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'The more empowered I feel, the more vulnerable I become': Exploring the entanglements of Human Rights Education (HRE), legal discourses and notions of agency and vulnerability amongst Human Rights Educators in Colombia

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‘The more empowered I feel, the more vulnerable I become’: Exploring the entanglements of Human Rights Education (HRE), legal discourses and notions of agency and vulnerability amongst Human Rights Educators in Colombia

by

Claudia Maria Blandon

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth

in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

This thesis has been proofread by third parties; no factual changes or additions or amendments to the argument were made as a result of this process. A copy of the thesis prior to proofreading will be made available to the examiners upon request.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Abstract

Claudia Maria Blandon

‘The more empowered I feel, the more vulnerable I become’: Exploring the entanglements of Human Rights Education, legal discourses and notions of agency and vulnerability amongst Human Rights Educators in Colombia

In the 21st century, notions of human rights are symbols of dignity, freedom, and equality (UNDHR, 1948) and equated with notions of empowerment. Simultaneously, in an epoch of recurrent waves of displacement, international instruments of protection are failing to safeguard displaced people and those who provide sanctuary. By the end of 2022, 104 million people had been forcibly displaced globally because of conflict and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2023). Against this global backdrop, empowering women through human rights education and legal discourses has become a priority, (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017, Altinova *et al.*, 2019).

With a firm conviction that the production of knowledge should be ‘about making a difference in the world and understanding the what, where, when, how, and for whom differences matter’ (Barad, 2007 in Ringrose & Renold, 2014:772-773), this research disrupts normative notions of empowerment that disregard women’s material conditions and are primarily informed by human rights and legal discourses. Consequently, this study is grounded on human rights Educators’ experiences of empowerment and vulnerability in a context of protracted violence and forced displacement.

It brings together forced migration studies, human rights education, and feminist new materialist epistemologies to explore how multiple entanglements of HRE programmes, legal instruments and other discourses shape women Educators’ conceptions of agency and vulnerability in Colombia. The research draws on data from observation of HRE sessions, document analysis of Colombian Law 1257 (2008), communications and interviews with twelve human rights Educators, in addition to auto-ethnography.

Through a triple-epistemological lens, a relational approach to ethics, thematic and diffractive analysis, this research shows that, at a ground level, notions of agency are conceived as an assemblage of indigenous practices of healing and protection, the more-than-human, as well as human rights and legal discourses. Therefore, this study advances a posthuman cartography of agency (PCA) as a conceptual tool that sees notions of agency as contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal. A PCA suggests that a sense of agency is revitalised and not conferred, and as such, the notion of ‘revitalisation’ of knowledge is preferred to that of empowerment. This conceptual shift is significant in reassessing hierarchical and anthropocentric understandings of empowerment. It can also inform better pedagogical HRE practices and more effective protection policies for displaced people globally.



Glossary of Terms

AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)

ELN: Ejército Nacional de Liberación (National Liberation Army)

FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Armed Revolutionary Group)

IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

HRE: Human Rights Education

FVM: Feminist Vibrant Materialism

UN: United Nations

UNDHR: United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



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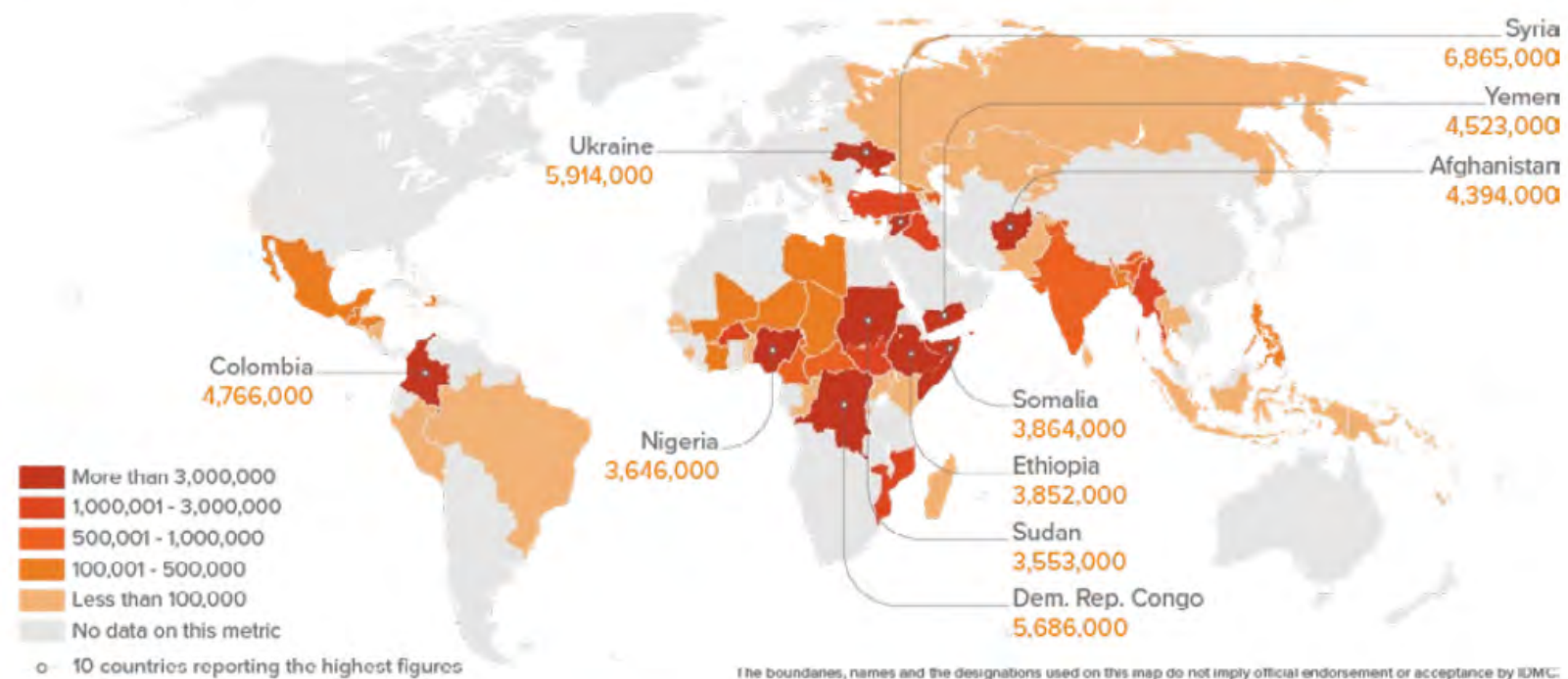
Map 1: Colombia in South America



Source: United Nations

Map 2: Number of displaced people worldwide because of conflict and violence (2023)

Displaced by conflict and violence



62.5 million

Internally displaced people as a result of conflict and violence in 65 countries and territories as of 31 December 2022

↑ 17%

Increase in the number of people internally displaced by conflict and violence since 2021

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023.

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‘Hello, hi, good morning or afternoon or evening: welcome’¹ dear Examiners & Readers,

Thank you very much for being here, for your time and interest in this topic. I am buzzing with excitement at writing these words, although they are setting up a beginning, they also mark the culmination of four years of hard work and delightful adventures.

This work was born from bearing witness to good intentions in fragile contexts and with people, especially women, deemed vulnerable. It was born from observing how programmes designed to empower women felt like undesired gifts; you know, those gifts that generous, thoughtful, and well-intentioned people give you, but they sit unused, unloved because we have no use for them, because they missed the mark on what makes us happy, because they failed to fit in in the materiality of our worlds. This project emerged from the desire to unearth notions of agency that lay beyond – and therefore remain invisible, unvalued - normative discourses of empowerment, and yet are tangibly agentic on the ground. With this research, I want to disrupt old, tired notions of empowerment and explore what constitutes genuine agency for women considered vulnerable.

Thus, I embarked upon asking women working with human rights and legal discourses on the ground, who were also living amidst displacement and violence, what empowerment and vulnerability felt like, what it meant to them, what contributed to each notion, and what role human rights education and laws play in shaping their sense of agency. To do this, I brought three different disciplines together: forced migration studies, human rights education, and feminist vibrant materialism. These three lenses underpinned this research throughout.

I focused on Colombia, not only because it was my country of birth, but also, importantly, because of its long history of internal displacement and consequent strong legislative response to manage and protect internally displaced persons (IDPs). Within Colombia, I concentrated on women who were human rights educators, defenders or/and community organisers and who had experienced displacement or worked with women who had. Throughout the thesis I refer to these research participants as ‘Educators’.

The thesis comprises ten chapters. Each chapter is introduced with a preamble, a story that anchors the theoretical explorations within the chapter. These preambles, in a nod to the auto-ethnographic aspect of the research and the importance of narratives as a feminist practice, are personal anecdotes that have carried seeds planted long ago and have germinated with this research.

This work tells stories about agency, vulnerability, displacement, and protection a bit differently. Stories of agency that consider what matters for people living in fragile contexts; stories of agency that transcend from a generic gift bestowed by the powerful to the vulnerable to alternative notions that revitalise and spark alternative ways of being agentic.

Once again, thank you for being here, for reading and exploring with me. I hope you enjoy the journey.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia

1 I am borrowing this warm and friendly greeting from the Prelude from Knowledge production in material spaces: disturbing Conferences and Composing Events. Fairchild *et al.* (2022).

Chapter one: Getting started: the importance of disrupting normative notions of empowerment and agency

Preamble

Planetariums, libraries, and shades of agency

It was anger and deep sadness that drove my interest in human rights. Anger about injustice, about loss, about violence. It was anger about the unpromising fate that biological, cultural, and social markers gave me and those around me. The early 90s brought another wave of extreme loss, fear, violence and forced displacement to our hometown that culminated in the infamous honour of being the murder capital of the world (Bahl, 2012; Hills *et al.*, 2018). To be clear, my family and I have yet to experience forced displacement, we have been immensely lucky so far; I have only borne witness from a safe distance. Throughout the thesis I have woven in personal stories to inform the reader what this safe distance looks like and how it has shaped my epistemological positions.

In those dark years, I started to visit the local planetarium every Saturday afternoon, and those visits saved me. Undoubtedly, I was inspired by Carl Sagan² - oh how I loved watching *Cosmos*! - The way he spoke, how easy, how accessible he made astronomy sound. Sagan taught me about constellations, and stars, and auroras. I learnt about the existence of black holes. Because of him, I learnt to identify constellations in our equatorial skies. Rebecca Solnit tells us that ‘stars are made of flaming gases, but constellations are made of stories’ (Solnit, 2000:10). In those days, through those stories, through astronomy I could ‘cease to be local without becoming lost: I could travel farther away with confidence’ (Solnit, 2000:15), if only in my mind.

In those dark years, fear and violence were omnipresent. But in the Planetarium darkness was safe, luminous. I loved the architecture of the building too. Spacious, clean, minimalist, and quiet. That was the type of place I wanted to belong to. A place that discussed ideas and explored dreams. A place that was safe and inclusive. A place that welcomed me, without asking me where I lived, what my last name was, who I knew. A place that gave me a chance to explore the topics that interested me. I felt

the same with libraries. Oh, how I love libraries!

Before the Planetarium, there was my school library. It was small, but it was a safe place to go during recess; especially on those days when I didn’t want to talk to anyone, or no one wanted to talk to me. During those teenage days when the world is overwhelming, the library was a gentle, quiet, and yet simultaneously, an exciting place to retreat to and a platform to other worlds. I loved the stories I found by chance and turned my world upside down (Herman Hesse I am looking at you!). I loved the warm, embracing company of the books. To this day, my deep love for libraries remains because they are places of hope and solidarity. They capture the best of human beings: a collective effort to include, to share and gather safely. Libraries are, at the same time, a safe refuge and a springboard when you are looking for direction or protection or exploration.

What is an explorer, and can I apply for the job please?

My love for planetariums and libraries is directly proportional to the annoyance I feel for the concept of being an explorer, although paradoxically, I always wanted to be one. In my mind, until recently³, explorers were all white, male, privileged Europeans who are brave, wise, and strong to venture into the ‘exotic’⁴ and ‘unknown’ world to ‘discover’, document, and share new knowledge. Their voices are one-sided and inherently superior. Their renditions conjure places and peoples into existence. Their stories of pain, loss, and endurance are celebrated and glorified. Now, thinking back and about the women with whom I have worked in Colombia, Niger, Algeria, Egypt, and England and who tend to be considered vulnerable, I recognise the courage, wisdom, creativity, resilience, and strength attributed to legendary explorers. The key differences are that these women’s journeys are unplanned, forced, violent, and that the knowledge they gather along the way remains invisible and/or unrecognised as

² Carl Sagan was a USA astronomer and science writer. He co-wrote and narrated the award winning 1980s television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, which became the most widely watched series in the history of American public television. He is often described as the scientist who made the universe clearer to ordinary people ([NASA](#), n/d; [Smithsonian Magazine](#), 2014).

³ I am grateful to Henriette Hänsch for bringing to my attention the book *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab travellers in the far north*. See also the Letters of Gertrude Bell and Isobel Hutchison’s work.

⁴ Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* was fundamental in shaping my understanding of colonial conceptualisations of exotic peoples and lands.

valuable knowledge. These women are at once powerful and vulnerable explorers.

As for me, in the end, I got to become an explorer. Studying anthropology, sociology, human rights law, forced migration and refugee studies was my chance to venture into the unknown. It was an opportunity to go to faraway places in my mind and in the world, to focus on quality and not quantity. These disciplines taught me that exploring meant to walk around with open eyes channelling anger and sadness into hope and solidarity. They made me aware of the different spaces I inhabit and the missing untold stories that matter.

The need to reassess the dominant narrative of empowerment

The preacher Miguel Brun told me that a few years ago he had visited the Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco. He was part of an evangelising mission. The missionaries visited a chief who was considered very wise. The chief, a quiet, fat man, listened without blinking to the religious propaganda that they read to him in his own language. When they finished, the missionaries awaited a reaction.

The chief took his time, then said:

“That scratches. It scratches hard and it scratches very well.”

And then he added:

“But it scratches where there isn’t any itch.”

(Galeano, 1991:30)

In 21st century Western contexts, notions of human rights as unassailable freedoms are omnipresent. As a new gospel, this discourse preaches that human rights are universal and inalienable privileges all human beings are entitled to simply because we exist as human beings. We are taught that human rights are indivisible and interdependent, equal, and non-discriminatory (UNDHR 1948). We are reassured that all governments have obligations and duties to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights,

irrespective of culture or context, because all countries in the world have ratified at least 1 of the 9 core human rights treaties (UN Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, n/d). It is a comforting message that instils the essence of liberty, equality, fraternity and carries a promise of empowerment for all.

Within this context, a focus on and understandings of women’s rights and notions of empowerment have become paramount. Primarily because rights related to employment, reproduction, healthcare, sexuality, education, family life and access to justice ‘have a direct impact on at least half of a state’s population as well as consequences for its other half’ (Marcus, 2017:39). Thus, in the past few decades, a focus on empowering women in fragile settings through human rights education (henceforth HRE) has become a priority, despite a universal lack of acceptance or/and understanding of the notion of women’s rights as conceived in the West (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017, Altinova *et al.*, 2016).

This project originated from personal experiences that highlighted the juxtaposition between theory and practice and the need to challenge one-size fits all notions of empowerment as conceived by Western ideas of agency. It started from observations and experiences of growing up in Colombia where internal forced displacement is rife (IDMC, 2023),⁵ and working in the West/North Africa, USA, and England and within social, cultural, and legal systems that rendered agentic women vulnerable. As governments, NGOs and philanthropists invest heavily in HRE programmes globally (OECD, 2023; Coleman, 2010), it is imperative to include understandings of empowerment of those individuals HRE programmes are seeking to emancipate.

Therefore, through a multi-disciplinary lens (forced migration studies (FMS), human rights education (HRE), and feminist vibrant materialism (FVM)) this thesis explores alternative conceptualisations of agency. Firmly grounded on women’s material conditions and tangentially informed by anthropological research on processes of vernacularisation⁶ of human rights (Levitt & Merry, 2009, Bajaj *et al.*, 2017), this study contributes to empirical work about the meanings women make of participating in HRE programmes (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017) and the role HRE, legal instruments and other discourses play in shaping their sense of agency.

5 Towards the end of 2022, there were 4.8 million internally displaced people in Colombia. IDMC figures as of end of 2022. Available at: file:///C:/Users/cblandon/Downloads/IDMC_GRID_2023_Global_Report_on_Internal_Displacement_LR.pdf.

6 Vernacularisation processes consider different ontological and epistemological dimensions of learning about human rights in different cultural contexts.

Moving beyond a critique of prevalent notions of empowerment, this exploration also identifies effective pedagogical practices when delivering HRE programmes to diverse audiences in fragile contexts and pays close attention to the types of knowledge that emerge from HRE spaces. In doing so, it illuminates nuances in notions of protection, vulnerability, agency, and displacement that can inform effective educational and protection policies in diverse contexts.

Inspired by the work of Audre Lorde, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, and Maria Tamboukou this research is underpinned by a feminist vibrant materialist approach and a diffractive methodology that pay close attention to the role matter, and the more-than-human play in rendering women agentic. Although underpinned by feminist theory, this study is also attentive to ways in which feminist thought sustains neo-colonial practices that see empowered Western women going into the world to liberate their ‘less fortunate sisters’ (hooks, 2000:45). It is equally cautious and ‘sensitive to questions of difference’, recognising that not all displaced Colombian women have the same needs (Spivak cited in Morton, 2003:8). This awareness is important because feminist discourses of empowerment, as well as human rights and legal positionings, might be left unquestioned under presumptions of universal benefit for women.

In alignment with feminist practices, the use of stories and narratives are vital instruments in this thesis. Stories are seen as important epistemological tools that can trigger change because:

Narratives have the power of involving us in the dynamics of thinking differently, beyond what seems to be ‘obvious’ in the unfolding of any story...Stories are interwoven in the web of human relations and as feminist researchers, we need to find a position within it, so that we can be-in-the-world-with-others (Tamboukou, 2020B:14).

‘Being-in-the-world-with-others’ matters in an epoch of mass-forced displacement, and when designing educational programmes and protection policies for those who experience forced uprooting and for those providing refuge. Explorations on what renders humans agentic on the ground, as opposed to hopeful and abstract theoretical constructions, can shed light on migration patterns and motives, a current huge concern in the global north. Being-in-the-world-with-the-more-than-human-others also matters. In 2018 Derek Robertson, a bird watcher and artist, noted that ‘the migratory journeys of

birds could reflect the same complexity of issues that triggered and affected human displacement’ (Robertson, 2018:15). He noted that people were taking the same lines of flight that birds had taken before humans.

In that light, through FMS, HRE, and FVM, this empirical work responds to an invitation to disrupt notions of empowerment that are human-centred, paternalistic, and colonialist. In doing so, this research theorises alternative understandings of agency from-the-ground-up to counter and shape vast theoretical material informing HRE (Bakker *et al.*, 2009) and protection policies in FMS. It illuminates the importance of reconsidering current notions of empowerment that neglect vital aspects of agency on the ground by highlighting sources of agency that lay beyond normative discourses.

Ontological and epistemological predispositions

If we don’t define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others, for their use and for our detriment. (Lorde, 2017)

Lorde’s (2017) observation is fundamental throughout this work. Thus, in a nod to her work, this study challenges normative notions of agency that are removed from women’s material conditions, quotidian experiences, and own perceptions of agency. It questions the almost universal assumption that human rights and legal knowledge equates to instant empowerment and the possibility of emancipation and transformation (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017).

The overarching research question detailed in the next section emerged from bearing witness to the strength and resilience of women who tend to be categorised as vulnerable by Western standards of empowerment and protection. It emerged from observing women in diverse fragile contexts and noticing their capacity to be resilient, knowledgeable, adaptable, and strong, and yet, they are considered vulnerable. Specifically, this research was propelled and informed by the assumption that not all women living in fragile contexts are automatically vulnerable and/or devoid of agency.

My work as a researcher with people who are deemed ‘vulnerable’ under Western ethical standards also highlighted instances where the human rights discourse is counterproductive. Research work has also given me exposure to and appreciation of inclusive practices in research and highlighted

the intricacies of conducting ethical research where contextual perceptions of harm and respect challenged each other.

