories of the utmost importance. The women’s voices have been silenced in both colonial and post-colonial times, and their bodies, culture and ways of life presented as ‘the Other’. But here they are located in ‘the centre’ with knowledge that has value.
Research Challenges and Limitations

In developing my post/decolonial feminist ethnography, I try to address the issue of quality in ethnographic research by building an approach to ethnography that is strongly influenced by my philosophical orientation and theoretical approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley, 2007; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Seale, 1999). Nonetheless, ethnographic research is not without its limitations. First, it is important to remember that ethnographic research is not generalizable. My ethnographic research is a specific case exploring the lives and work of marginalised, Maya women in the rural Western Highlands of Sololá, Guatemala. My findings of communitarian organising are specific to the lives and work of Maya women in this region.

Beyond this, in the case of my ethnographic research, the primary limitation is the use of a translator in the field. The limitations of this are acknowledged in the methodology chapter, Chapter Four, where I discuss how I addressed the epistemological and practical implications of in-field translation. There is a dearth of ethnographic literature regarding the challenges and use of a translator in the field, particularly in the management and organisation studies discipline. This caused me considerable anxiety in undertaking this research and, before going to Guatemala, I was very apprehensive about how this would affect the quality of my research. However, in working with a translator in Guatemala, I realised how this limitation was also an original contribution of my research. In the following section, I discuss this further and outline the potential of this for future research.

The question of translation relates to the ultimate challenge of my research: how to address the issue of representation, not simply in translating and representing the Maya women’s languages, but representing their knowledge and voices throughout my research. The issue of representation is discussed in detail in the methodology
chapter, however, considering the significance of representation for a post/decolonial feminist ethnography, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of representation in this section. Engaging in research with the marginalised ‘Other’ raises the issue of representation, particularly the risk of Othering, and colludes with structures of domination (Fine, 1994; Krummer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). Said (1978, p. 97) argues that “since the Orientals cannot represent themselves, they must, therefore, be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself.” In other words, Western academics claim epistemological authority over ‘Others’ by suggesting that they must be represented as ‘the Other’ cannot represent themselves. In the spirit of reflexivity, a central concept of this dissertation, I admit that I still struggle with the ethical dilemma of representation: am I representing the women or are they representing themselves through my research?

Regardless of how reflexive I am or the extent of the personal relationships developed with the Maya women participants, I am still in control of the data that is analysed and the findings that are presented, and ultimately, I am still in a position of power to represent the women. Conversely, in trying to remove myself and foreground the Maya women’s narratives, I risk romanticising the lives and work of the Maya women participants (Fine, 1994). Likewise, centring my self and engaging in self-reflexivity can be viewed as a narcissistic and self-indulgent task (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Fine, 1994; Foley, 2002). Thus, engaging in research with the marginalised ‘Other’, foregrounding the participants voices, foregrounding the researcher’s voice or ignoring the silenced voices of ‘the Other’ all pose ethical dilemmas and are interwoven with the ethics of knowing, writing, representing or ignoring (Fine, 1994).
The ethical complexities of representation are overwhelming. So, in addressing the issue of representation in my research, the most important thing for me to do, and perhaps the only thing I can do, is to ensure I am not (re)presenting the women, their lives and their work as ‘the Other’. The Maya women participants are not “flat caricatures” (Fine, 1994, p. 79) or a homogenised group of ‘Other’, ‘Third World’ women living in the periphery (Mohanty, 2003). To resist (re)presenting the Maya women as ‘the Other’, I embrace the self-Other relationship constructed in the field. This relationship is not fixed, but fluid, and filled with complexities and contradictions that I take with me from the field into my data analysis and writing. I try to produce narratives that reveal the partialities and pluralities of both my self and the Maya women participants. And, I choose to ‘work on our relationship’, the relationship between my self and ‘the Other’, and ‘come clean’ about the complex, confusing and often contradictory nature of representation (Fine, 1994).

**Future and Further Research**

Given that this dissertation addresses a fertile area of research, further engagement with marginalised, indigenous Global South women in the organisation studies discipline is suggested. Indeed, I urge organisational scholars, in the critical management studies area, to engage in research with those whose knowledge and experiences of work and organisation/organising have been marginalised in mainstream discourse.

As noted above in the limitations section, the findings of this research are not generalizable. Therefore, in particular, I suggest further research to explore if the
concept of communitarian organising is applicable or relevant to the work and lives of marginalised, indigenous women elsewhere in Latin America.

Great progress has been made in organisation studies in acknowledging that our discipline contributes to the geopolitics of knowledge and the coloniality of power and gender, however, there is a pressing need for empirical research with ‘the Other’, or, moreover, from ‘the Other’, if we are to truly decolonise organisation studies and move our discipline towards transmodernity. Methodologically, we also need to decolonise our approach to research when engaging in research with the marginalised ‘Other’ in a post-colonial context. Thus, it would be very interesting for my post/decolonial feminist approach to research to be implemented by others in their research projects and explore how it can be further developed by the academic community. These are exciting times for our discipline, and I look forward to growing academically as our discipline grows academically.