Although later in the research process I disrupt static and singular notions of researcher positionality; at the outset, I considered three fundamental ontological positions that could have impacted the research process. First, the impact of perceptions of identity. It was fundamental that participants knew that I had left Colombia not as a refugee, but as an economic migrant according to current legal definitions. I explore the importance of this ethical transparency in the methods and ethics sections in chapter four.

Second, in terms of target group, the initial focus of this study was under-researched indigenous and Afro-Colombian women. Consequently, I expected challenges in terms of my right to research these communities. In this case, the question of who was indigenous applied to both the researcher and the researched and it had epistemological and methodological implications as notions of indigeneity are complex and contested (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005). While I have never been a militant patriot, neither have I any reservations in embracing my heritage. As a mixed-race Colombian woman, I have family members across the skin colour spectrum. However, in this context, being considered indigenous went beyond ethnic identity and skin colour. Tuhiwai-Smith (2005) defines indigenous peoples as:

Those who have witnessed, been excluded from and have survived modernity and imperialism ... They remain culturally distinct, some with their native languages and belief systems... some indigenous communities survive outside their traditional lands because they were forcibly removed from their lands and connections (86).

Although I do not fit in within this definition and was eventually unable to focus solely on the initial target groups, reflecting on this ontological positionality was helpful in highlighting the 'complexity of hybrid and shifting identities' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005:87). Beyond an intersectional acknowledgement of the role race, class, and gender play in shaping women's oppression (Olesen, 2005:241) and agency, these reflections also planted a seed that germinates in chapter five as I explore auto-ethnography as a method from a posthumanist perspective.

A final preoccupation involved researcher-participant power relations. In academia it is acknowledged

that:

Research is a site of contestation not simply at the level of epistemology or methodology but also in its broadest sense as an organised scholarly activity that is deeply connected to power (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005:87).

While I am a working-class Colombian woman, living abroad for over two decades has afforded me some privileges and thus I expected participants to perceive me wealthier, more powerful, and more privileged than I really am. This awareness was important when discussing the benefits of taking part in the research with potential participants. I expand on the practical ramifications of this issue in chapter four.

In summary, these ontological and epistemological positionings premise and inform this project. They propel the impetus to disrupt the assumption that women living in difficult contexts are powerless and in need of salvation as preached by human rights and legal discourses. Ontological and epistemological positionings also open spaces for alternative notions of agency that lay beyond legal and human rights discourses, particularly in a context of displacement and from the perspective of those who are usually silent. Finally, these positionings also informed a focus on material conditions and on what mattered to women on the ground in terms of agency and vulnerability.

Research Questions

This project's foundational research question explores alternative and/or additional sources of agency, beyond HRE and legal discourses, that render women in Colombia agentic. The overarching research question asks:

Considering limited empirical research on understandings of agency amongst human rights Educators in Colombia, how might a multi-disciplinary study provide insights into the ways in which human rights education, legal instruments, and materiality shape Educators' notions of agency in a context of protracted violence and displacement?

Sub-questions include: What type of discourses are embedded in designing and delivering HRE programmes? How do Educators engage with human rights, legal and other discourses in their quest for agency? What lessons and practices could be learnt to inform HRE design and delivery in other contexts? and what are Educators' perceptions of empowerment and vulnerability?

These questions have five main epistemic-ontological assumptions. First, that women's material conditions shape their sense of agency. Second, that it is important to unmask and deconstruct colonial legacies and 'rhetorical blind spots' that inform normative notions of agency through human rights and legal discourses (which stabilise conventional notions of truth and reality) (Morton, 2003:4). Third, that human rights, laws, and gender discourses have been hijacked to advance universal principles that might have a detrimental impact on displaced women (Murdock, 2003). Fourth, that it is crucial to question the assumption that one-size fits-all HRE programmes have positive impacts on target populations (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, that it is important to theorise from the ground up and increase the visibility of displaced women's voices in academic discourses.

With this in mind, this study has five aims. First, to identify potential discrepancies between theory and praxis related to HRE programmes to inform better practice in terms of design, content, and delivery in diverse contexts. Second, to shed light on the specific ways in which human rights and legal discourses promote and/or preclude notions of agency to better inform protection policies. Third, to illuminate the tensions between the transformative potential of human rights and local power structures (Großklaus, 2015). Fourth, to understand the conditions that favour either the adoption of international norm promotion or local appropriation of human rights knowledge (Levitt & Merry, 2009, Bajaj *et al.*, 2017). Five, to contribute to limited empirical work on what meanings women make of participating in HRE programmes and the role this knowledge plays in shaping a sense of agency (Bajaj *et al.*, 2017).

In essence, this research is concerned with the 'invisible knowledge' (Quinn, 2023) that is often ignored by dominant discourses of empowerment. It aligns with the belief that the production of knowledge should be 'about making a difference in the world and understanding what, where, when, how, and for whom differences matter' (Barad, 2007 cited in Ringrose & Renold, 2014:772-773).

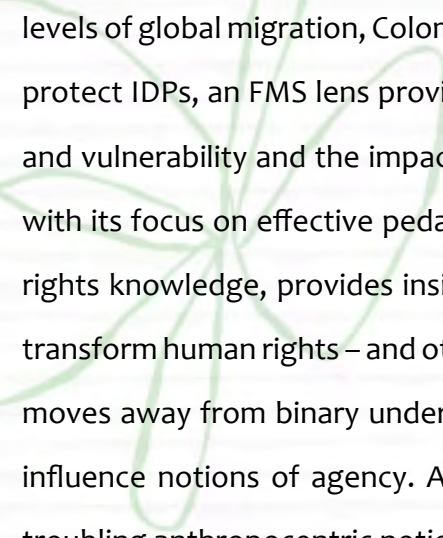
Thesis Roadmap

This thesis includes ten chapters. The first three chapters provide justifications and motivations for the research, contextual information of Colombia as a research setting, and how the three epistemological disciplines underpinning this research (FMS, HRE, FVM) conceive notions of empowerment. The fourth chapter is divided into three main sections addressing methodology, methods, and ethical approaches. Perhaps unorthodoxly, chapter five is an extension of the methods section. It is a posthuman exploration of auto-ethnography as a method, and as such, the chapter sits at the intersection of the methods and findings chapters as it emerged from an FVM engagement with auto-ethnographic data. Chapters six, seven, eight and nine work with the data to advance a posthuman cartography of agency as a theoretical tool. The final tenth chapter concludes the thesis.

While navigating this thesis, please keep in mind the following considerations. First, throughout the thesis, the term Educators is used to refer to the sample of research participants who took part in this research. Educators were identified and recruited through personal contacts and were either human rights educators or/and defenders, community organisers or performed all these roles. These Educators design and deliver HRE programmes to other women, their backgrounds are provided in the methods section. Wherever necessary, I made clear the distinction between Educators and women (students/participants) who were taking part in HRE programmes delivered by Educators. These students/learners were not part of this research.

Second, regarding terminology, the words empowerment and agency are often, particularly initially, used interchangeably. However, as the work progresses the word agency is preferred and the word empowerment gradually troubled and dropped. Also, in later chapters, I use the words explore and speculate liberally and deliberately. Their use denotes the excitement and apprehension of leaving a safe port and the acknowledgement of multiple truths and entanglements. Moreover, the term feminist vibrant materialism is used instead of feminist new materialism, I discuss this preference further in the methodology section.

Third, three epistemological lenses underpin this research: forced migration studies (henceforth FMS), human rights education (henceforth HRE), and feminist vibrant materialism (henceforth FVM). This triple-epistemological approach is significant for several reasons. First, considering the alarming



levels of global migration, Colombia's long history of displacement, and consequent legal responses to protect IDPs, an FMS lens provides insights into how legal instruments conceptualise empowerment and vulnerability and the impact of these conceptualisations on policies of protection. An HRE lens, with its focus on effective pedagogical approaches to achieve transformative action through human rights knowledge, provides insights into knowledge production and how Educators learn, adopt, or transform human rights – and other types of knowledge – to inform their sense of agency. An FVM lens moves away from binary understandings of empowerment and focuses on how material conditions influence notions of agency. An acknowledgement of the vitality of matter was also important in troubling anthropocentric notions of agency.

Finally, I translated all the quotes from the Spanish, of which I am a native speaker. Wherever pertinent, I provide footnotes to elaborate further on contextual references and insights of the Spanish expressions used.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter outlines the justifications, motivations and rationale that informs and propels the urge to trouble Western-centred notions of empowerment, vulnerability, and protection. It details how personal and professional experiences living and working with women and populations deemed vulnerable around the world have shaped the ontological and epistemological predispositions that influence this research inquiry.

This project is unique in bringing three disciplines together to problematise pervasive notions of empowerment: FMS, HRE, and FVM. Essentially, this study aims to explore discrepancies between theory and praxis related to HRE programmes and the role human rights and legal discourses play in shaping notions of agency. It also aims to contribute to limited empirical work on what meanings women make from participating in HRE programmes and the role this knowledge plays in shaping their sense of agency. Grounded on Educators' experiences and material conditions, this project seeks to unveil alternative notions of agency that are meaningful and tangible to women living in a context of protracted displacement and violence.

This work is important and timely as 'problematic' waves of migration from the global south inundate the global north, and substantial financial resources are invested globally in pursuing women's empowerment. By questioning notions of agency shaped by the global north, this project intends to substantiate the need to change the story of agency. It seeks to shed light and value the hidden, temporal, contextual, and yet tangible and effective tools that contribute to women's sense of agency, just like a planetarium and a library did for me a long time ago.

Chapter two: Colombia as a research setting: It is not all, but there is a lot of and recurrent doom and gloom

Preamble

The Materiality of loss

My mother has been a seamstress for as long as I can remember. My brothers and I grew up surrounded by the materiality of her trade: the texture, smell and colours of diverse fabrics, the scent of metal and oil that made her sewing machine work, the omnipresent peril of needles and pins. My mum was always terrified that we might ingest the needles, that they may find their way into our stomach or hearts. Her needles created and mended, but also had the potential to harm.

The Colombian sculptor Doris Salcedo is well-known for exploring the ways in which violence vanishes people and the profound void and sense of instability these absences leave in the world (Adan, 2015). Her *Disremembered Series* (2014) includes three shawls made of woven raw silk and thousands of needles. The work explores the materiality of mourning by crafting haunting sculptures that ‘from afar look like hazy, barely real, grey shawls, but as one gets closer, it becomes clear that the ghostly grey hue are tens of thousands of sewing needles that have been burned, bent or sharpened’ (Ables, 2022⁷: n/p) (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: *Dismembered*, 2014: Sewing needles and silk thread
Source: Doris Salcedo, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

In another artwork, ‘*a flor de piel*’ (2014), Salcedo created a blood-blanket by treating thousands of rose petals with collagen and stitching them together. The artwork was an offering to the memory of a Colombian nurse who was captured and tortured to death by paramilitary forces (The Financial Times, 2023)⁹. These artworks combine ideas of mending, suturing, and wounding; they show visually the ‘unresolved nature of tragedy: never to be resolved, but also never to be forgotten or dismissed’ (Grynsztejn, 2015:13). Salcedo’s work ‘gets at the mundanity of pain, how it lingers at the corners of ordinary life, coats reality with a thick film of despair, and pricks at the skin with every move, often invisible to those who don’t know it themselves’ (Ables, 2022, n/p). Her work embodies the paradoxical feeling with which we grew up: that things could be beautiful yet dangerous.

7 Kelsey Ables, Doris Salcedo used 15,000 needles to represent pain of gun violence. June 23, 2022. The Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2022/06/24/doris-salcedo-glenstone-violence/>. [Accessed 9.10.23].

8 An expression denoting strong or raw emotions, a similar feeling to ‘wearing one’s heart on one’s sleeve’ although the Spanish expression does not intend to hide the emotion.

9 Artist Doris Salcedo: “People say we are living in postcolonial times, there’s nothing “post” about it’. The Financial Times. Anny Shaw. 9 June 2023. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/dfod6af7-2951-434b-b478-3c0737eebf32>. [Accessed on 10.10.23].

Salcedo's artworks about beauty and danger, about vulnerability and power, provide an apt introduction to the research setting. Colombia does not live in binaries; it is neither completely violent nor completely beautiful. Women Educators talked about the beauty that came out of despair, the agency that came out of pain. Colombia as a case study is important because its long history of displacement has produced strong legislative instruments intended to protect and empower women victims of violence, displacement, and human rights violations. In this context, Salcedo's work reminds us of the significance, not only of bearing witness to the devastating impacts of violence, but also of the importance of engaging in collective, temporal, contextual and ongoing healing processes which echo with Educators' experiences of agency.

Background

Donna Haraway describes Colombia as a country of 'layered complexity and resurgent pain' (2019:3), an apt description for a country that has been experiencing civil unrest since its independence from Spain (Ruiz, 2011; Roshani, 2018). The Spanish found and dominated a land inhabited by a multitude of Indigenous peoples to which they later added a multiplicity of Africans as an enslaved workforce. Today's population is a mixed progeny with Indigenous and Afro-Colombians actually considered ethnic minorities and still battling with colonial practices of oppression and discrimination.

Because of recurrent conflict, Colombia has one of the highest number of internally displaced people¹⁰ globally (IDMC, 2021). A main trigger of displacement has been - and remains to be - land expropriation. During the first three decades of the 1900s, Colombia, with the assistance of the United States, embarked on a modernisation process that shaped capitalist foundations for legislative, economic, and social reforms. These reforms increased urbanisation, through voluntary and forced migration.

Instead, the forced movement resulted in poverty and violence that instigated social movements demanding a better quality of life.

Existing cycles of violence are still fuelled by reverberations of this original 'modernisation' spark (Ruiz, 2011; Fadnes & Horst, 2010), the interests of diverse belligerent actors¹¹ and big landowners, in addition to illegal drug trading (The Economist, 2019), high levels of impunity (Roshani 2018), and poverty (The World Bank, 2023¹²; Human Rights Watch, 2023¹³). These circumstances have created a cycle of forced displacement and violence that feeds off itself. The original spark of mobilisation (in the name of modernisation) triggered a wave of violence that still lingers and creates further displacement. In this negative feedback loop displacement triggers violence that fuels further displacement. This 'layered complexity and resurgent pain' (Haraway, 2019:3) has resulted, as of 2023, in 4.8 million IDPs (IDMC, 2023) and spirals of violence disproportionately affecting women, children, and minority ethnic groups (Torregrosa-Jimenez et al., 2018).

Considering displaced women in particular, a telling fact is that despite Colombia's strong judicial response to protect IDPs (Domingo et al., 2015), they have a higher illiteracy rate (30.8%) than displaced men (27.9%) (Díaz & Marin, 2013). Moreover, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian women experience intersectional discrimination and disproportional violence, including sexual violence (Meertens, 2012; Few et al., 2021).

¹⁰ Please note that IDPs differ from refugees in that they have not crossed an international border and as such remain under the protection of their own country, even if the State was the cause of their displacement. Refugees, on the other hand, are people who have crossed an international border and as such are under the care of the international community (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/about-internally-displaced-persons>. [Accessed on 10.10.23].

¹¹ In international humanitarian law, a belligerent group is a formally recognised group engaged in a conflict and therefore accountable to international humanitarian law, for instance revolutionary groups fighting for people's rights. In the Colombian context, right-wing and paramilitary groups are not considered belligerent groups as defined by humanitarian law as they are formed by wealthy landowners and criminal gangs. Therefore, in this thesis I use the term militant actors to encompass fighting groups including the army and revolutionary movements.

¹² Poverty & Equity Brief. Latin America & the Caribbean: Colombia. April 2023. The World Bank. Available at: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-7505888F00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_COL.pdf. [Accessed on 10.10.23].

¹³ Poverty, violence, and Colombia's state failures main human rights concerns in 2022: HRW. Adriaan Alsema. 12 January 2023. Available at: <https://colombiareports.com/poverty-violence-and-colombias-state-failures-main-human-rights-concerns-in-2022-hrw/>. [Accessed on 10.10.23].

Women, feminisms, and Colombia

Generally, and considering diverse markers of identity and cultural backgrounds, Colombian women have faced distinct challenges compared to men. Delays in exercising their human rights have not been a unique challenge Colombian women have faced¹⁴; but their experience of violence, political repression and exclusion have been indeed exceptional tests. It was in this context of civil unrest that many Colombian feminists began to organise in collectives (Elston, 2016).

In fact, in Latin America, feminisms were fuelled by the experiences of militant women whose feminist consciousness was shaped by state oppression and institutionalised violence. Interestingly, the interaction between feminism and left-wing politics had important outcomes for the development of the ideology and defined major internal feminist conflicts in the region. For example, it created a schism between feminists favouring class struggle and those supporting feminist concerns. This clash resulted in further divisions that saw the creation of ‘political feminists’ who believed in remaining politically engaged in left-wing organisations alongside feminist groups. In contrast, ‘autonomous feminists’ believed in absolute autonomy from leftish or institutional ideologies (Elston, 2016). This is a fundamental schism that undermines Educators’ practice in Colombia to date.

Unsurprisingly, Latin American feminist theorists have been critical of universal and hegemonic claims of desires and agency. They highlight the heterogeneity of Latin American women, their contexts and needs which in turn inform their political requirements and engagement. For instance, the diverse histories of colonisation, spaces and temporalities women inhabit shape their notions of agency and resistance (Pinilla-Gómez, 2023). Understanding the historical, cultural, economic, and political specificities that underpin patriarchal and inequality systems in Latin America is imperative to comprehend and address not only cycles of violence, but also what fuels stands of resistance (Pinilla-Gómez, 2023). In the 1970s, feminist movements in Latin America were also influenced by popular movements seeking radical societal changes informed by the liberation theology, the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2017), and Quijano’s coloniality of power discourses. Another fundamental element in Latin American feminisms is the centrality of rescuing histories and collective feminine memory to

shape women as agentic political subjects (Pinilla-Gómez, 2023).

In the 1980s, a fresh surge of violence fuelled by drug cartels and new militant groups coincided with a process of political opening and democratisation. Many militant women joined mainstream politics, in part seeking to move away from patriarchal structures that dominated militant groups (Elston, 2016). However, this masculine stance was indicative of larger cultural patterns that informed gender norms across the social spectrum. For instance, although revolutionary movements tend to include women in battles, contrary to right-wing forces that promote defined gender roles, both sides of the conflict commit high levels of violence against women, including coerced abortion and sexual exploitation (Schmidt, 2007). Regardless of their position, women have continuously been used and abused by all parties involved in the war as a strategy to control and humiliate opponents (Roshani, 2018).

By the 1990s, the feminist movement in Colombia had become mainstream as evidenced by reforms affecting women’s issues, for example by installing gender studies at universities and promoting research that confronted masculine-centred forms of knowledge (Pinilla-Gómez, 2023). However, some feminists lamented the loss of the ‘subversive nature’ of feminism by engaging with neoliberal processes. For instance, feminist activists noted that the proliferation of funded gender programmes ‘depoliticised gender discourse to underwrite a twisted version of gender theory, such as women’s difference from men was recognised, but its basis in unequal power relations was not’ (Murdock, 2003 cited by Elston, 2016:21).

Educators’ histories and positionings echo the historical evolution and schisms described above. They sit within two clear positionings: those who are willing to unquestionably engage with normative discourses (human rights, feminism, laws), and those who are critical of engaging with discourses that purport to protect them whilst rendering them vulnerable. Nonetheless, they all agreed on the intersectional sources of oppression women experience because of their ontological positioning as women. Despite reservations, all Educators engaged with the legal discourse in varied ways because of the repetitive cycles of mourning, loss, and pain they experience. Yet they maintain a subversive aspect to their engagement, which I discuss in chapter eight.

14 For example, Colombian women won the right to vote in 1954, but were unable to exercise it fully until 1957.

Colombia's legal infrastructure relevant to displacement, violence & women

Regarding forced displacement, Colombia's legislation is relatively new compared to the scale and the length of internal displacement. In 1997, Law 387 was enacted and 'praised as one of the most progressive legal frameworks in internal displacement' (Fadnes & Horst, 2010:113). It addressed all stages of displacement, including prevention, humanitarian assistance, rights to return home or settle elsewhere in the country. However, implementation of this law has always been challenging as the government has never had complete control over the country, thus rendering its obligations to prevent displacement or guarantee a safe return meaningless (Fadnes & Horst, 2010).

On paper, Colombia has an ample legal framework complying with international legal duties (Lopera & Estrada, 2015). In terms of international human rights law obligations, Colombia is a party to most of the international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two optional Protocols, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Of interest to this research, Colombia has ratified, without reservation, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and signed its optional protocol in 1999, but it has not yet ratified it. This means the country does not recognise the competence of CEDAW to receive and act upon communications or undertake investigations considering serious violations of the Conventions (OMCT, 2003:3).

At a regional level, Colombia has ratified the American Convention on Human Rights and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Sanction, and Eradication of Violence against Women (de Belem do Para Convention) (OMCT, 2003:4). It is evident that language from these legal instruments was adopted in Law 1257 (2008)(detailed further below) as it reflects an obligation from the Colombian government to protect women in public and private spheres. For example, Art 7 of the Inter-American Convention places specific obligations on state parties to 'prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women' (OMCT, 2003:4). Moreover, under Art. 93 of the 1991 Colombian Constitution 'human rights treaties have the status of constitutional law and therefore take precedence over national law' (OMCT, 2003:4). A more recent development sought to strengthen judicial practice concerning violence against women, particularly for those who have experienced displacement. In 2016, the Colombian government and FARC (a key revolutionary group) signed a peace agreement to end their 52-year armed conflict and agreed to treat sexual violence (because of armed conflict) as an autonomous

crime that has no right to amnesty (JEP report, 2022; Merino-Caan & Rajakumar, 2017).

Although in theory, Colombia has a strong judicial response to protect IDPs and victims of violence, at ground level, some Educators confirm that indeed 'the enactment of a law does not guarantee its effective sanction' (Torregrosa-Jimenez *et al.*, 2018:162), and that 'judicial equality does not constitute real equality' (Lopera & Estrada, 2015: 272; Young, 2013). Research has shown that 'sexual and gender violence is still highly prevalent, is one of the most extreme expressions of structural violence against women, and forms part of a continuum of violence and power that predates the armed conflict' (Merino-Caan & Rajakumar, 2017:8). In fact, as recently as May 2022, there were reports that every day in Colombia, on average, 246 women and girls reported being victims of gender-based violence (El Tiempo Newspaper, 2022).

Furthermore, in 2017, CEDAW expressed concerns women in Colombia had inadequate legal protection because government officials were unwilling to uphold relevant protective legal instruments, particularly, Law 1257 (2008)(Merino-Caan & Rajakumar, 2017). It is believed this 'unwillingness' derives from cultural pressure to prioritise the family unit instead of enforcing women's rights (Torregrosa-Jimenez *et al.*, 2018). The Committee also 'noted persistent discrimination faced by rural women, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women because the State lacks an effective and coordinated response to enforce relevant laws' (Merino-Caan & Rajakumar, 2018:7).

Challenges to implementation are unsurprising as law is socially constructed (Snyder, 2014). However, two main contextual challenges are worth mentioning here. First, for some, a lack of alignment between national and international response to gender policies meant gender related programmes were forced upon Colombia by international pressure instead of being an internal response to inequality. Internationally funded gender programmes neglect to understand contextual persistent notions that see women as 'instruments of production and not as subjects of rights' (Torregrosa-Jimenez *et al.*, 2018: 166-167). Second, internal methodological inconsistency means authorities use different methodologies that undermine each other. For example, Law 1257 (2008) has a comprehensive description of violence against women, but the Ministry of Education only recognises violence against women in terms of reproductive rights which undermines other rights or types of violence (Torregrosa-Jimenez *et al.*, 2018).

In the context of this research, Educators highlight the law's blind spots and the lack of understanding of women's material realities when enforcing protection mechanisms and processes to justice. According to Educators, this legal blindness is a result of 'masculine' understandings of protection that fails to deliver in action. In this instance, 'masculine' protective mechanisms are placing women at greater risk, and thus making law a 'site of struggle' instead of a site of liberation (Smart, 1995 cited in Snyder, 2014:370).

Therefore, in this study, focusing on Educators' experiences of engaging with legal instruments (particularly Law 1257, 2008) illuminates the struggles and contestations women experience when seeking justice and agency through legal mechanisms.

Law 1257 (2008): A legal framework to protect women against violence and discrimination

An incentive to use Colombia as a case study was its long and strong legislative response to protect IDPs (Domingo *et al.*, 2015; Cantor, 2018). This project provides a close examination of Law 1257 (2008) because it features prominently in Educators' interviews as an important legal tool associated with notions of agency.

In 2008, Colombia enacted Law 1257 as a legal instrument to prevent violence and discrimination against all women. This legal instrument was considered significant because it was the country's first attempt to regulate the obligations both the State and society had in 'implementing actions to prevent, eradicate, and sanction all forms of violence and discrimination against women' (Lopera-Velez & Estrada-Jaramillo, 2015:271). It was also innovative in that it introduced internal legislation to address violence against women specifically, considered it as a violation to their fundamental rights, and recognised women's autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions (Lopera-Velez & Estrada-Jaramillo, 2015). In my view, in Art 6.2, the Law also introduces a fourth fundamental aspect:

the recognition that women's rights are human rights. This is significant because globally there is still a persistent lack of consensus about what women's rights mean in practice (Marcus, 2017; Relis, 2016).

The legislation is divided into three main sections with a total of eight chapters. The first section defines violence against women and conceptualises alternative ways of protection. The second section includes the principles through which women's rights would be interpreted. The final section describes the mechanisms by which women victims of violence can be supported. The Law is ambitious including clauses to promote 'political approaches to change patriarchal systems and societal response against public and private violence,' and outlining a holistic system of support for victims of sexual violence and discrimination (Torregrosa-Jimenez, *et al.*, 2015:171-172).

Interestingly, the Law also recognises the private/public nature of violence, and that acts of omission also constitute violence. Moreover, echoing the African Charter of Human Rights, it introduces the principle of co-responsibility, in this case stipulating that everyone in society is responsible for preventing violence against women. Additionally, considering Colombia's religious and conservative background, the Law seems transgressive in recognising women's rights to make decisions about their reproductive lives. Relevant to this research, the Law also outlines victims' rights to access protection mechanisms for themselves and their families.

Predictably, Law 1257 (2008) emerged as an important tool in the Educators' arsenal¹⁵ to access justice and agency. Colombia's long history of internal displacement has shown uprooting is varied, complex and can be 'indefinite, circular and hidden' (Cantor & Apollo, 2021:649). From an FMS point of view, this long and complex history has been crucial in shaping legal responses to address people's needs at ground level, informing protection practices, and durable solutions for IDPs. From an education perspective, this long history of displacement has had a detrimental impact on people's schooling and access to formal education. Hence the importance of exploring notions of agency through a multiple epistemological lens.

15 Educators also engaged with diverse Autos (Constitutional Court Follow-up Mandates), especially Auto 092 (2008) pertaining to displaced women rights and protection measures.

Conclusion

A long history of and strong legislative response to internal displacement, in combination with a complex social fabric still permeated by colonial practices that perpetuate discrimination and vulnerability make Colombia a compelling case study. The specificities of histories, stories, needs, recurrent violence, trauma and loss require a more careful consideration of Educators' contextual profiles and what is legitimate to them in telling their story of what constitutes a sense of agency. From Educators' perspectives, laws do play a crucial – albeit not singular - role in shaping a sense of agency. This is significant in informing alternative conceptualisations of agency that lay beyond normative discourses of empowerment.

Nonetheless, an historical overview of the evolution of feminist thought and development of judicial infrastructure in Colombia is beneficial at three levels. First, it provides important contextual information on the nature of violence Colombian women have endured for decades particularly because of armed conflict. Second, it highlights how notions of vulnerability (as defined by a status of victimhood) and empowerment (as defined by retributions) are understood and shaped by the legal discourse. Finally, becoming familiar with Law 1257 (2008) is beneficial when contrasting the 'text or body' of the Law with women's understandings of it and their perceptions of the role it plays in shaping their sense of agency and/or vulnerability. Being aware of the intersection of laws and Educators' experiences provides nuanced understanding of the role legal instruments play in (dis)empowering women in a context of protracted violence.

Against a backdrop of recurrent displacement and loss, Educators' quotidian experiences trouble facile notions of empowerment and vulnerability as advanced by human rights and legal discourses. This is important because, despite Colombia's contextual specificities, current global discontent with normative notions of empowerment and protection is evidenced by growing waves of illegal migration from the global south to the global north. A focus on Colombia demonstrates that although displacement is a personal tragedy, it is also a communal one as it hinders global agendas of empowerment and sustainability (Zeender & Yarnell, 2021).¹⁶ Through their engagement with human rights, legal and other discourses, Educators in Colombia continue to suture the ripped social fabric,

and through that experience and knowledge they encourage us to reassess prevalent notions of empowerment that can be meaningless and detrimental on the ground.

In terms of ethics protocols, familiarity with Colombia's complex historical, social, cultural, and legal contexts was vital in informing ethical research approaches. Recurrent cycles of violence, displacement, trauma and loss in contrast with strong legal systems, resilience, and rich ethnic and cultural diversity make Colombia a rich setting to explore and challenge notions of vulnerability and fragility as conceived in the global north. Colombia's entangled history of agency and vulnerability, of violence and protection, of displacement and belonging inherently troubles normative binary notions of agency and vulnerability.

16 Such as the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Chapter three: Navigating & disrupting notions of empowerment through forced migration studies, feminist, and human rights education epistemologies

Preamble

I still have a clear memory of the quality of light when I first met the *Barbarian*. It must have been its soft luminosity, the subtle warmth it radiated. For ancient Greeks, a *Barbarian* was anyone who did not speak Greek and lived beyond the edges of their known world. However, the *Barbarian* I met that afternoon long ago, in the quiet warmth of the university library, was a well-educated woman who spoke fluent English and would have passed as a typical north American woman. It was a fortunate encounter for me, another precious gift from a library.

We met whilst I was researching cultural relativism and female genital circumcision.¹⁷ She was an Algerian woman studying in the United States and told me about her experience of being an outsider. She was intrigued about my interest in the topic and my innocent response conveyed my incipient curiosity about the murky intersections of values. I leaned towards being a cultural relativist, but there were lines I could not cross. I wanted to explore if those lines were movable and whether and how it could be justified. She stood firmly on the other side of that line, she confessed, and because of that she had been called a *Barbarian* in the States, and the word stung, hurting her deeply. In fact, she said, that very week her niece was going to be circumcised. I remember listening to this confession with a heavy heart and deep, deep sadness. I interviewed her for my final assignment, and her insights and experiences were immensely generous and enlightening, although she left me with more questions than answers. Most of all, she gifted me a tangible realisation that notions of dignity are multiple and often contradictory.

Years later, when I ventured outside my own geographical and disciplinary walls to pursue my own civilising project, some young women in West Africa told me about the practice as well. Over numerous cups of tea, they explained how the practice made them worthy of love, of a husband, of a home. They talked about notions of cleanliness and fitting in. I walked with these women to the market every single Friday for two years, to the edges of their known world, the world in which they were likely to

remain for the entirety of their lives. The world that shaped their sense of worthiness, of dignity.

In her book *The Amazons*, Adrienne Mayor talks about how untamed women from warlike nomadic societies who fought alongside men fascinated the Greeks. In the Greek imagination, the Amazons inhabited a contradiction: on one breath, the idea of bold, resourceful women warriors, the equals of men, dwelling at the edges of the known world, ‘inspired an outpouring of mythic stories, pitting the greatest Greek heroes against Amazon heroines from the East’ (Mayor, 2014:19). In another breath, Amazons were branded as savage barbarians failing to conform to the classical Greek feminine ideal.

Interestingly, some of the women I interviewed for this project also spoke of *Barbarians*, of their horrific practices, punishments, and treatment towards women, young girls, and even children. Gut-wrenching methods mainly associated with Indigenous populations. Their accounts highlight a contradiction: there are some indigenous practices and traditions that are worthy of conserving and celebrating, whilst other practices are inherently considered barbaric. The same is true of that Algerian woman I met years ago. From a feminist perspective she inhabited a contradiction, an educated wealthy woman clinging to old traditions that perpetuate the subjugation of women.

In ancient times, *Barbarians* were those who did not speak the dominant language, those who lived beyond the principles that shaped the local world. *Barbarians* were terrifying and needed taming, they needed to be won over or defeated. They were too foreign, too wild, too incomprehensible. Branding the Algerian woman, indigenous peoples and their practices as *Barbaric* carry connotations that their sense of dignity is too foreign, too wild, too incomprehensible. I often see the tendency to want to redeem the *Barbarian* in modern human rights and legal discourses. Discourses with a legacy to tame incompatible and incomprehensible notions of dignity, discourses firmly shaped by one side of the known world.

¹⁷ I use the term circumcision instead of mutilation with full acknowledgement of the political, ethical, and social connotations of the term. I use the term with full acknowledgement of the devastating impacts clitoridectomy, and extended procedures have on women and young girls. I use the term as a sign of respect not to the practice but to the woman who shared with me her thoughts and positions which in turn opened many doors for me.

Introduction

As I write towards the tail end of 2023, two news stories erupted about the need to tame the *Barbarians* amongst us and yet to come. On the same day, the Financial Times reported that Sweden, ‘a wealthy nation famed by its progressive values’ was being shaken by waves of unprecedented violence. ‘It is like a war zone...something you see on the news from Afghanistan,’ said a concerned Swede. This eruption of violence on Swedish soil was the result of a different war: the failure of integration and immigration policies that see migrants or second-generation migrants unable to integrate ([The Financial Times](#), 23 November 2023). On the same day, The Netherlands, one of the most progressive countries in Europe, elected a far-right leader. Geert Wilders pledged to ‘curb the asylum tsunami’ and ensure that ‘the Dutch get their country back’. His party won because voters felt the country could not cope with the high volume of asylum seeking applications and arrivals ([The Financial Times](#), 23 November 2023).

In this light, displacement issues are not a local issue; local problems have become global concerns. Since I started studying displacement patterns in 2008, the number of refugees and IDPs have steadily and alarmingly increased globally. By the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people in the world, of which 35.3 million were refugees and 62.5 million were IDPs ([UNHCR, 2023](#)). Thus, considering the concerns of all involved, I wondered: if empowerment programmes delivered globally, particularly in the global south, were to be successful, how would that success reflect on the ‘asylum tsunami’? If structural adjustment programmes that focus on empowerment considered notions of contextual agency, would those considerations create pull or push conditions¹⁸?

Hence the importance of focusing on this unregulated flow of people through multiple epistemological lenses (FMS, HRE, FVM) as they all make important contributions to notions of dignity and solidarity in the 21st century. In this light, these discourses are the civilising forces of our times as they are mostly shaped by the global north and are concerned with the provision of international instruments of protection for both the displaced and the hosts.

With full acknowledgement of the importance of an international system of protection for the displaced, this research was ignited and propelled by onto-epistemological positionings that trouble hegemonic notions of agency, dignity, and protection. It was premised on an understanding that

notions of dignity are complex and multifaceted. This standpoint informs the foundational question that explores Educators’ notions of agency and vulnerability in a context of forced, violent, and protracted displacement. In this chapter, then, I provide an overview of how forced migration studies, feminisms, and human rights education have contributed to notions of empowerment and protection. This interdisciplinary background is important in contextualising Educators’ compliance with and deviation from normative and universal conceptions of agency.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first provides an overview of forced displacement in the Anthropocene¹⁹ and key protection measures as outlined by the international law regime. The second outlines the contribution of feminist legal theory to debates on the role law plays in empowering women. The final section provides an overview of human rights education, and outlines debates relevant to current conceptualisation of human rights and their implications for notions of dignity, agency, and protection.

Forced Migration & notions of empowerment

The world is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge.

(Haraway, 2015:160).

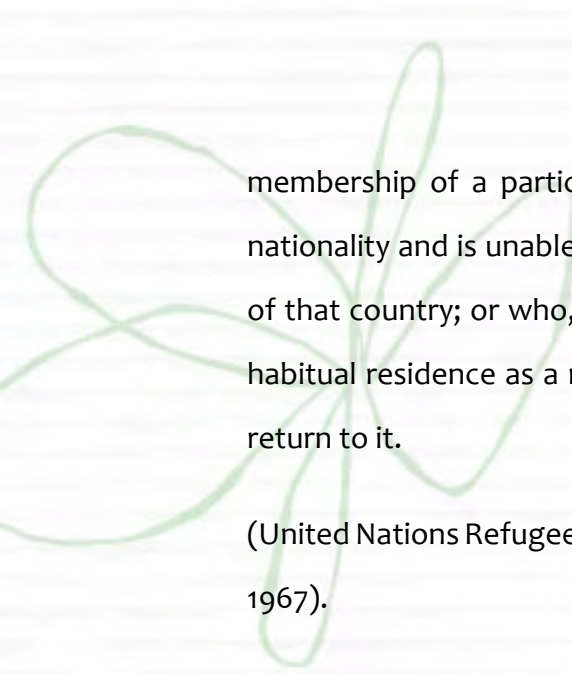
The Global story of Displacement in the Anthropocene: Forced displacement & international law

As mentioned above, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world continues to increase alarmingly. However, not all forcibly displaced people are eligible to claim protection under international law. For example, international law defines refugees as a ‘special class of migrants who deserve specific protection by a host state’ (European Parliament, 2015, n/p). Moreover, Art. 1 of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, as modified by the 1967 Protocol, defines a refugee as a person who:

[O]wing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality,

18 Conditions to pull people to stay or push people out of their countries.

19 Anthropocene is defined as a historical era when human beings became ‘a geological force capable of affecting all life’ on earth (Braidotti, 2013:5)



membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

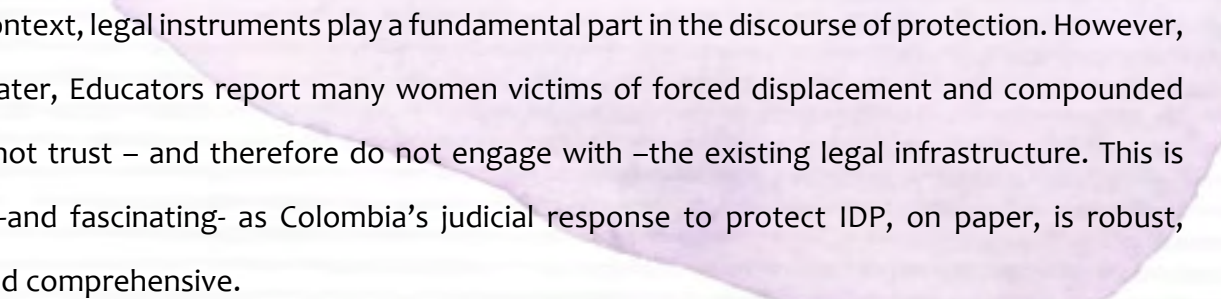
(United Nations Refugee Convention, 1951; Additional Protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention, 1967).

This definition provides three basic conditions that must be met to be considered a refugee:

- a) people must be outside their own country;
- b) there is well-founded fear of persecution (being at risk of harm is insufficient, discriminatory persecution must be proven); and
- c) their own state cannot provide protection.

Note that this definition does not offer protection to those who have been displaced by natural disasters, violence, or war (European Parliament, 2015). Indeed, many legal scholars have argued that current international law instruments of protection are archaic, anachronistic and in desperate need of reform to reflect current forced mobility needs and challenges (O’Byrne, 2013; Betts & Collier, 2017; Collins, 2019).

In contrast, IDPs are persons who have been forced to flee their homes for similar reasons but have not crossed an internationally recognised State border to find safety, and therefore, remain under the protection of their own state; even if their government is the reason for their displacement (UNHCR, n/d; Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998). Putting aside the recent influx of Venezuelan refugees (Amnesty International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022; UNHCR, 2022), Colombia’s high number of IDPs usually ranks it in the top three countries with the highest number of IDPs in the world (UNHCR, 2022).



Within this context, legal instruments play a fundamental part in the discourse of protection. However, as I discuss later, Educators report many women victims of forced displacement and compounded violence do not trust – and therefore do not engage with – the existing legal infrastructure. This is problematic -and fascinating- as Colombia’s judicial response to protect IDP, on paper, is robust, extensive, and comprehensive.