Moving forward, for me, how do I plan to grow academically with the discipline and what further contributions can I make? First, as noted above, the role and use of a translator in the field for organisational ethnographers is an original contribution of this research yet to be explored. I plan to develop a methods paper that provides insight into the use of a translator when undertaking ethnographic research in a post-colonial context. This complements the post/decolonial feminist approach to ethnography and will be of benefit to scholars in the critical management studies community interested in engaging with the marginalised ‘Other’.

Moreover, regarding bigger picture research and moving my research forward, an area of this research that is worthy of deeper exploration is the relationship between the women’s groups and aid organisations. The work of marginalised Maya women’s
groups overlaps with the efforts of Western donor nations and aid organisations that seek, in general, to assist people in the Global South in building sustainable economies, businesses and livelihoods. However, the Western donor nations and aid organisations that fund Global South indigenous social foundations to work with marginalised, indigenous groups implement policies and promote Western business practices based on an ontology of modernity that, simply, do not make sense for indigenous people living and working in the socio-economic margins (e.g., Donnelly and Ōzkazanç-Pan, 2014). For example, in the months before my arrival and during my time undertaking this research in Guatemala, Aj Quen received a donation from Oxfam Belgium, and Maya Traditions had a successful grant application with Canada’s foreign aid agency, Canadian International Development Platform. Western funding is secured by indigenous social foundations based on certain conditions of their work with the women’s groups that are usually based on an ontology of modernity and used to promote Western business practices. So, by implementing a postcolonial, decolonial, feminist theoretical framework to explore the policies and practices of, for example, Irish Aid, there is scope for further research to understand the different worldviews and work practices between Western aid organisations, Global South indigenous social foundations and marginalised, indigenous groups, and, moreover, to explore if these differences perpetuate the coloniality of knowledge and gender.

More research is needed, and there are further avenues of exploration from my own research. Nonetheless, this dissertation takes us into the work and lives of marginalised Maya women to facilitate their contribution to our discipline. I have tried to end my dissertation with a ‘snappy summary’ of my work, but since this is the Maya women’s story I think it best to close with a quote from Alicia that rings through my ears and brings tears to my eyes while I write this conclusion:
I am happy that your work with us will give us a voice. ... I am happy you are telling our story. It’s important. ... People don’t think we can do many things or have much knowledge because we are Maya and we are women, but I think because we are Maya women we have much more knowledge and can do more things than most other people, maybe even people in your country. ... We have a voice, but now, with you, our voice is louder, and you can share our knowledge and our story with many people.
REFERENCES


Ferguson, K. E. (1994). On bringing more theory, more voices and more politics to the study of organization. *Organization, 1*(1), 81-99.


Grasco (2005) Spanish colonialism and processes of social change in Mesoamerica.


APPENDIX ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONS AND CATEGORIES OF INQUIRY

Personal Details
- Demographic profile. Is she married, does she have children, etc.?
- Everydayness. What does she do every day, at the weekends, who lives in the house?
- Does her husband work? What does he do?
- Did she receive formal education? Does she learn from the trainings provided by the foundations, does she use knowledge gained from trainings?
- Do her children work? What do they do?
- What future does she want for her children? Is this possible?
- Does she want her daughters to be artisans?
- What is her opinion on education?
- Does she have other work outside the group to supplement her income?
- Does she get any time to rest? What is rest?
- Is it important for her to work from home?
- Does everyone contribute to the household expenses? Do family members have personal money?
- Household expenses. General expenses in the community.
- Do people have money in this community? Do/can they buy more than necessities?
- Is this community poor? Is she poor? What does poor mean to her?
- Are there many employment opportunities for people in this community?
- What do people do here? Are most women artisan weavers and men involved in agriculture?
- What is her religion? What is the religion of the community?
- Do many people practice Maya religion? What is it?
- How does religion impact their lives?
The Group

- Tell me about the group.
- Why was it established? When? By who?
- How many women are in the group? Are they all active in the group?
- What is the objective of the group?
- Is the group a registered business?
- What is the group's structure? Does the group follow a structure?
- Who are the directors? What do they do? How do women become directors?
- Does each member have a specific job? What is her job and role in the group?
- Who manages the group? What does this involve?
- Who manages the money, accounts and facturas?
- Do they have rules in the group?
- How do they divide orders and payments?
- How often do they meet? Where? What do they discuss?
- Is everyone in the group equal? What does this mean?
- Does everyone contribute equally to the group?
- Is anyone a paid employee of the group? What does she think about this?
- Do the women only receive payment for the orders received and products made?
- Do the women have to contribute a percentage of their sales to the group? Why? What is this money used for?
- Do they pay taxes?
- Does the group have any capital? How is the group doing financially?