However, forced displacement also affects others beyond humans. Considering the FVM approach of this research, it is crucial to acknowledge that forced displacement also affects and is detrimental to the-more-than-human. This recognition is important for global and local regimes of protection as it implies epistemological, ontological, and ethical shifts that could inform more comprehensive policies of protection in displacement.

Other-than-human Displacement

To be sure, embodiment is crucial to any investigation of the effects of migration, exiles and displacements on identity and community.

(Ahmed et al. 2003:11)

Taking a step back from a human-centred notion of forced mobility, Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2017) define displacement as ‘instances where there is no choice but to move, either temporarily or permanently, within or across borders’ (cited in Carstens & Bozalek, 2021:70). This definition speaks to the importance of reconsidering notions of displacement at different levels and beyond the human. It provides space to consider displacement triggered by technological advances and the forced movement of non-human entities because of human activity (for example habitats, plants, land, minerals) (Haraway, 2015; Carstens & Bozalek, 2021; Barad, 2019).

The era of the Anthropocene, also known as the epoch of humanity, is defined as a historical era when human beings became ‘a geological force capable of affecting all life’ on earth (Braidotti, 2013:5). As seen above, although official displacement statistics are at a record high, these figures ‘do not include the vast numbers of non-human species and ecosystems being impacted and displaced’ by human

activity (for example floodings, mudslides, polluted water, and land) (Carstens & Bozalek, 2021:70). In this era, it has become crucial to recognise that ‘all of life has become unmoored and displaced (including multispecies that create and sustain terrestrial life spaces),’ and that human displacement is just one strand of that collective displacement (Carstens & Bozalek, 2021:71).

This acknowledgement is important because Educators’ experiences of forced displacement showed that indeed ‘displacement unfolds across multiple temporalities, societies, environments’, species, and bodies (Carstens & Bozalek, 2021:79). In later chapters, I discuss the important role the-more-than-human, and embodiment play in shaping notions of agency, and how a conceptualisation of displacement that moves beyond the human is crucial in informing better legal infrastructures, protection policies and re-settling schemes.

Against this backdrop of overwhelming displacement and faltering legal instruments failing to provide meaningful protection, Educators’ experiences of forced displacement corroborate the need for a resignification of what it means to be empowered or vulnerable in a context of displacement. In that sense, this research follows Tamboukou’s (2020A) and Ahmed *et al.* (2003) invitation to trouble conceptualisations of displacement, forced or otherwise, as experiences of loss and/or vulnerability, and/or uprooting. Rather, a focus on ‘specific processes, modes and materialities of uprootings and regroundings in different contexts and on different scales’ (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003:2) can identify the lines of flight that exist within displacement (Tamboukou, 2020A). These lines of flight, in turn, can highlight alternative conceptualisations of displacement that deprivilege the human, and take movement rather than sedentarism as the norm. All these conceptual shifts could lead us to think differently about legal jurisdiction, borders, and protection protocols.

Feminist legal theory & notions of empowerment

Law exercises power not simply in its material effects (judgements) but also in its ability to disqualify other knowledges and experiences.

(Smart, 1995 cited in Snyder, 2014:370)

Despite this project’s premise that legal and human rights discourses need to be examined as the

primary source of notions of agency for women deemed vulnerable in fragile contexts, this work also acknowledges the crucial role feminist legal theory has and continues to play in shaping women’s sense of agency in certain contexts. This section provides an overview of how feminist theory informs, troubles, and shapes how legal discourses seek to empower women.

It was as recently as the early 1990s that feminist legal scholars started to draw from the experiences of women and from critical perspectives developed within other disciplines to offer ‘powerful analysis of the relationship between law and gender and new understandings of the limits of and opportunities for legal reform’ (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991:1). This stirring was, perhaps, the reason behind the formal recognition that violence against women was indeed a human rights issue, despite violence against women being an important factor used to prevent women from realising other rights (Terry, 2004). Better late than never. And it is precisely the spark, the process, the results that feminist thought ignited that moved us from nothing into something. It is this capacity to ignite different conversations that makes feminist epistemology one of the pillars of this research.

In essence, feminist legal theory engages different feminist perspectives to question the role of law in empowering and/or perpetuating the oppression of women. It seeks to theorise the relationship between law, feminism, and women, and ‘understand the relationship between the law, the state, and the specific reproduction of patriarchal relations in ideological and material terms’ (Smart, 1995:139). Here, I focus on specific contributions that are relevant to this enquiry, namely, the role laws play in dis/empowering women, the role laws play in legislating over female bodies, and legislating over private and public spaces.

The role law plays in dis/empowering women

One important position within feminist legal theory saw law as a major source of women’s oppression (Smart, 1995; McKinnon, 1987) and believed that engaging with legal discourses would improve the material and social position of women both privately and publicly. These scholars argued that although law did ‘not create patriarchal relations, it did often reproduce the material and ideological conditions under which these relations would survive’ (Smart, 1995:144). Therefore, engaging with

legal instruments would bring change through meaningful legal reform in the long run (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991; Smart, 1995). An important advocate of this position was Catharine MacKinnon as she sought to engage with legal reforms to ban pornography. In her seminal work in the 1980s, she argued that laws were not neutral, genderless, or objective because they were formulated from a male's standpoint (Bridgeman & Millns, 1998). She advanced that pornography represented women as freely available for sexual use, degradation, and humiliation and that 'the meaning of womanhood was proclaimed to be sexual submission' (Pateman, 1990:407).

However, MacKinnon's line of argumentation has been long challenged by other feminists for several reasons. Some pointed out that contrary to feminist standpoints, her theory neglected to consider diverse cultural contexts and perceptions of sexuality and pornography when interpreting laws and sexual exploitation (Showden, 2009). Others critiqued her emphasis on sexual oppression neglecting attention to racism, 'for treating race as additive or incremental to the "essential" oppression of women' (Harris, 1990 cited in Mahoney, 1989:217). Other feminists believed MacKinnon's work overlooked women's agency and resistance to power (Smart, 1989).

Interestingly, MacKinnon's line of argumentation was also extended to question notions of rights as they derived from a philosophical base that originated from men's experience of the world. Thus, 'under such conditions legal rights could not meet the needs of women' (MacKinnon & Gilligan, 1982 cited in Smart, 1995:159). In the context of this research this point reverberates with some Educators' experiences of engaging with the law. They challenged what they called 'masculine approaches' to protection, which I discuss in chapter six ('Empowerment for what?').

Legislating bodies, private, and public spaces

Another important strand of feminist legal theory focuses on laws that engage with the female body. These are laws that impact the body in what Bridgeman and Millns called 'body politics' (1998:2). These scholars believe women's bodies and experiences ought to inform legal reform to 'map the female body into law' (Roach, 1992; Bridgeman & Millns, 1998: 5). However, some find 'body politics' problematic in that legal discourses could define bodies as areas over which law could have jurisdiction. Others worry about the tendency to treat women as if they were their bodies and nothing else. A final

concern highlights the inclination to link women's behaviours with the processes of their bodies. All these concerns substantiate a crucial feminist concern, namely, the role law plays in perpetuating the subordination of women or supporting their emancipation or both (Bridgeman and Millns, 1998). In the context of this research, where embodiment and sense of agency are closely linked, these debates were helpful when exploring embodied notions of agency and vulnerability in processes of reparations and access to justice of cis and transgender women. This is explored in chapter seven ('Empowerment for whom?').

Another vital feminist contribution to legal theory relevant to this study is the belief that the personal is political. In the legal sphere, this feminist mantra is fundamental in arguing that private experience (which has always been trivialised) is an appropriate subject of public enquiry in that private and public worlds are always linked. The personal is political implies that theory should not be detached from reality but 'based on the concrete and trivial and emphasise context and lived experience' (Bridgeman & Millns, 1998:9). For instance, Educators in this research had been successful in achieving legal reforms that provided personal and collective protection because of their roles as human rights defenders.

Educators' actions were also fundamental in driving legal reform that reflected key principles of Snyder's (2014) Indigenous Feminist Legal Theory (IFLT) framework. The IFLT framework combines key principles from indigenous legal theory, feminist legal theory and indigenous feminist theory to address the issue of gendered laws (Snyder, 2014). The framework advocates for the importance of 'understanding law in relation to the social context in which it operates and how social practice influences legal practices' (Snyder, 2014:365-366). It is premised on several principles, but for the purposes of this research, the recognition that what is said and left unsaid matters, and that some laws benefit men while keeping women marginalised were crucial values.

Interestingly, a focus on what is said and left unsaid in laws aligned well with the FVM approach underpinning this study. In chapter six, I discuss how Educators' work made visible instances when patriarchal violence helped propel and sustain colonialist practices (Snyder, 2014). A focus on materiality and material conditions is also helpful in navigating notions of agency and vulnerability on the ground and highlighting how legal discourses exercise power by disqualifying other knowledges

and experiences (Smart, 1995). In the methodology section, under feminist vibrant materialism, I expand on the role materialism has played in feminism and legal studies.

Human Rights Education (HRE) and notions of empowerment

Notions that human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible are omnipresent in the 21st century. Part of the modern infrastructure of human rights is the knowledge that governments have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfil human rights ([United Nations](#), 2023). These principles are the foundation of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights born in 1948 after the atrocities perpetrated during the Second World War. In line with this agenda, the field of Human Rights Education (HRE) evolved from the need to promote these core principles in a systematic and effective way (Coysh, 2014). However, despite the devastating reasons that drove the creation of universal concepts of human rights, for some, these principles remain contentious as they clash with divergent perceptions of dignity, freedom, and respect.

It is important to note that the genesis of the current concept of human rights is firmly set within European moral and political philosophy that holds that notions of ethical principles, including rights, 'are expressions of the nature of practical reason and of our capacity for a sense of justice' (Al-Daraweesh & Snauwaert, 2013:393). This European philosophical lineage shaped the language of human rights instruments and education, which defines human rights as 'those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity as human beings' (Coysh, 2014:91).

In that light, one concise definition describes HRE as 'an international movement to promote awareness about the rights accorded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related human rights conventions and the procedures that exist for the redress of violations of these rights' (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2010:87). Thus, in this sense, HRE is vital in spreading a consensus of what is moral, ethical, and just. However, in response to this proselytization of -well-intentioned- universality, a relativist and contested position argues that ideas of human rights 'as inherent and universal is only one perspective in a spectrum of different understandings or a mere socio-historical construction' (Coysh, 2014:91).

Considering universalist and relativist conceptions of human rights, my ontological and epistemological positions have been shaped by bearing witness to the clashes between universal perceptions of

rights and relativist constructions. I approached this research with the firm belief that to have a transformative potential, HRE practice should take seriously local knowledge, be grounded on critical reflection, and move away from a centralised production of discourse (Coysh, 2014; Gollifer, 2021). Thus, background information on the development of the notions of human rights and HRE is fundamental in understanding the underpinning principles that shape current and normative notions of dignity and provide a launch pad to explore alternative conceptualisations of dignity and respect.

The nature of human rights

Current notions of rights are indebted to ancient belief systems that exercised collective and systematic approaches to ensure fairness and justice. Recorded instances include the Hammurabi code in ancient Babylon and the work of Cyrus the Great in Persia, for example (Freeman, 2017). In contrast to modern notions of human rights, scholars noted that ancient traditions did not imply equal treatment of all individuals all the time as ancient civilizations tended to rationalise 'unequal entitlement for the weak or the "inferior"' (Ishay, 2008:7).

As a legal concept in the modern era, human rights are seen to emerge from debates on natural rights (Hume, Smith, Hobbes, Locke) dating back from the early Enlightenment. Others believe that modern notions emerged as recently as the early 1970s during the rise of 'new global morality' and consider that earlier concepts of rights had different meanings and therefore could not inform later perceptions of the concept (Moyn, 2010 cited in Freeman, 2017). Either way, a foundational value of current notions of rights is the concept of dignity which owes to Kant's philosophy the shaping of its modern incarnation. From Kant's perspective, dignity ought to be understood as 'the inherent and equal worth of every individual' (Bayefsky, 2013:809). In other words, it is the quality of being worthy of honour or respect. Dignity is also a crucial element in modern notions of justice.

In that light, in modern conceptions of justice, human rights are also seen as legal constructions that are 'imagined as a movement involving international law and institutions as well as a movement involving the spread of liberal constitutions amongst states' (Steiner *et al.*, 2008:59). This modern genesis matter for some legal scholars in that, as a distinct legal concept, human rights had little history before 1945. This means that because the concept originated in the aftermath of Fascism and Nazism,

the explicit connection between human rights and human dignity derives solely from a European perspective. Importantly, it also means that rights derive from moral and legal rules, making them a technical discourse dominated by academics and lawyers (Freeman, 2017).

Nonetheless, some legal scholars have highlighted inherent contradictions in conceptualisations of dignity. For instance, how might one conceptualise notions of dignity and freedom when it comes to freedom of religion of those whose religion denies that all humans are equal in rights? To counter this challenge, Freeman (2017) proposed that the meaning of human rights should be perceived as:

A continuing *social* process that includes legal professionals but also other stakeholders. If the concept of human rights is to be useful, we must distinguish human rights from the legal rights of societies and from other desirable objectives (7).

Therefore, at the core of the human rights concept, lies a distinct notion of dignity. The evolution of the concept has shown that dignity can take different shapes, even when defined using contemporary human rights language. In that vein, modern notions of human rights are the result of cumulative historical processes that have made up a living discourse.

Human rights education as a human right

After WWII, the UN believed citizens had a right to be informed about the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art 26, UDHR, 1948). Naturally, dissemination plans were delayed by decades as the world gave priority to more pressing post-war agendas (Moyn, 2010). In 1974, UN agencies put forward a recommendation concerning education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, which was followed by a plan of action in the early 1990s. The plan of action coincided with new socio-political and geographical configurations of the world triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and fit the demand to redefine notions of citizenship and personal agency (Suarez, 2007 cited in Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2010). The 1996 Plan of Action defined HRE as

[T]raining, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding attitudes

directed to:

- a. The strengthening and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- b. The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- c. The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; and
- d. The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society

(UNOHCHR, Plan of Action for the UN Decade for HRE, 1996).

Therefore, HRE aims to build ‘a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes’ (Coysh, 2014: 93). These aims could be achieved by different methods, namely, by promoting universal respect; providing human-rights knowledge, developing attitudes and behaviours to empower people; learning about, through and for (human rights); claiming rights; accessing justice and reparations; contributing to social cohesion; and becoming agents of change (Transformative action) (UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011; Bajaj, 2011, Starkey, 2012, Council of Europe, 2022).

Considering the wide range of these aims, in 2004, the UN General Assembly created the World Programme for Human Rights Education (GA Res 59/113, 10 December 2004) with the main goal ‘to advance the implementation of HRE programmes in all sectors.’ The Programme has run since 2005 (and is ongoing as of 2023) and is coordinated globally by OHCHR ([Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, n/d](#)). The Programme has been structured in four consecutive phases to focus on specific sectors and issues. The first phase (2005-2009) focused on HRE in the primary and secondary school systems; the second phase (2010-2014) focused on HRE for higher education and training for teachers, educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel; the third phase (2015-2019) focused on strengthening the implementation of the first two phases and promoting human rights training for media professionals and journalists; the fourth phase (2020-2024) is focusing on the

youth ‘with special emphasis on education and training in equality, human rights, non-discrimination, inclusion and respect for diversity’ (UNOHCHR, n/d). This phase focuses on building cohesive societies and aligns its objectives with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically with target 4.7²⁰ of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNOHCHR, n/d).

In terms of HRE for women, non-governmental organisations tend to use the Convention on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a theoretical and practical framework to inform training on human rights. There is a general assumption that because CEDAW has been almost universally ratified, it represents an authoritative international legal framework for women’s human rights and a call for a radical transformation of structural discriminatory practices (Women’s Human Rights Institute, n/d). However, despite CEDAW’s strong foundations and clear aims, in addition to other international human rights laws and countries’ domestic laws and international obligations; there is evidence to show that there is still a lack of understanding about what women’s rights mean on the ground (Marcus, 2017; Relis, 2016).

It is this lack of consensus that puts displaced women living outside the global north in precarious circumstances in the name of rights and equality. This study not only explored the extent to which discrepancies between HRE theory and praxis exists in the Colombian context, but it also sought to ‘humanise’ human rights by featuring individual biographies more prominently in human rights theory’ (Baxi, 2009 cited in Relis, 2016:356).

Pedagogical Approaches to HRE

Considering the history, values, and goals of HRE described above, a fundamental aspect of empowerment through HRE entails individuals’ ability to become agents of change by exercising human rights knowledge. Although this technical information was thought to be the main source of HRE curriculum globally (Al-Daraweesh & Snauwaert, 2013), research has shown that knowledge that

derives from learners’ own struggles for justice is more effective in advancing the HRE agenda (Osler, 2015; Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020; Bajaj et al., 2017).

As a result, generally, HRE content has both legal and cultural dimensions. The legal dimension focuses on content about international human rights standards and promotes the importance of monitoring States’ obligations to uphold human rights. The cultural dimension focuses on promoting skills, knowledge, and motivations to align people’s values with human rights principles. Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, methods that are learner-centred, interactive, narrative-orientated, and experiential have been found to be effective in promoting conditions for change (Osler, 2015). Additionally, teachers’ understandings of diverse pedagogical approaches and knowledge of local contexts is fundamental in addressing contradictions between universal and local values and consequently a key skill in advancing the HRE agenda (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020; Tabbitts & Fenekes, 2010).

Regardless of the approach, Obiagu & Nwaubani (2020) believe that there are four specific elements that underpin effective HRE pedagogy: first, teachers’ knowledge of the human rights discourse and its purpose; second, teachers’ understanding and experience of human rights issues; third, knowledge and familiarity of pedagogical debates (including evaluation); and fourth, ethics of care in practice. These elements highlight criticality which in turn will translate into inclusive and transformative practice (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020). Moreover, a transformational approach also assumes that the learner has had personal experiences of human rights violations and thus could be more motivated to promote human rights in the long term (Tibbitts, 2018). This transformational element is an essential component of emancipatory pedagogy, a popular approach in HRE circles (Bajaj, 2011) and a fundamental goal of HRE as described above (Bajaj, 2011, Starkey, 2012, Council of Europe, 2022).

As the stories shared in the Preambles throughout this thesis demonstrate, my personal ontological and epistemological predispositions align with Tibbitts’s (2018) position stating that effective HRE begins with the personal but links up with wider social change processes. A transformational approach ought

20 Target 4.7: sustainable development and global citizenship. By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development. More generally, Goal 4 aims to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all. Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>. Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>.

to include HRE epistemological theory (what is meant by human rights knowledge) and pedagogical theory (how to organise that knowledge for learning) that considers the diversity of learners of human rights and their contexts (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2010).

This pedagogical positioning is not novel, however. In the context of South America, Freire's critical pedagogy is an approach widely used in HRE. This approach sees the purpose of education being to develop a critical consciousness that will empower learners to identify and challenge sources of oppression (Freire, 2017; Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020). Yet, Ellsworth (1989) pointed out that critical pedagogies could provide a false sense of achievement while perpetuating the status quo. She provided a powerful critique of key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to critical pedagogy, such as empowerment, dialogue, and criticality. She argued that those methods could become repressive and indeed perpetuate relations of domination, and as a result problematised notions of empowerment and dialogue that:

[G]ave the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact. Empowerment treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched (Ellsworth, 1989: 306).

Profoundly important for the focus of this research, she questioned the aim to empower students by qualifying the question:

Empowerment for what? For human betterment? (Parker 1986), for expanding the range of social identities people may become? (Simon, 1986) for making one's self present as part of a moral and political project that links production of meanings to the possibility of human agency, democratic community and transformative social action? (Giroux, 1986) (As cited in Ellsworth, 1989:307).

Ellsworth's qualifying question has been fundamental in the conceptualisation and development of this research project, particularly when exploring different dimensions of agency, which I discuss in later chapters. However, although Ellsworth's work has influenced feminist and critical race theory,

the concept of empowerment remains deeply embedded not only in pedagogical discourses but across disciplines. This study problematises and deconstructs the cause-and-effect linearity between human rights knowledge acquisition and the capacity to become agents of change, or in other words, to become agentic.

However, I am not alone in questioning the impact of HRE on shaping people's sense of agency. Here, I focus on three critiques that are relevant to this study. The first critique sees HRE as a global vector that subjugates types of knowledge that it perceives as inferior (Coysh, 2014; Großklaus, 2015). It sees human rights knowledge as a 'manufactured discourse' that trickles down from above only validating institutional and technical knowledge while discounting others. To overcome this challenge, scholars suggest to 'rethink the HRE discourse by creating space and drawing upon community knowledge and agency' (Coysh, 2014:90). Educators in this research were indeed adept in this approach by embracing the amalgamated knowledge and agency that emerged from the intersection of human rights discourses and local knowledge.

The second critique acknowledges that HRE programmes may also trigger undesired impacts in that human rights knowledge (and promotion) may be appropriated by different (structurally bounded) actors with substitute goals and agendas. This critique highlights the tension between the transformative potential of human rights and the structural powers behind dissemination. It is possible that misappropriation of HRE may produce 'ambiguous and often contradictory results of international norms' (Großklaus, 2015: 1256; Gollifer, 2021).

A final important critique is that in certain contexts, the human rights discourse is too abstract to offer any solution. In this sense, HRE has been seen as something given to people because there is an assumption that people didn't know their human rights and this lack of knowledge led to human rights abuses (Coysh, 2014; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2010). It also assumes that people are devoid of a sense of dignity and agency. With full acknowledgement of contexts where people are in need of international solidarity and support to halt human rights abuses, the core of this critique sees the human rights discourse as an encompassing discourse of dignity that discards other ways of knowing and being.

What these critiques highlight is the complexity that emerges at the intersection of HRE and local contexts. Focusing on the overarching aim of HRE to empower learners to transform their realities

through their engagement with the human rights discourse, I think Figure 2 below illustrates well the intricacy of what exactly transformative action might entail. In depicting the different types of knowledge, aims, audiences, and rights that constitute HRE, the figure hints at the multiplicity of understandings of dignity and the complexity in deciding which rights to prioritise. For example, the USA and Europe prioritise differently first and second-generation rights (rights related to freedom of speech, employment, social security), whereas indigenous communities across the world may prioritise environmental and group rights over individual rights.

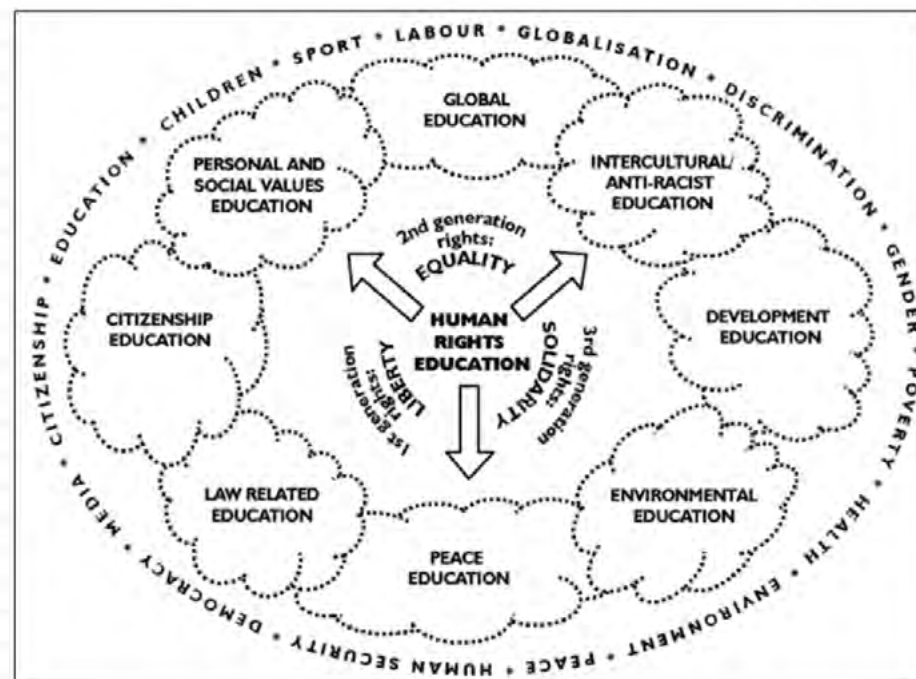


Figure 2. Types of Human Rights Education. Compasito: Manual on HRE for children. Flowers et al. (2007). Council of Europe.

In subsequent chapters ('Empowerment for whom?' and 'Empowerment how?'), I explore how Educators in Colombia approach and manage the diversity of (and at times the contradictory nature of) goals, target audiences, and local priorities.

Exploring alternative conceptualisations of rights and HRE: What might a posthumanist understanding of rights look like?

As discussed above, notions of human rights, and consequently HRE, have been evolving since their inception and continue to be shaped by the cultural, social, and political priorities of the day. Nonetheless, notions of human rights remain linked to Western ideas of dignity, respect, and freedom and to legal infrastructures that equip people to claim and exercise rights linked to those prerogatives. Explorations of alternative conceptualisations of rights would imply a consideration not only of different constituent foundations of rights (other than dignity and freedom for example), but also a focus on the degree to which those concepts facilitate agency and notions of responsibility.

This is not a novel idea as debates between universalist and relativist understandings of human rights have shown (Starkey, 2012). The universalist position is grounded on the understanding that human rights are indivisible, inalienable, interrelated and interdependent and they are inherent to all human beings irrespective of nationality, sex, religion, ethnicity or national origin, colour or any other status (UNOHCHR, n/d). Acknowledging that a universal notion of rights is narrow, universalists propose that a claim to universality should be understood as an agreement on the way 'human beings ought to be treated, not that they are or have been or that these norms have been accepted everywhere' (Donnelly, 2003 cited in Starkey, 2012:9). However, this consensus also implies that 'those who deny human rights are liable to be considered barbarians or uncivilised, that human rights are part of the struggle for civilization against barbarity' (Starkey, 2012:9). Indeed, noncompliance with UNDHR normative standards of empowerment condemns rather than engage, the UNDHR proposed the terms on which judgements of conscience can be made 'just as the main religious and humanist traditions aimed to develop a conscience of good and evil in their followers' (Starkey, 2012:11). On the other hand, relativists argue that conceptualisations of human rights are influenced by cultural contexts, and that it is paramount to engage local knowledge and experiences in the advancement of the human rights agenda (Perry, 1997). Unlike the universalist position, a relativist stance allows for the exploration of how localised notions of agency may inform (alternative) notions of dignity, and consequently of rights.

Therefore, a different starting point is needed, a premise that steps back from human-centredness and Eurocentric foundations of dignity and agency. In that light, the work of Rosiek *et al.* (2020) is helpful in proposing agential realist ontologies as an alternative way of conceptualising rights. They advance that Barad's agential realism can deconstruct notions of rights because it suggests 'a practice of enquiry that involves transformations not just of our ways of knowing but also of our ways of being, feeling, committing and living in the world'. It further recognises that 'the very being of the inquirers are also multiple and transformed in the entanglement of inquiry' (Rosiek *et al.*, 2020:335). Considering the transformative aspect of HRE, agential realism conceives agency as:

[N]ot just a human capacity but a quality manifest in all aspects of reality. It simultaneously affirms the way the things of this world exceed our representations of them while also highlighting our responsibility for the role we play in constituting the world through our representational activity (Barad, 2007:332).

Agency, thus, is understanding that 'power emerges in relation to other beings' (Rosiek *et al.*, 2020:342). To be clear, 'other beings' include the more-than-human²¹ and as such this notion of agency moves beyond collective understandings of human rights (as conceived in the African Charter of Human Rights for example).

It is crucial to acknowledge here that notions of agency that de-centre the human and recognise the agency of the more-than-human are not new as indigenous epistemologies around the world have affirmed the agency of matter for millennia (TallBear, 2017; Todd 2016). Importantly, preceding cultural relativist stances, indigenous epistemologies have also valued a focus on the particular and not the general, because 'the key to knowing is not to determine universals and derive particulars, but to know the particulars' (Deloria & Wildcat 2001 cited in Rosiek *et al.*, 2020:337).

Furthermore, in addition to exploring alternative conceptualisations of agency, a post-humanist approach to ethics informed by an FVM perspective would be helpful in reconceptualising notions of rights. For example, Alaimo and Hekman (2008) argued that:

Ethical practices - as opposed to ethical principles – do not seek to extend themselves over and above material realities, but instead emerge from them, taking into account multiple material consequences (8).

In this instance, an ethical approach to rights acknowledges the fundamental role matter and place play in shaping people's sense of agency. This is important in the context of this research because Educators evidenced that disruptions of their relationships with the-more-than-human 'represented not only a violation of a unidimensional human and individual right but also profound epistemic, ontological, and cosmological violence' (Tuck & Yang, 2012:5).

Moreover, any enterprise attempting to challenge dominant notions of human rights needs to acknowledge the elements of colonisation, decolonisation, and neo-colonisation the human rights discourse carries. Earlier in this thesis, I alluded to colonial aspects of the human rights discourse as being akin to a new gospel. In the interviews for this project, Educators spoke about the importance of practices of protection that were perceived to be in opposition with the empowering message of human rights. In that instance, the externality of the human rights discourse and the existence of alternative notions of agency was evident. Therefore, it is fundamental to recognise that there are diverse ideas of agency that differ from Western notions of this concept. It is imperative to recognise and value meaningful and tangible understandings and sources of agency (and therefore rights) that lay outside human rights and legal discourses.

21 This terminology will be addressed in the Methodology section.



Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of conceptualisations of agency as informed by the three epistemological pillars underpinning this research, FMS, FVM, and HRE. It provided an interdisciplinary background against which alternative notions of agency could be contrasted and developed.

An overview of current migration trends and instruments of protection provide an understanding of how FMS conceive notions of agency. Moreover, considering the current extent of human and more-than-human displacement, the need to reconceptualise notions of displacement, protection, vulnerability, and agency that are human-centred should be reassessed. The contribution of feminist thought to legal theory is also relevant. In particular, outlining key debates on the risks and benefits of engaging with legal instruments and the impact on women's sense of agency or oppression is helpful in guiding further explorations.

Finally, an overview of the evolution of the notion of human rights and human rights education is necessary considering the focus of this inquiry. The historical evolution of HRE showed that political, social, and cultural forces drive the human rights agenda. Those forces still shape the interpretation and prioritisation of fundamental principles such as notions of dignity, freedom, and respect.

Against this interdisciplinary background, this chapter concludes with explorations on what alternative conceptions of agency and rights might entail. Considering the focus on materiality of this study, a notion of agency as an entanglement of different types of knowledge (including but not limited to personal experience, human rights, and legal knowledge) start to emerge. This emergent notion of entangled agency is important in its radical contrast to perceptions of agency that are only human-centred, linear, and within the boundaries of legal and human rights discourses. This emergent notion of agency not only recognises the ways in which legal, human rights and other knowledge affect and are affected, but also hints at diverse and important sources of agency that lay beyond the conceptual walls human rights and legal discourses have erected.

Chapter four: Methodology, Methods & Ethics

Preamble

In June 2008 photographers Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin were embedded with the British army in Afghanistan. At the time, the British army had been occupying the country in response to the 9/11 attacks in the USA. As embedded photographers, they were expected to document ‘the theatre of war’, to produce images that represented and documented, in a sanitised way, the trauma of war. But they had other ideas in mind.

They arrived during the deadliest month of the war; that week in June turned out to be the deadliest week of the war since it began in 2001. On the first day of their visit, a BBC fixer was dragged from his car and executed, and nine Afghan soldiers were killed in a suicide attack. The following day, three British soldiers died. Casualties continued until the fifth day when nobody died.

In a subversive act against representation and a strong wish to resist and interrupt the expected narrative of war they were anticipated to document; they took a box with light sensitive paper inside. They had no intention to document anything but the performance of war itself. The main protagonist of this performance was the box itself. However, on the fifth day, the only day in which nobody was reported to have been killed,²² they removed a six-meter section of light sensitive paper and exposed it to the sun for 20 seconds. The images that emerged from this exposure were accidental, created by the temperature of light on that day, at that moment, in that place.

Looking at that exposure of light moved me deeply. It felt raw, vulnerable, and yet transgressive and powerful. The images that emerged from that fleeting moment were an ephemeral encounter between light, paper, temperature, sand, sweat. Those images represented nothing and everything, they disrupted conventional representation, the role of the photographers was almost entirely removed from the process. It was light, temperature, paper that came together to produce something new.

Broomberg and Chanarin’s work has been immensely helpful when thinking with and about notions of agency and vulnerability, and/or their representations. Like them, I also believe that representation

(in photography, in academia, in policy) is problematic, it is complicit in instigating and perpetuating trauma. Simultaneously, like them, I also believe that suffering demands a witness. They said that one simple truth about any photograph is not its meaning but its register in time. Their work is akin to John Cage’s 1960s composition of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, in which a pianist comes to the stage, opens the piano sits there for that length of time, before closing the piano and walking off stage. Cage, Broomberg, and Chanarin are asking us to listen, to attend. They invited us to contemplate, to look harder and beyond the spotlight.

And that is what an FVM, and diffractive methodologies have allowed me to do: to turn the spotlight to the dark corners and illuminate what usually remains unseen, unsaid or unquestioned in terms of perceptions of agency.

Section one: Methodology

The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. (Lorde, 1984)

This research project is an empirical, qualitative, and interdisciplinary project comprising FMS, HRE and FVM epistemologies. The overarching research question explores alternative and/or additional sources of agency, beyond HRE and legal discourses, that render women human rights Educators in Colombia agentic. The foundational question asks:

Considering limited empirical research on understandings of agency amongst human rights Educators in Colombia, how might a multi-disciplinary study provide insights into the ways in which human rights education, legal instruments, and materiality shape Educators’ notions of agency in a context of protracted violence and displacement?

Sub-questions include: what type of discourses are embedded in designing and delivering HRE programmes? How do Educators engage with human rights, legal and other discourses in their quest

22 The day nobody died by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin. Presented at the Barbican Art Gallery, London. 4th December 2008. Available at: <https://www.broombergchanarin.com/the-day-nobody-died-1-1>. Last accessed on 24.10.23.

for agency? What lessons and practices could be learnt to inform HRE design and delivery in other contexts? and what are Educators' perceptions of empowerment and vulnerability?

With these questions in mind and armed with three epistemological lenses, this study explores conceptualisations of agency from the ground up. It investigates the role HRE programmes, a local legal instrument (Law, 1257, 2008), and other discourses/sources play in shaping Educators' sense of agency. In doing so, this study contributes to empirical work on grounded notions of agency and vulnerability and proposes a theoretical construct of agency based on Educators' experiences. Chapter three provided an overview of feminist contributions to legal theory, particularly in terms of the role laws play in dis/empowering women. In this chapter, I outline key aspects of FVM as one of the epistemological pillars of this research.

Feminist vibrant materialism (FVM)

FVM is also known as feminist new materialism. From a European perspective, a focus on materiality for research inquiry is not new, but a conceptualisation of matter as agentic is, hence the term 'new' materialism. In this thesis, I have adopted the term vibrant (instead of new) as I agree with those who contest its theoretical newness. This contestation will be addressed below in the critiques section.

This methodological approach is helpful to guide explorations on conceptions of agency for several reasons. First, because it is grounded on the everyday (as in real, complex, not linear) conditions of Educators' lives (Conaghan, 2013). Second, it disrupts binary thinking (Dophjin & van der Tuin, 2016), focusing instead on what happens in the interim, for instance in this case, considering the spectrum between the binary empowerment/vulnerability, individual/communal, local/global, micro/macro among many others. Third, it focuses on what lays beyond the spotlight and asks questions on what is missing, what inhabits the periphery, on what exists between the lines, in the silences. Lastly, because it aligns with indigenous epistemologies which became an important aspect as the research developed.

What makes it material?

Historically, the material referred to the quotidian experiences of life. Philosophically, there have been

three lineages for the conception of materialism (Tuana, 2021). First, a Marxist inspired conception of materiality that focused on how material conditions perpetuate exploitation by fostering economic and political inequalities. From this perspective, Marxist historical materialism focused on 'capitalism and the relations of material production and consumption' (Smartt-Gullion, 2018:21). It was specifically concerned with women's material living conditions in terms of labour, reproduction, health, and education (Hird, 2009). A second lineage paid attention to materiality in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and postmodern thought. From a postmodern perspective, for example, reality is a product of language, which implied that materiality and notions of the body and nature are products of discourse (known as the cultural or linguistic turn). A final lineage emerged from the need to include new technological advances to better understand materiality (Tuana, 2021). This strand recognised the relevance of using the development of the natural sciences (physics and technology) to rethink the nature of matter and being (Coole & Frost, 2010).

From the last lineage emerged the 'ontological turn' that called to understand matter as emerging from dynamic relationality (Barad, 2007). According to Karen Barad, a quantic physicist, materiality cannot be fully understood without engaging with the natural sciences. Barad argued that matter is agential in 'that things in the world are not fixed substances but rather events of emerging intra-actions'. Barad used the word intra-actions, as opposed to interactions, to move away from conceptualisations of dualism or causality. Through her theory of 'agential realism' Barad challenged the dualism between matter and language by arguing that indeed 'discursive practices and materiality co-emerge; matter and meaning materialise together' (Barad, 2007: 44-45).

Importantly, an ontological turn also calls against nature being dismissed as passive and irrelevant for social theorising and against seeing humans as special creatures having a birth right to knowledge. In this light, materiality is also relational as opposed to self-contained; it is conceived as 'multi-directional flows that suggest fluctuating connections and a rich 'messiness' whose complexity and indeterminacy preclude the notion of totality' (Wingrove, 2016:456). An ontological turn also rescues the ontology of the body by emphasizing the importance of embodiment and situatedness in the complex exchanges of bodies and power (Braidotti, 1991; de Beauvoir, 1951; Haraway, 1988), and considers the conditions under which 'bodies are encultured, psychologised, given identity, historical location and agency' (Grosz, 2004:2).

What makes it vibrant?

Vibrant materialism is a revival of materialist ontologies that move away from the linguistic turn (that focused on the primacy of language and cultural man-made representation²³). From a European perspective, it implies a reconceptualisation of matter as an underexplored question and as an active force that enables social worlds and expressions (Braidotti, 2013). In this sense, it moves away from constructivism because it accounts for con-constitutive intra-actions between meaning and matter (which leaves neither materiality nor identity intact) (Barad, 2007).

Importantly for this research, vibrant materialism is attuned to more-than-human agents, recognises that thinking theoretical concepts is also ‘empirical’ research (Truman, 2019:2), and considers how matter comes to matter in terms of gender and politics (Tuana, 2021). Moreover, it rejects the notion that matter and nature are passive and irrelevant for social theorising. Significantly, it decentres the human by engaging with ‘flat ontologies that employ matter and discourse on a plane level’ (Smartt-Gullion, 2018:21). Further, a conventional conception of (human) agency is replaced with Spinoza’s notion of affect, defined as the capacity to affect, and be affected. In Spinoza’s view, all matter has an ‘agential’ capacity to affect rather than being shaped by human agency (Alldred & Fox, 2017). Thus, fundamental ramifications from this epistemological shift includes the perception of agency as distributive, the privileging of relations rather than individuals, the prioritisation of affect, and the troubling of causal and linear thinking and the nature of being. Furthermore, a vibrant materialist perspective urges us to focus on what bodies can do rather than on what they are, and to concentrate on what something does instead of what it means. These are fundamental epistemological compasses guiding this research.

In sum, vibrant materialism represents a ‘keen interest in engagements with matter’ (Hird, 2009:330) and a ‘shift in theoretical focus from epistemology to ontology’ (Conaghan, 2013:13). The materialities considered here include human bodies, other animate organisms, material things, spaces, places,

and material forces (including time) (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Vibrant materialism considers matter as vibrant and agentic and consequently nature is not dismissed as passive (Bennett, 2010). It considers distributive agency and assemblages²⁴, and privileges relations rather than individuals (Truman, 2019). Prominently, it decentres the human and the primacy of language and instead considers entanglements between matter and language (Barad, 2007), whereby matter and discourse emerge together in the creation of situated knowledge (Braidotti, 2013). It recognises the porosity of boundaries (Bennett, 2020) and the importance of ‘ontoepistemological processes that challenge the view that knowing and being are separate (Truman, 2019). Finally, by rejecting binary thinking (Dophjin & van der Tuin, 2016), it challenges representational logic (in which separation is foundational) and reassess the relationship between nature and culture (Alaimo, 2020).