The Work of the Group

- What type of products do they make?
- Do they have a lot of orders? How often?
- Who buys their products?
- How did the group get involved with the social foundations?
- Is there a difference in working with these organisations?
- Who does she prefer working with? Why? Do different organisations have different rules and specifications?
• Are these organisations buying less now? Why? What does this mean for the group?
• Are there less tourists? Do they sell directly to tourists? Why/not?
• Is the group affected by the international economic crisis? Does she know about the international economic crisis? Are there economic problems in Guatemala?
• Is the group looking to do business with more organisations? How?
• What are their other options for selling their products?
• Do they have an idea for direct markets? What is it? How would they do this?
• What training do they receive from the foundations? How often do they meet with foundations?
• What do they learn? Does the group use what they’ve learnt? Does she?
• How does she come-up with creating designs for products?

Fair Trade
• Has she heard of fair trade? what is it?
• Are they a fair trade group? Are the social foundations fair trade organisations?

Group Development
• How has the group changed and developed?
• What is the group doing now to develop? Is it doing anything different from before?
• Would the group like to get involved in different projects? How would this change the group?
• What does she want for the future of the group?
• Is the group going to grow and invite more women to join the group? Why/not?
• Are less women weaving now? Do women want to join the group?
• Would the group ever have a paid professional working for the group?
• Are they working with any organisations learning how to develop the group, learning administration, management skills, learning to become more independent, etc.? What organisations? Is this different from their way of organising?
• Is the group an independent organisation? What does this mean? Would they be able to work without the social foundations?

**Group Benefits and Maya Women**

• How has she benefited from being in the group?
• What has she learnt from being in the group?
• Has she changed from being in the group, e.g., confident, independent, knowledgeable, empowered, etc.?
• What would she be doing if she wasn’t in the group?
• Has her participation in the group benefited her family?
• Has the group impacted the community?
• How has the group benefited the women in the group?
• Does the group provide employment for her and the other women that otherwise would be difficult to find?
• Is it more difficult for artisans not in groups, that is, women working independently?
• Is working together in groups beneficial to Maya women? How? Why?
• Does the group provide a ‘special place’ for the women? What does this mean?
• Is she earning sufficient income from the group? Are the women? Do they supplement their income? How?
• Is being at home / working from home an important aspect of the group? What does working in the home mean for her? I working in the home beneficial or detrimental to the women?
• Do people in the community and other artisan women think she is wasting her time by being in the group? Why?
• Are groups an unusual way of working? What is the Maya way of working?
• Does she know of other groups?
• How long have groups been working in the community?
• What was the first group in the community? When was this?
• Why is it a woman’s group?
Maya Culture and Maya Women

- What is Maya culture? What does it mean to her? Is Maya culture changing?
- Is working in a group part of Maya culture?
- Does formal education affect Maya culture? How? Why?
- Is society changing for Maya women?
- Have women’s groups helped contribute to this change? How?
- Are indigenous women different from Ladino women? How?
- Are women and men treated equally in this society and community?
- Is life difficult for indigenous women? How? Why?
- What does it mean to her to be an indigenous Maya woman?
### APPENDIX TWO

**CODES EMERGING FROM STAGE-ONE DATA ANALYSIS**

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## APPENDIX THREE

**CATEGORIES AND THEMES EMERGING FROM STAGE-TWO DATA ANALYSIS**

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<td>The Groups</td>
<td>Fair Trade</td>
<td>The understanding and application of Fair Trade principles in the groups and with foundations.</td>
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<td>Group Customers &amp; Orders</td>
<td>The customers and buyers to the groups. How the groups connected with their buyers/customers. The relationship between the buyers and the groups. The specifications of the orders from the buyers. The frequency of orders.</td>
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<td>Group Development and Organisation</td>
<td>How the group is currently developing. What the women are doing to develop the organisation. How the women organise the group. Everydayness of group organisation.</td>
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<td>Group Development - Challenges</td>
<td>Factors that are presently inhibiting the groups from growing and developing. What the group needs to do / is doing to address these challenges.</td>
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<td>Ideas regarding how the women hope to / plan to develop their groups in the future.</td>
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<td>Group Finances</td>
<td>The financial aspects of the group, including capital, payments, women's income, etc.</td>
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<td>Group Formalisation</td>
<td>The formal and legal aspects of the group. Group rules established by the women. Democracy, equality and participation of the board of directors.</td>
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## APPENDIX FOUR

CATEGORIES AND THEMES EMERGING FROM STAGE-THREE DATA ANALYSIS

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<td>Informal Democratic Management</td>
<td>This theme details the formal and informal structure of the groups by providing insight to the management and organisation of the groups. The theme details the informal and democratic nature of the groups.</td>
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<td>What the women have learnt and how they have learnt from their participation in the group. Participation in the group provides them with knowledge, builds their confidence and challenges their thinking.</td>
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