What makes it feminist?

All feminist theory is based on radical disengagement from dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity. Feminist thought seeks to enter the process of ‘transforming prevailing notions of gender and in doing so, it combines critique with creation of alternative ways of embodying and experiencing our sexualised selves’ (Braidotti, 2012: xiii). A feminist approach pays attention to difference and processes of becoming. It also recognises, that historically, women have been considered subservient to men and the need to redress this structural subjugation by seeking justice and equality for women everywhere (Tong, 2001).

At a methodological level, a feminist perspective challenges ‘the traditional methods by which knowledge is generated and the source of the views of the world such knowledge reflects’ (Collis & Hussey, 2009:84). A feminist methodology is alert to knowledge that is grounded in the experiences of women, mindful that the research benefits women and empathetic for the world being studied (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Importantly, a feminist epistemology does not homogenise women, instead

²³ In this context, representation is understood as ‘the view that the only things people can know are representations of the world. Ontologically this sets up a binary between distinct entities that pre-exist and come to be known or experienced through representation. It also assumes an ontologically discreet knower.’ (Tuana, 2019:5)

²⁴ In a vibrant materialist context, Jane Bennett suggested that an assemblage could be defined as ‘a living, throbbing grouping whose coherence coexists with energies and countercultures that exceeds and confounds it. It is a web with an uneven topography: some of the points at which the trajectory of actants cross each other are more heavily trafficked than others, and thus power is not equally distributed across the assemblage. An assemblage is not governed by a central power and is made up of many types of actants: humans, nonhumans; animals, vegetables, and minerals; nature, culture, technology’ (Bennett, 2005:445).

recognises the diversity of identities and needs women have in different contexts. Specifically, postcolonial, new *mestiza*, and black feminists challenge homogenisation discourses and theorise the distinct experiences of black, indigenous, and mestiza women (Olesen, 2005). They argue that ‘feminism takes many different forms depending on the context of contemporary nationalism’ (Carvajal, 2018:241) and move feminist thinking ‘in the direction of more particularised knowledge and away from any sense of the universal’ (Olesen, 2005:244; hooks, 1984, 1990). In the context of Latin America, Anzaldúa’s work is fundamental in shaping a new *mestiza* consciousness that ‘was aligned with the efforts of diverse third world colonised women to fight for social justice locally and globally’ (Carvajal, 2018: 59).

Moreover, a focus on women’s material conditions addresses a key critique of the feminist discourse, namely that white ethnocentric ideas of empowerment, agency, identity, and discrimination speak for all women regardless of their contextual social differences (Spivak cited in Morton, 2003). This proselytization constitutes a neo-colonial paternalistic benevolence where Western educated women consider themselves liberated and go forth into the world to liberate their ‘less fortunate sisters’ (hooks, 2000:45). Similarly, Spivak also questions the lie of a global ‘sisterhood between first and third world women, pointing instead to the complicity between feminism and imperialism and the need to be more sensitive to questions of difference’ (Spivak cited in Morton, 2003:8). In diverse contexts, both in the global north and south, I have borne witness to how feminist standpoints reproduce ideologies of racism and victimhood while ignoring issues of intersectionality (Barrett & McIntosh, 2005). Despite its faults, I agree with Hawkesworth and Disch (2016) in that ‘feminism would not exist as a theoretical endeavour without the political struggles for women’s empowerment’ that have emerged across time and places (2).

In sum, material feminists insist on the importance of understanding and engaging with the ‘complex lineages of the materiality of oppressions’ (Tuana, 2021:391), and emphasize the criticality of situatedness and embodiment, which constitute the backbone of FVM’s desire for experimentation and speculative thought (Truman, 2019; Haraway, 2016). In terms of exploring notions of justice and agency, FVM advances that situated feminism must attend to and intervene in the processes and assemblages that allow inequalities to emerge, persist or reproduce (Truman, 2019). Of interest to this research, an FVM sense of justice asks how one could mobilise matter to enable justice to emerge (Käll, 2019).

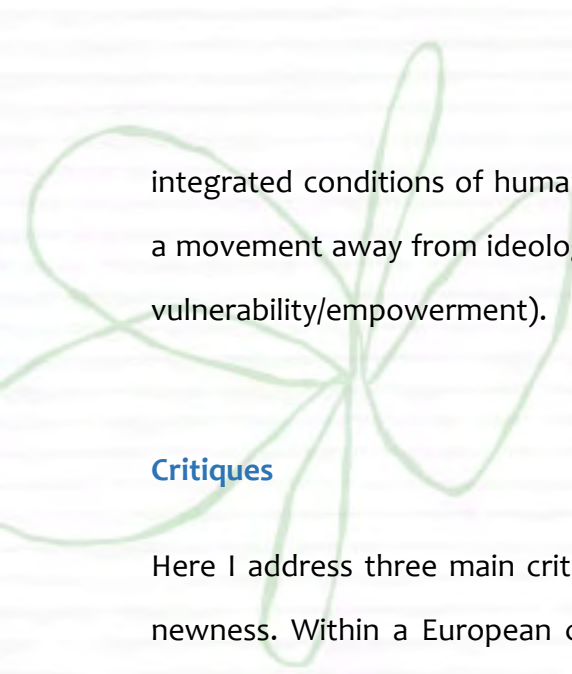
Feminism, materialism, and the law

As mentioned in chapter three, a core feminist debate highlights the strategic gains and risks of feminist engagement with law reform. For some, this engagement held potential for women’s liberation, while for others it perpetuated conditions of oppression (Snyder, 2014). Moreover, as texts, laws were firmly situated within the linguistic turn, and as result materialism was rarely acknowledged in feminist legal theory, perceived ‘as having little to do with the role of law in society and therefore of no interest to feminist legal theory’ (Conaghan, 2013:2). To be clear, in this context, materialism refers to everyday conditions of people’s lives, in this case women’s lives.

However, considering the conceptual ontoepistemological shift proposed by FVM, a materialist approach to law is helpful in anchoring concepts and categories to materiality, ‘not as representation of the real but as materially situated and intra-active’ (Conaghan, 2013:30). Within a legal context, FVM invites us to move away from binaries, to ‘resist conceptualizations of feminist legal engagement as either material or discursive, modern or postmodern, reform-based or theoretical’ (Conaghan, 2013:31). Moreover, a focus on matter moves away from the well-known position that law fails to reflect women’s lives, to a position that sees the world as a complex place where humans and the more-than-human intra-act, a world of relational agency (Conaghan, 2013). Incidentally, recognition of relational and distributive agency, and the capacity to affect and be affected are important conceptual tools to explore notions of agency. Kang & Kendall ‘s work on the materiality of law has been helpful in providing ‘a mode of understanding law’s composition and relationality’ as a legal materialist approach that:

[B]egins from identifying law’s materials that contribute to the making of legal difference, as opposed to understanding legal meaning by explaining law through various contexts. It attends to the choice of particular legal elements, their assembly, and the overall shape of the montage (2020: 26-28).

This is important in moving away from conceptualising legal instruments as merely discursive entities and focusing on what legal instruments do instead of on their meaning. In this case, an FVM approach places value on the unseen or unsaid, by being attentive to the reality of embodied, embedded, and



integrated conditions of humans and the more-than-human (Wingrove, 2008), and by encouraging a movement away from ideological binaries (for example mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, vulnerability/empowerment).

Critiques

Here I address three main critiques of FVM. The first critique contests the claim of its conceptual newness. Within a European context, FVM calls to rethink matter, to see matter as vibrant and agentic. However, beyond the global north, this epistemological position is not new as indigenous epistemologies have affirmed the vitality and agency of matter for centuries (Todd 2016; Smartt-Gullion, 2018; Rosiek *et al.*, 2020; TallBear, 2017). Therefore, in acknowledgement to this critique, the preferred term throughout this thesis is vibrant materialism.

The second critique highlights that distributive understandings of agency and recognising matter as agentic imply a subordination of politics by epistemology and therefore constraining political action (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2005; Washick & Wingrove, 2015). Moreover, attempting to grasp the materiality of power (Barad, 2007), ‘overlooks or downplays the durable structures that support hegemonic positions and the ways in which they constrain differently positioned individuals’, and therefore reproduce relations of inequality (Tuana, 2021:390). In this research, being aware of this critique was helpful in identifying hidden colonial and systemic practices of discrimination.

A third critique notes a colonial aspect of FVM in that it fails to include the materiality of race. Critics highlight that it is not possible to trouble the human/non-human divide without recognising the racialised nature of Western notions of the human. This shift implies that those who have not been considered fully human because of race or ethnicity will be left behind once more (Tuana, 2021). In this study, an FVM approach was helpful in exploring embodiment and the role the-more-than-human played in shaping notions of agency through the body. In this context, racialised, gendered, and ethnic bodies played an important role in assemblages of agency and, as such, were very much included in the research.

Nonetheless, with these critiques in mind, using an FVM epistemology in this research was fruitful at different levels. It contributed to the effort of bringing back the material into feminist theory and

explored and speculated about new ways of understanding discourse and matter without privileging one over the other, but also valued being over knowing (Lather & St Pierre, 2013). As a fertile ground to study the ‘interaction between culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the environment without favouring any of these elements’ (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008:7), FVM provided the epistemological tools to explore and speculate, away from the constrain of linearity, causality, and binary thinking, temporal, spatial and contextual notions of agency that tended to remain invisible and silenced. Importantly, it also illuminated and valued the significant role the more-than-human played in shaping notions of agency.

A note on data analysis: research-in-becoming, data-in-becoming, and researcher-in-becoming

This work uses both thematic and diffractive analysis of interview data. Below, in alignment with an FVM compass, I discuss how data analysis and engagement with the data transformed throughout the different phases of the research. I also expand on the reasons to combine both types of analysis.

Moreover, as the research progressed, I experienced what Ringrose and Zarabadi termed a ‘researcher-in-becoming, a subject who becomes with its research, its participants, and its data’, but so did the data and the research process itself (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:211). The explorations of these research entanglements and the implications for the research process are also included below.

Research-in-becoming

I first analysed interview data through thematic analysis. This analysis seeks to uncover themes or ‘some level of patterned response of meaning within data sets’. It involves identifying both implicit and explicit ideas; themes emerge when ‘answering the question what is this expression an example of’ (Fugard & Potts, 2015:669). Essentially, it provides a nuanced understanding of experience, which is always mediated by the researcher’s judgement and practice (Fugard & Potts, 2015).

I diligently coded and thematically analysed this project’s data, but the patterns found and the commonalities I mapped out, left important aspects obscured, uncoded and hidden. Although the themes did provide valuable insights into the role HRE, legal instruments and materiality played in

shaping Educators' notions of agency, they neglected to make visible crucial contextual and temporal experiences that deviated from human-centred conceptualisations of agency. Thematic analysis left out 'data that glowed' or 'hot spots' (MacLure, 2013), stories that haunted, objects within narratives that were luminous and vibrant.

Arguing that this glow was meaningful and worth exploring, MacLure (2013) critiqued methodological techniques that tried to 'neatly categorise and subsume difference into schemas of representation'. She cautioned that engaging with data in this representational way could 'neglect singularity, texture, and affective complexities of qualitative data' (MacLure, 2013 cited in Ringrose & Renold, 2014:773). Coding, for MacLure, was related to representation, a way of categorising the world in hierarchical relationships. Instead, she proposed to use the logic of assemblages, 'in which objects, utterances, institutions, bodies, and fragments relate in 'unholy mixture' rather than orderly hierarchy' (Lecercle, 2002 cited in MacLure, 2013:165).

Although it would have been easier, safer, and sufficient to remain within the boundaries of well-threaded thematic analysis territory, as I delved deeper into FVM literature, the data 'hot spots' glowed with more intensity. Beyond rational and hierarchical themes, Educators' stories, and encounters 'pointed to the existence of embodied connections with other people, things and thoughts that were far more complex than the static connections captured in the thematic analysis' (MacLure, 2013:172). This slippery nature that did not allow their inclusion in the themes was unsettling and haunting. These stories, encounters, objects pointed to something else, something more diaphanous, ephemeral, uncategorisable and yet vital for this study.

Barad (2007), Ringrose and Zarabadi (2018) also urge us to go beyond the coding, to pay attention to the things that get missed (Barad 2007); 'to feel the hotness and glowing-ness' (and I should add the fear and uncertainty), of a moment for everyone in the research encounter and being able to engage and explore that different way of knowing (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018: 212).

Therefore, mere thematic analysis was no longer enough; the affect of the glow emanating from the data transformed the research approach to also account for data that lay outside the spotlight of patterns. The upheavals caused by the global pandemic had silver linings for this research at different levels, but methodologically, they inspired a desire to 'pay greater attention to what traditional

qualitative research misses: movement, difference, singularity, emergence, and the entanglements of matter and language' (MacLure, 2013:171). They made me wonder if with this work I could make 'little ruptures that could lead to structural changes' (Ringrose and Zarabadi, 2018:215). It was terrifying to venture beyond thematic analysis; it meant a risk, a high possibility of 'getting things wrong'. But my supervisory team, Ringrose and Zarabadi (2018) encouraged me to venture out because:

The point is not that we get it right or wrong; the point is that we get it perhaps differently or it gets us, it pulls us. This is an affective entanglement with these methods and theories, it is not just us taking these methods and ideas, but they are taking us as well. They glow for us, as soon as we think and FEEL there is something (indeterminate and unprecedented) in this heavy theory, like Deleuze, that probably can help me to experiment. That is the moment of entanglement, rather than the representational understating of worthiness; these are spacetime-mattering events where this method, theory, or concepts make themselves intelligible to you (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:216).

Hence the need to engage with the data diffractively. Diffractive analysis offered the conceptual tools to explore the data that remained obscured by linear thematic analysis. A diffractive approach was equipped to grasp the complexity of Educators' experiences and the nuanced nature of agency. Later below I expand on what diffractive analysis entailed.

Data-in-becoming

In addition to the recognition of and engagement with the 'glowness' of data, an FVM lens highlighted other important aspects that transformed data in the research process. The data I refer to here are interviews and communication with Educators, which were all conducted in Spanish. I was the sole translator of all ethical documentation, information and quotes used in this thesis, and the transcriber of all interviews in Spanish. I expected this body of textual data to remain inert, but these data became and did something else.

This process, this data-in-becoming, was illuminated by a fortuitous oversight. Early in the data analysis process, I neglected to create a master document with all translated quotes to be used in the thesis. As the writing process evolved and editing drafts became more convoluted, I opted for translating

quotes as the need emerged from the writing process. As a result, I found myself translating the same quote several times. Time constraints aside, this would have been unimportant had I not come across earlier translations that differed slightly from subsequent versions. However subtle the change of words was, it was telling, and it prompted me to speculate, through an FVM lens, its implications for data analysis and for the research at large. Here I focus on the act of translation and the notion of narrative assemblages (Tamboukou, 2020C) and the implications for the text, the translator, and the research.

Fenoulhet (2020) argues that translators are relational entities that are part of an assemblage. In that light, the act of translation is more than the transfer of meaning from one bounded language to another; it becomes something more fluid and dynamic. Moreover, in translation there is interplay between identity and subjectivity, the act of translation deterritorialises the translator, it troubles notions of a stable and fixed identity (Fenoulhet, 2020).

As I delved deeper into Educators' past, present and future narratives and engaged more deeply with the ongoing crises, the quotes found a changed translator, a differently territorialised one where the words found different resonances at every encounter. Each act of translation reflected a temporary fixing of identity. This realisation moved the emphasis from the usual goal of translation of finding a meaningful translation of a text to a focus on what the process of translation was doing to the research data and for the research project at large. This shift highlighted the important role relationality played in the act of translation. As a translator, I had the 'pleasure of dwelling in others' language' (Fenoulhet, 2020:499) and in a rich assemblage of narratives (Tamboukou, 2020C). This shift also highlighted the importance of delving deeper into the meaning of an auto-ethnographic approach within a posthuman epistemology. This exploration is included in chapter five.

Tamboukou speaks of 'narrative assemblages, within which stories are told, listened to, and analysed' (Tamboukou, 2020C: 3). She conceived narrative rhythm analysis as a method that:

[B]rings to the fore the catalytic role of the story space/time/matter not just on the level of context but also on the embodied listening, thus opening up new analytical paths and insights (Tamboukou, 2020C: 4).

And opening new analytical paths and insights they did. The act of translation found a differently

situated translator in space/time/matter that elicited slightly different words not only to convey meaning but also to spark an act of solidarity with the multitude of narratives within narratives. Thus, the act of translation in addition to an assemblage of narratives highlighted the nature of a translator as relational and that was significant for this research and is explored in depth in chapter five.

Researcher in-becoming

As a result of this engagement with data analysis, I became what Ringrose and Zarabadi (2018) called 'a fractured I or eye, the organ that becomes different in each encounter' (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:211). This researcher-in-becoming was ignited by a spark of recognition in the data about injustice, about what mattered to Educators that was left unsaid or said differently. I was ignited by 'a desire to understand some sort of complex relationship' that explained temporal and contextual notions of agency (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:215). In this case, thematic data analysis provided more than patterned responses associated with notions of agency, it prompted the need to account for the differences that emerged from the data, and hence the need to engage with the data diffractively.

Diffractive analysis: Commonalities are important but so are differences

Diffractive analysis is an alternative methodology to critical reflection. Instead of uncovering cause-and-effect, patterns, or categories; diffraction maps entanglements and considers 'interference patterns,' which means engagement with matter and discourse in a flat ontology (Smartt-Gullion, 2018:123). In a diffractive analysis the goal is to show how all the elements are important without putting them in opposition. In this research, for instance, it allowed the exploration of notions of agency beyond 'humanist, neoliberal concepts of personhood and empowerment and how gender, ethnicity, and poverty intersect in the experience of injustice' (Simmons, 2018:496).

A diffractive approach moves away from the position where data are 'treated as passive matter to be interpreted by an ontologically separate researcher in a self-reflexive way'; instead, the aim is 'to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities presented in the data' (Taguchi, 2012:267-268). Thus, diffraction as a methodology is about mapping how differences get made in intra-actions and the effects that differences make, what is excluded and how these differences matter (Barad, 2007). In short, thinking diffractively means 'thinking as a process of co-constitution,

investigating the entanglement of ideas and other materialities in ways that reflexive methodologies do not' (Taguchi, 2012:271).

Moreover, a diffractive approach focuses on becoming not being. Diffraction, unlike reflection or refraction, creates something new (Barad, 2007), it illuminates the difference within (dark within light within dark)' (Barad, 2014:176 as cited in Smartt-Gullion, 2018: 118). Diffraction is 'a matter of patterning attuned to difference' (Barad, 2017: 65). Crucially for this research, a diffractive methodology encourages us to ask and focus on what something does instead of what it means (Smartt-Gullion, 2018; Gale, 2023); to explore the tracings of a process rather than the cause and effect; to focus on different units of analysis, not people or groups, but phenomena (intra-actions) (Barad, 2007); and appreciate nonlinearity and complexity.

Finally, considering that a diffractive methodology 'is a matter of reading insights through rather than against each other to make evident the always ready entanglement of specific ideas in their materiality' (Barad, 2017, 64-65), this approach also inspired the use of auto-ethnographic anchors.

Auto-ethnographic anchors: the role of stories in engaging with the data and the research process

Paradoxically, the deeper I delved into post-humanist and diffractive literature, the more confident I became in using auto-ethnographic data to engage with the research process. Stories became part of an assemblage, no longer just personal, anthropocentric, discourse-bound, vibrant memories. Furthermore, I became an active participant in the assemblages that I was researching (Smartt-Gullion, 2018). This realisation had methodological implications, as personal stories became important tools that facilitated the research process.

First, most of the stories used in preambles were dormant seeds and memories that haunted me for years and germinated with this research. They were stories and encounters that glowed quietly but consistently throughout the years, they niggled me subtly. Somehow, they changed internal conversations but had remained hidden and untold. As the research unfolded and the writing process began, the stories simultaneously propelled and grounded me. I used personal stories to read insights through the theoretical concepts I was using. I called them anchoring stories because they grounded me on specific material conditions that mattered to me as well as others who mattered to me. They

anchored me on specific contexts and temporalities while I explored abstract theoretical concepts to create little ruptures that perhaps, hopefully, could lead to structural changes' that might, one day, be meaningful for women experiencing displacement and living in fragile contexts (Ringrose and Zarabadi, 2018).

Anchoring stories were a tool not to describe but to engage with differences and to 'recognise that there is no objectivity because researchers (and even academic disciplines themselves) are beings in the world' (Smartt-Gullion, 2018: 122). In that vein, Barad argues that 'we do not uncover pre-existing things as they exist frozen in time, rather we learn about phenomena about the specific material configurations of the world's becoming' (Barad, 2007:90– 91). Which means that:

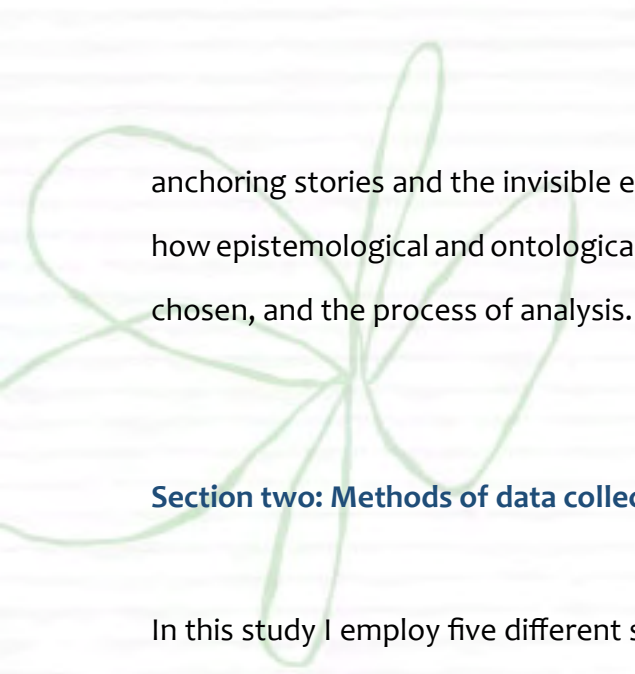
Rather than spending time describing people and the things they do— we shift to an optics of diffraction— we ask questions about how assemblages work and how boundaries are configured and reconfigured (Smartt-Gullion, 2018:121).

The point of using stories went beyond making analogies or offering auto-ethnographic contextual insights, they were a tool to 'explore patterns of difference to trouble binaries such as macro/micro, nature/culture, centre/periphery, and general/specific' (Barad, 2017, 64-65).

A second methodological implication was the use of letters to communicate with my supervisors in the later stages of the research. These letters were also used as preambles in early drafts and aimed to create an embedded informal space for communication within the thesis. This approach was helpful because it bridged informal and formal communications as the letters included questions and requests for opinions but also out-loud-thoughts that I would not have included in emails or document comments, either because of lack of time or confidence. This informal epistolary communication opened an intermediary space between formality and informality that grounded and comforted me.

Although embedded in the methodological approach, the letters were not included in the final thesis despite serving a critical role in the writing process. While the letters remain unseen in this final work, they were a vital undercurrent to keep communications, writing, and thinking flowing, they were crucial in making this final written work possible, and as such worthy of acknowledgement.

In essence, beyond valuing narratives as a feminist approach, it is important to acknowledge that the



anchoring stories and the invisible epistolary communication used in this study provided insights into how epistemological and ontological stances influence the conception of the research, the approaches chosen, and the process of analysis.

Section two: Methods of data collection

In this study I employ five different sources of data collection: document analysis of Law 1257 (2008); preliminary observation of virtual HRE sessions; personal communications (emails and WhatsApp texts); twelve interviews with Educators, and auto-ethnography. Considering the multiple methodological lenses and the travel restrictions placed by the Covid-19 pandemic, these methods fit the research questions for several reasons. As an empirical study troubling normative notions of empowerment and exploring alternative conceptions of agency, this research focuses on Educators' mundane experiences of engaging with human rights and legal discourses. As a result, observation of HRE sessions gave insights into people's perceptions of agency, the challenges they encounter in pursuing it and the practices Educators use to render people agentic. Observations also provided opportunities to identify clashes between formal (legal and human rights discourses) and informal (traditional) understandings of agency. Document analysis of Law 1257 (2008) provided contextual background that explained the type of discourses embedded in designing and delivering HRE programmes. It provided contextual background on aims of HRE programmes, targets, pedagogy, desired impact, and length of programmes. This contextual information was useful in designing and conducting interviews. Interviews were helpful in exploring subjective experiences of learning about universal concepts of human rights in order to shed light on perceptions of agency and empowerment, and how they learn, interpret, construct, and transform knowledge of human rights. An auto-ethnographic element was important in explaining the ontological and epistemological predispositions that influenced the research.

Document analysis of Colombian Law 1257 (2008)

Although in chapter two I provide contextual background of Law 1257 (2008), the focus in this section is on the process of analysis. Originally, document analysis of relevant texts informing HRE was

envisioned as a critical approach to provide contextual background of HRE programmes. However, I decided to focus on Law 1257 (2008) as it emerged from the interviews as a fundamental legal instrument informing Educators' sense of agency.

Educators talked at length and in-depth about Law 1257 (2008) and highlighted this legal instrument as a key learning and strategic tool to generate agency. Using the original Spanish version of this legal instrument and considering the triple-epistemological lens of this study, document analysis focused on how the law portrayed protection measures (FMS lens), the extent to which notions of empowerment were associated with human rights and legal discourses (HRE lens), and conceptions of victimhood and/or agency (FVM lens).

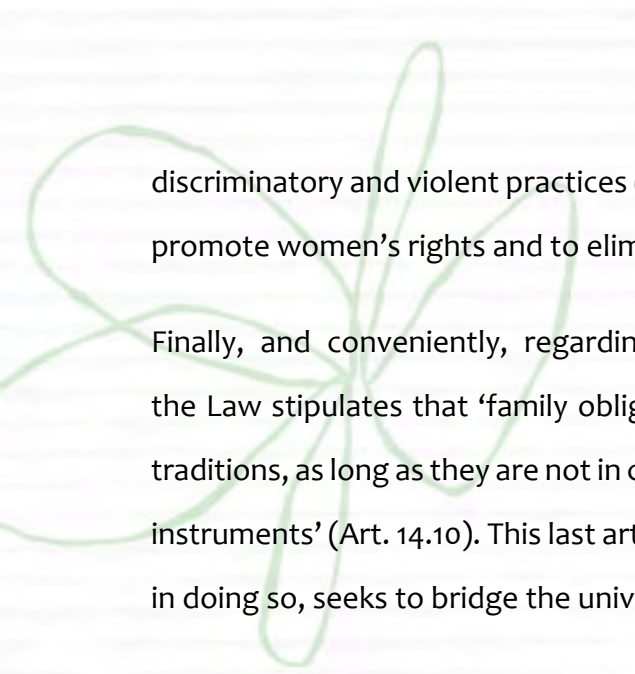
In Colombia, Law 1257 (2008) aims to sensitise, prevent, and sanction any form of violence against women. Art. 1 sets up the objectives of guaranteeing women the ability to live a life free of violence both in public and private spheres, to exercise rights and access legal systems for protection. Art. 2 is fundamental in providing a comprehensive definition of what violence against women entails:

Violence against women is understood as any action or omission that causes death, injury, physical, sexual, psychological, financial or patrimonial damage because of their condition of being a woman; as well as threats of said actions, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of freedom, either in the private or public space.

(Art. 2, Law 1257, 2008) (Translated by the researcher)

In my view, Art. 2 introduced two fundamental aspects about violence, namely the violence that occurs in private and public spheres, and, importantly, that it could be conceptualised as acts of omission and aggression. As discussed in chapter two, recognition of women's reproductive rights is an important step in a cultural context where women tend to be valued by their reproductive capacity and their role as mothers.

In terms of education, Chapter 4 includes detailed descriptions of all the measures needed to educate about and prevent violence against women at national and local levels. The Law is comprehensive in detailing the tasks necessary to achieve these aims. For example, some key tasks include the provision of training to civil workers; the implementation of measures to encourage social sanction to denounce



discriminatory and violent practices (Art. 9.5); to acknowledge that the family has the responsibility to promote women's rights and to eliminate violence and inequality for women (Art. 14).

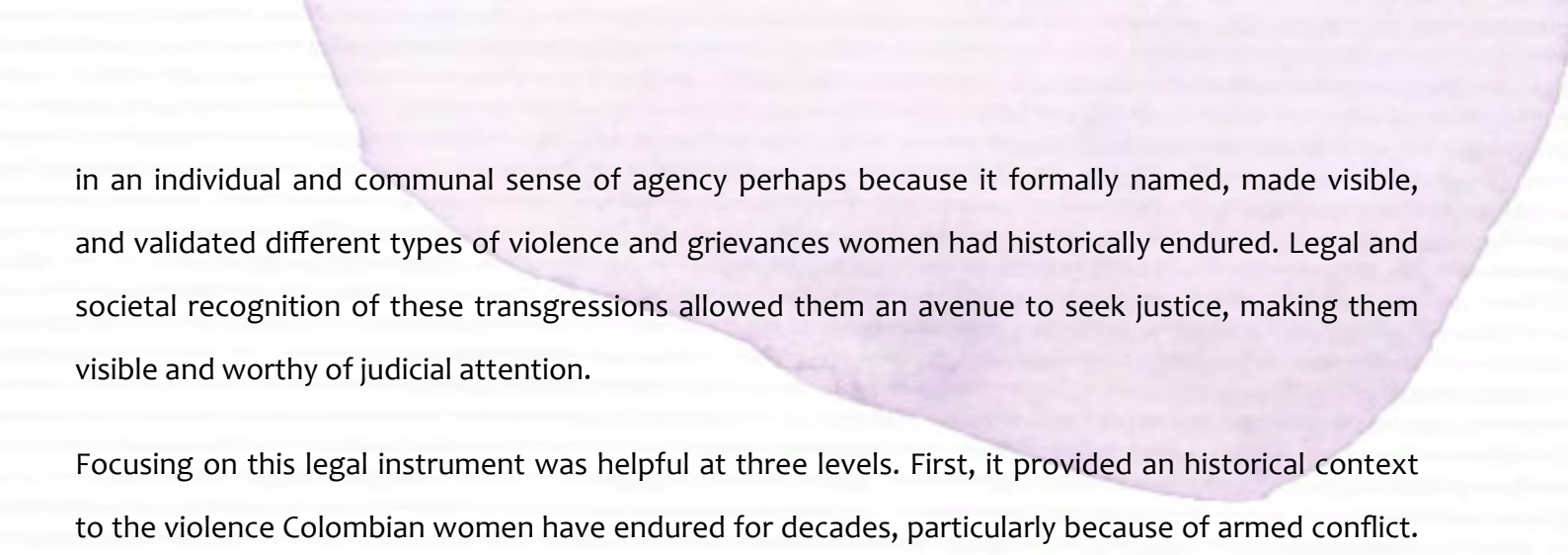
Finally, and conveniently, regarding indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other ethnic communities, the Law stipulates that 'family obligations will be established in accordance with their cultures and traditions, as long as they are not in contradiction with the constitution and international human rights instruments' (Art. 14.10). This last article lays at the intersection of relativist and universalist views and in doing so, seeks to bridge the universal with the particular.

Acknowledging the complexity and challenges of exercising rights in a multi-cultural society and in a context of protracted violence and displacement, Law 1258 (2008) is an important step in articulating what constitutes violence against women and providing safeguarding measures for victims. In that light, the Law details all the protection measures available to victims of sexual violence and discrimination, including provisions to support illiterate women pursuing justice, but excluding indigenous communities where the power to oversee these issues was given to indigenous leaders (Art. 16).

In my view, important points from Law 1257 (2008) relevant in contextualising the aims of this research include: an explicit recognition that women's rights are human rights; an acknowledgement that society has a responsibility in eradicating violence against women; providing measures to facilitate access to justice; a recognition of private and public violence; and a more severe punishment for femicide. Tellingly, and sadly, all signatories of the law were men.

On paper, Law 1257 (2008) is a robust source of agency as it offers a comprehensive and somewhat clear avenue to access justice. In theory, this instrument provides the legal and conceptual tools to trigger a cultural shift regarding conceptions of violence and a nuanced understating of women's rights. Leaving aside its efficacy on the ground, it is also an important public acknowledgement and articulation of the systemic violence women endure, both at home and in the public sphere, because of their condition of being women.

This might explain its significance amongst Educators and their desire to engage with this Law particularly in dissemination efforts. Engagement on the ground with legislation played a crucial part



in an individual and communal sense of agency perhaps because it formally named, made visible, and validated different types of violence and grievances women had historically endured. Legal and societal recognition of these transgressions allowed them an avenue to seek justice, making them visible and worthy of judicial attention.

Focusing on this legal instrument was helpful at three levels. First, it provided an historical context to the violence Colombian women have endured for decades, particularly because of armed conflict. Second, it offered a contextual legal and cultural understanding of how notions of vulnerability (as defined by a status of victimhood) and empowerment (as defined by retributions) are understood and promoted. Finally, contrasting the content of the law with Educators' understandings of it shed light on nuanced understanding of the role this legal instrument played in (dis)empowering women and shaping their notions of agency.

Early observation of virtual HRE sessions

Because of Covid-19 travel restrictions and a concurrent political crisis, observations were conducted solely online and were limited to the early stages of the research. Early in the pandemic, using Zoom and/or Teams applications, I conducted three virtual observations organised, led, and delivered by Educators. The sessions included a session on femicide to a mixed group of adults, and two workshops on empowerment delivered to a mixed group of young adults. Attendees were informed at the beginning that I would be observing the sessions for the purposes of research. I was invited to introduce myself, provide information and answer questions. As I joined the sessions, I had my camera on, so participants could see me as well as hear me. I also used the chat box to greet everyone. All these conversations were conducted in Spanish, of which I am native speaker.

The sessions I attended encouraged participants to answer questions or reflect privately. I did not take part in the discussions; I only noted relevant experiences in relation to perceptions of or allusions to empowerment and vulnerability. In fact, using the term 'observation' for this phase of data collection is a misnomer as most participants had the camera off and I was mostly listening to or reading their

comments in the chat box. Nevertheless, although these preliminary observations were limited, they were informative, insightful, and invaluable in informing fieldwork²⁵, methodological changes and ethical considerations as the pandemic evolved and a political crisis erupted.

As the pandemic unfolded and lingered, the sessions were cancelled because of technical, financial, and personal difficulties. Organisers explained that most of the people they worked with had been confined at home with limited or no income. Organisers found out that people struggled to join the sessions because they lacked the technical knowledge to download the required applications, the confidence to engage virtually, and the financial means to pay for Internet connection. These technical and financial restrictions alienated many participants from taking part in the online sessions and eventually organisers decided to suspend all virtual delivery. Educators were also overwhelmed as they were experiencing precarious conditions because of lack of income and experiencing a high demand of requests to support participants in crisis.

Despite the challenges described above, an unexpected advantage of conducting virtual observations was the ability to access people living in remote, secluded rural areas in Colombia that were not considered in the original research design. Online sessions provided a valuable and rare opportunity to connect with people living in areas of the country who for decades have been considered off limits because of the armed conflict.

Micro-communications: personal communication with Educators

Because of the compounded crisis, e-mails, and texts communications (via the free application WhatsApp, which all participants had access to) became a crucial source of information. Access to this free application became a research lifeline during the pandemic and subsequent political crisis. An additional ethics amendment was required and approved to use these texts and email communications as sources of data collection. All Educators retrospectively signed an additional consent form to give permission to use these private communications as research data.

These micro-communications were succinct yet eloquent during times of unprecedented crisis. As

such, they were vital in guiding methodological changes and navigating the ethics of conducting research in such a fragile context. Engaging with potential participants in this way presented both challenges and possibilities. For instance, approaching potential participants via this medium implied a low level of response because unsolicited texts from an unknown number are likely to be perceived as suspicious or a nuisance. On the other hand, considering the FVM approach of this research, this type of communication presented an important assemblage of the research, as tangible and intangible objects (smartphones, internet connection) became conduits of temporal and contextual notions of agency. Under this lens, communications transcended the written text to include visual and auditory information that were eloquent and informative and that might have been dismissed otherwise. Below in the ethics section, I expand on the ethical dimensions of these communications and how they informed a relational approach to ethics in moments of crisis.

Interviews

I conducted twelve interviews with human rights Educators working in Colombia. The twelve Educators who took part in the research were recruited through a snowball sample from personal contacts. These Educators were community organisers, human rights trainers, defenders, or all of the above. Educators delivered diverse HRE programmes to other women, men, children, and young people. Throughout the thesis I refer to these research participants as Educators and wherever necessary I made the distinction between Educators and women learners (to whom Educators delivered the training but who were not part of this research). I provide a brief description of Educators' background and interests further below.

The interviews explored Educators' views on key contextual issues of HRE; the methods, sources, and pedagogical approaches informing the content and delivery of HRE programmes; their experiences of how human rights and legal knowledge might be transformed and applied in their day-to-day lives; and their perceptions of empowerment and vulnerability.

25 Although the word is used throughout the thesis, it is important to acknowledge the contested nature of the word as it has 'been used to 'otherise' non-Euro-Western populations in the majority regions of the world' (Oyinloye, 2021:18).



A note on pseudonyms: The soul of flowers

*'Bloom — is Result — to meet a Flower
And casually glance
Would cause one scarcely to suspect
The minor Circumstance
Assisting in the Bright Affair
So intricately done
Then offered as a Butterfly
To the Meridian —
To pack the Bud — oppose the Worm —
Obtain its right of Dew —
Adjust the Heat — elude the Wind —
Escape the prowling Bee
Great Nature not to disappoint
Awaiting Her that Day —
To be a Flower, is profound
Responsibility'*

Bloom by Emily Dickinson

Anonymity is a fundamental principle of research ethics, and therefore giving participants pseudonyms is a common practice. Although, in future I will involve participants in choosing their own pseudonyms, this time I opted to choose the name of flowers as code names for a few reasons. Flowers play a fundamental part in Colombia's economy through the flower industry and are an omnipresent symbol of beauty and comfort. They are diverse in size, colour, needs, and represent hope for better things to come. Maria Popova tells us that 'two-hundred million years ago there were plants but no flowers, but in the cretaceous period flowers appeared; and today, without flowers, there would be no us'. Flowers emerged not just as a 'pretty object to be admired but as a ravishing system of aliveness – a kind of silent symphony of interconnected resilience' (Popova, 2022, n/p). They have developed and adopted varied techniques of survival and dispersal and provide seeds that nourish other beings (Solnit, 2021).

Therefore, flowers not only conjure relationality but are also 'emblems of ephemerality and mortality...they remind us that blooming and decaying, life and death, are inseparable' (Solnit, 2021:16). Interestingly, Solnit also notes that flowers often represent the feminine and as such, they are 'dismissed as ornamental and inconsequential, but flowers are powerful' as they are crucial to the survival of many beings (Solnit, 2021:17). Educators' experiences of 'joy, sorrow and loss, hope, victory, and pleasure' echo what flowers are used to express (Solnit, 2021:16). It is this capacity to represent

life itself, as fertility, mortality, and transience that makes Colombia's flower industry at once a source of empowerment and exploitation (Solnit, 2021). Hence, the choice of flowers as pseudonyms.

With this in mind, below I provide a brief description of Educators' background and interests. They are twelve women of different ages, professional and ethnic backgrounds and located in rural and urban areas in Colombia. They play different roles in their organisations, but most of them deliver human rights and gender equality training to a wide range of women and other audiences.

Camelia is in her mid-thirties and works as a dentist in a major city. Her mother was involved in creating a women's support group, in which Camelia has been involved since she was a teenager. She delivers gender and health trainings to women; and as a dentist, helps women in need of urgent dental work.

Sol is a statistician and lives in a major urban area. She is Camelia's younger sister and also volunteers for the same organisation delivering wellbeing and self-esteem training courses to women.

Alhelí is a retired teacher with a long history of community engagement and is also a women's rights activist. She is Camelia's and Sol's mother and the original founder of the organisation for which they work. The organisation works in rural and urban areas and in collaboration with a wide range of other organisations nationwide.

Daisy is an Afro-Colombian older woman and a teacher who lives in an urban area. She works with an organisation that focuses on empowering young Afro-Colombians in urban and rural areas by providing support and access to diverse training. Daisy has a long history as a community organiser and educator.

Magnolia is a human rights defender who lives in a major city. Throughout her life, she has experienced multiple episodes of forced displacement and sexual violence. Her work focuses on supporting women victims of sexual violence and participating actively in strengthening policies of protection. She has advised the government regarding gender issues.

Lily is a young Afro-Colombian woman who lives in a remote rural area. She is halfway through her social sciences studies. She leads a local entrepreneurial initiative that aims to empower Afro- women and men by increasing opportunities to generate their own income. Her work also focuses on empowering Afro-Colombian people to know and embrace their cultural identity.

Azalea also identifies as an Afro-Colombian woman and lives in a major city. She works with a local organisation supporting Afro-women who have experienced displacement, violence, and discrimination. She studied communication and political sciences. Her work has a strong focus on supporting and strengthening Afro-Colombian women's wellbeing, rights, and cultural identity. She has experience in engaging with government initiatives of inclusion.

Jasmin is a Union leader and organiser in a major city. She works as a cleaner in a local university. She has a long history of community engagement and supporting women's rights. As the leader of the Union's gender unit, she organises and delivers gender trainings, workshops, and talks, inside and outside the university campus.

Rosa is an anthropologist and works for a governmental institution that aims to support people who have experienced sexual violence because of the armed conflict. She was raised by a single, strong, left-leaning, unionist mother who believed in the power of education and left a strong influence in her life. She has a long history of working for governmental and nongovernmental institutions and advising the government in peace processes.

Margarita lives in an isolated rural area and has a long history of community engagement at grass roots and institutional levels. She works with a local women's collective that seeks to empower women politically, economically, and socially. She also works with men and young people as part of the empowerment process.

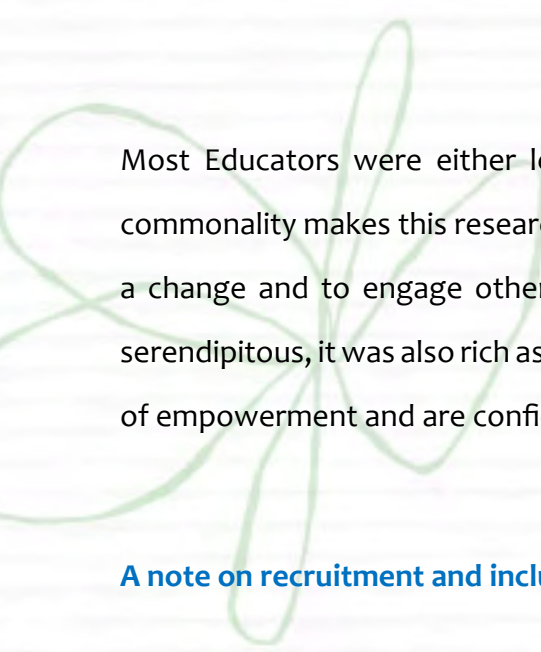
Iris studied journalism and was a self-described nomad. She works and lives in a remote rural area in Colombia that had been isolated from the rest of the country because of the armed conflict. She founded an organisation that works with young people in rural areas to support their right to education and to live free of violence (including intra-family and sexual violence).

Violeta is also a journalist and co-founder with Iris of the organisation for which both work. Both Iris and Violeta have extensive experience delivering gender trainings commissioned by UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations.

Table 1 includes a summary of Educators' backgrounds.

Table 1. Educators' Background

	Participant	Role	Location/ Focus
1	Camelia	Community Organiser + Dentist	Urban/ gender & health/mixed audience
2	Sol	Community Organiser + Statistician + Entrepreneur	Urban/ gender & financial/mixed audience
3	Alhelí	Human rights Educators + Community Organiser + Teacher	Urban-rural/gender & empowerment/ mixed audience
4	Daisy	Teacher + Community Organiser	Urban/Rural + gender + youth + mixed audience
5	Magnolia	Human Rights Defender	Urban + Human Rights and Legal Education
6	Lily	Community Organiser + Human Rights Educator	Rural + gender/empowerment/ entrepreneurship + Mixed audience
7	Azalea	Community Organiser + Political Scientist	Urban-rural/gender & ethnicity/women only
8	Jasmin	Community & Union Organiser	Urban-rural/gender/ mixed audience
9	Rosa	Anthropologist + Government Official	Urban/rural + HRE + Access to Justice + Mixed Audience
10	Margarita	Community Organiser	Rural + Gender + Mixed audience
11	Iris	Human Rights Educator + Journalist	Rural/mixed youth audience
12	Violeta	Human Rights Educator + Journalist	Rural/mixed youth audience



Most Educators were either leaders in their communities or in the organisations they led. This commonality makes this research sample homogenous in that these women are attempting to make a change and to engage other women who they deemed vulnerable. Although the sample was serendipitous, it was also rich as Educators have valuable experiences in engaging with long processes of empowerment and are confident and critical of the development of the HRE and legal systems.

A note on recruitment and inclusivity

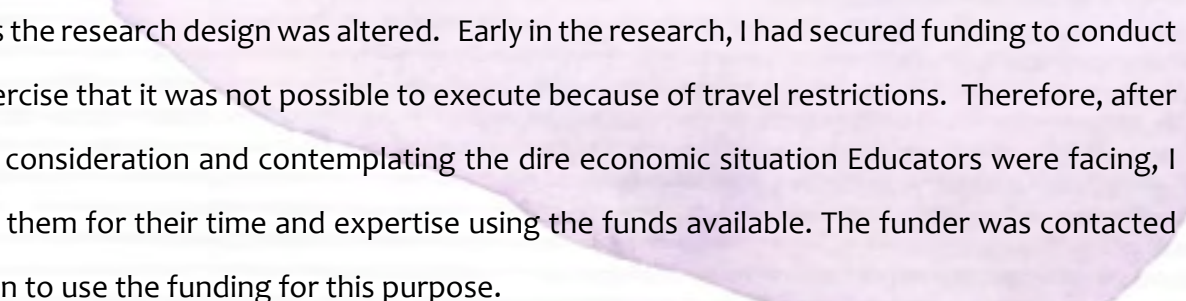
There are three methodological and ethical aspects of note regarding recruitment in the fragile context of this research. First, the advantages and disadvantages of recruiting participants via mobile texts. Second the advantages and disadvantages of native knowledge in recruiting participants. Third, ethical considerations in navigating financial remunerations of interviews in a fragile context.

A key issue with recruiting participants via mobile texts was of inclusion. Preliminary conversations with existing contacts revealed that most of the women with whom they worked were familiar with Zoom and WhatsApp applications. This accessibility was fundamental during recruitment and fieldwork. However, although conducting fieldwork online had the welcome advantage of including women beyond the three initial cities/sites considered, it also meant that women with no access to smart phones, internet connection, or knowledge of or access to the applications mentioned above were excluded from this research.

Moreover, those who were excluded were likely to be experiencing compounded isolation as social gatherings were restricted and HRE training was delivered online only. In future, designating a budget to pay a local research assistant to organise and facilitate recruitment and cover financial expenses related to access to communications would be a feasible approach to overcome this challenge.

Second, as a native Colombian, cultural and language knowledge was fundamental in facilitating communication and recruitment. This 'native' knowledge played a pivotal role in micro-communications in terms of recruitment. Knowledge, understanding, and use of spoken and unspoken cultural references were crucial in gaining people's trust quickly.

Third, financial remunerations for interviews were not originally considered but were adopted later in



the project as the research design was altered. Early in the research, I had secured funding to conduct a scoping exercise that it was not possible to execute because of travel restrictions. Therefore, after much ethical consideration and contemplating the dire economic situation Educators were facing, I opted to pay them for their time and expertise using the funds available. The funder was contacted for permission to use the funding for this purpose.

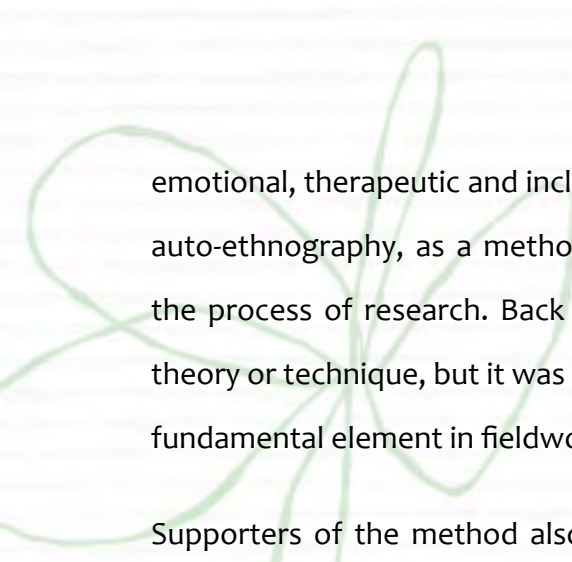
It is important to note, that when I first contacted and recruited Educators, there was no mention of any financial incentive to take part, and yet they all generously volunteered to help, despite the difficult circumstances in which they were operating. Participants were paid £40 each for a two-hour long interview. Only one person declined payment. Eleven women were interviewed via Zoom and WhatsApp, and one submitted written responses to the interview questions.

Auto-ethnography

In chapter five, I offer an exploration of what constitutes auto-ethnography as a method in a study underpinned by FVM and diffractive epistemologies. However, before embarking on that exploration, here I consider some of the traditional critiques to the method and justify the reasons for overriding them in this project.

In essence, critics find the method weak in terms of rigour and validity. In terms of rigour, auto-ethnography is critiqued for being too artful, too emotional, and inexact. Critics also question the quality of the data as the length of fieldwork is not justified rigorously, and personal data is seen as biased (Ellis *et al.*, 2011). Those highlighting lack of rigour believe auto-ethnography lacks objectivity as it 'integrates the personal with the academic' (Chang, 2008; Denshire, 2014). It is also believed to be ethically weak in terms of consent and confidentiality (Delamont, 2009; Tolich 2010), and to slip into 'autoethnography-as-therapy that produces an "(over) excited subjectivity"' (Gannon, 2006: 276).

In response to these critiques, defenders of auto-ethnography point out that these evaluations 'position arts and science at odds with each other, a condition auto ethnography seeks to correct' (Ellis *et al.*, 2011:283). In line with this project's FVM approach, the disruption of the binary between science and art is appealing. I agree with the idea that indeed 'research can be rigorous, theoretical, analytical,



emotional, therapeutic and inclusive of personal and social phenomena' (Ellis et al., 2011:283). In fact, auto-ethnography, as a method, has developed and has the capacity to change how we perceive the process of research. Back in 1978, auto-ethnography 'was not considered a research method, theory or technique, but it was acknowledged that it coloured all these aspects of research and was a fundamental element in fieldwork' (Hayano, 1978:99).

Supporters of the method also believe that auto-ethnography is in fact a response to decolonise ethnographic practices that:

[E]rase the subjectivity of the researcher while granting him/her absolute authority for representing the "other" of the research. In auto-ethnography, the subject and object of research collapse into the body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time (Gannon, 2006:275).

To continue the evolution and the decolonising efforts of the method, it is crucial to engage with alternative ways that challenge positivistic binary positioning and offer re-conceptualisations of *Self* beyond individualistic notions of being. An example of this alternative conceptualisation is offered by USA African American scholars Dillard and Bell (2011) in their auto-ethnographic work tracking their roots to Africa. In their work they advocate for the need to have an (auto)ethnographic method that:

Truly honours the complexities of the indigenous and the "modern" that [they] were experiencing in their bodies, their minds and spirits.

Something dialogical and multiple.

Both spiritual and sacred. Both historical and cultural. Something that honoured fluidity, of time and space, of the material and spiritual world. Mostly, we needed an ethnography that acknowledged both the joy and pain of location, dislocation and the transformation of both our societies. African women are not stories of a singular self, but are stories of we, collective spirits deeply embedded in African women's wisdom and indigenous knowledge (Dillard & Bell, 2011:343).

This view of ethnography moves from the (individual) auto to the (group) auto; it recognises collective, temporal, complex, shifting, and spatial elements of identities and stories. It acknowledges that in

certain contexts, the collective self is more relevant than the individual self. This position recognises the plurality of truths, it

[P]ushes us from notions that there is a singular cultural perspective revealing a set of irrefutable truths and generates useful ways of creating knowledge about individuals, collective agency and the interior language of emotional vulnerability (Ettorre, 2017:1).

Nevertheless, despite disrupting entrenched positivist binaries (individual/group; modern/indigenous; objective/subjective; collective versus individual agency), these approaches to decolonising auto-ethnography are still firmly centred on the human. Thus, in the following chapter, I engage with auto-ethnographic data through FVM and diffractive approaches to move the spotlight from human agency to agency and relations across matter; to disrupt binary thinking (insider/outsider; empowered/vulnerable; displaced/settled), and to offer alternative ontological conceptualisations of the shifting, porous shapes we inhabit.

Acknowledging that although conventional features of auto-ethnography as a method supported the aims of this research and indeed contributed to engagements with data, the following chapter engages with alternative explorations of auto-ethnography that disrupt ideas of identity and individuality, and value the role of the more-than-human in our understandings of agency. As such, chapter five, unconventionally, sits at the intersection of the methods and findings section. It is both an extension of the methods section and an exploration of an alternative take on auto-ethnography from a posthuman perspective.

Section three: Ethics

Disrupting notions of vulnerability through relational ethics

The ethical value of an action is what it brings out in a situation, for its transformation, how it breaks sociality open. Ethics is about how we inhabit uncertainty, together.

(Massumi 2015: 11)

It was the Spring of 2010, and the intensity of the heat deep in the Sahara was unlike anything I had experienced before. By then, I had lived in West and North Africa for four years and was familiar with, and respectful of the intensity of the sun. I was accustomed to the tingling sensation extreme heat triggered on my body and imagined it as a slow burn of the adipose tissue under the skin, even in the shade. Nevertheless, I was excited to be there, to meet the Saharawi people whose case in the International Court of justice I had read extensively about.

I arrived in Tindouf (the Algerian gateway to five Saharawi refugee camps) after months of preparation to conduct my master's thesis research. I was interested in finding out, from the camps' residents directly, their perceptions about the right to self-determination. In international law, this right is the cornerstone of the human rights regime, it is mentioned tirelessly in legal scholarship, but people's perceptions of the right are seldom discussed. I was intrigued that their plea was hardly spoken about outside legal circles, even though about 100,000 Saharawi have lived there in exile since 1976 because of a territorial dispute with Morocco.

Tindouf welcomed me with a heat slap on the face and a torrent of ethical challenges. One challenge specifically shook my foundations and triggered deep interest in ethical research practices with people deemed vulnerable. I arrived at a participant's tent to interview her with all the translated consent forms at the ready. I felt confident, I had given it so much thought and care. I complied with all

institutional requirements and more. I was prepared. Also, thankfully, the participant spoke Spanish, which gave the translator time to drink some tea, and I, no excuse to claim a misunderstanding.

I started to explain the consent process and form, but as soon as I spoke about her right to anonymity, she stopped me in my tracks. Oh no no no! She said. You include my name alright! In fact, let me spell it out for you! And she did, and I compliantly, took careful note of it. Undeterred, however, I tried to explain that anonymity intended to protect her from harm, to respect her right to confidentiality (which sounded ludicrous in a room full of people listening to the interview). She looked me fiercely in the eye and said: I have lost so much; I have lost so many. We have been tortured, starved, humiliated, abandoned. We are here because of what we believe is right. My story and my name are the only things I have left. Go and tell the world our story and our names. Tell them that we are here. To my shame, it took me years to honour her request to share her name, and when I first did, I did it outside academic circles.

I wanted to do better with this project, I did not want to plunder people's stories ever again (MacLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015; Oyinloye, 2021). After Tindouf, research practice taught me that ethical practices with those deemed vulnerable are likely to equate fragility with lack of agency, and consequently, either excluding or patronising participants in the name of protection. Colombia's complex context proved a fruitful setting to explore ethical notions of respect, protection, transparency, and vulnerability. This time, I was determined to investigate a) the extent to which meaningful ethical partnerships with participants were possible whilst respecting existing ethical protocols based on the 'do not harm' principle; b) what constituted ethical engagement with others in a context of protracted displacement and violence; and c) the extent to which understanding contextual perceptions of harm, respect, vulnerability could foster greater inclusion of participants in shaping the ethical terms of the research (Oyinloye, 2022; Hammersley & Traianou, 2014).

I embarked on this ethical exploration with research protocols that were informed by UK and international research ethics principles²⁶ of respect, privacy, autonomy, diversity of participants, confidentiality, and anonymity. Protocols that provide measures to address 'sensitive topics', and that

26 Ethics protocols for this research complied with BERA (British Educational Research Association) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition (2018). (Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>. [Accessed on 12.10.23]); and The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration – IASFM – [Code of Ethics](https://www.iasfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IASFM-Research-Code-of-Ethics-2018.pdf) (2018). Available at: <https://www.iasfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IASFM-Research-Code-of-Ethics-2018.pdf>. [Accessed on 16.10.23].

categorise participants in this research as vulnerable and in need of special protection. Thus, considering this project's interest in disrupting notions of empowerment, troubling notions of vulnerability was also deemed appropriate. Therefore, grounded on Educators' experiences, I explored with Educators what constituted harm, vulnerability, and sensitive topics; who should be deemed vulnerable and by whom; and what renders a person vulnerable in a context of compounded volatile fragility.

The root of good will: The birth of the do-not-harm principle

It is telling that the term vulnerability derives from the Latin *vulnus* meaning wound (Levine *et al.*, 2004). In research, the concept of vulnerability emerged from brutal abuse in biomedical research during WWII and the Tuskegee Syphilis study in the USA (Falb *et al.*, 2019) and underpins the 'do-not-harm' principle. As a result, Western ethical guidelines (the Nuremberg Code, 1947²⁷; The Declaration of Helsinki, 1964²⁸; the Belmont Report, 1978²⁹) were crafted to set standards in research to protect participants by including informed consent, preventing unintentional harm, and avoiding coercion of participants to take part in research (Falb *et al.*, 2019).

In the social sciences, the term vulnerability is pervasive yet highly contested. Vulnerability has been characterised as 'both universal and categorical, as enduring yet situational, as variable, occurrent, dispositional, pathogenic, layered, and more' (Hudson, 2018:26; Levine *et al.*, 2004; Levine, 2005). While some scholars recognise that vulnerability is an inherent characteristic of the human condition (Levine 2005; Hudson, 2018), within legal and ethical frameworks, vulnerability is often employed as a label for an individual who belongs to a population categorised as helpless, and as such deserving of special protection. Essentially, vulnerability implies susceptibility to exploitation or harm, inability to protect one's own interests, or lack of basic human rights (Hudson, 2018). The 'list of usual suspects' of vulnerability includes children, persons with mental or behavioural disorders, prisoners, homeless persons, and refugees (Luna & Vanderpoel, 2013:325 cited in Hudson, 2018).

Nevertheless, despite original intentions to protect and respect research participants, many scholars

find attributions of vulnerability flawed and problematic. For instance, Levine *et al.*, (2004) raise three main issues: a) the concept is too vague and universal and this broadness and nebulosity renders it meaningless; b) it stereotypes people and fails to note differences within groups (DeBruin 2001 cited in Levine, 2004:47); and c) it stigmatises people as victims who may in turn become subject to 'paternalistic protections premised on the assumption that the vulnerable are incapable of protecting themselves' (DeBruin, 2004 cited in Hudson, 2018:30). A point Educators highlighted in the interviews, and which I discuss later in the thesis.

Thus, to reconcile the conceptual challenge between the categorical and universal nature of vulnerability, scholars have focused on identifying what renders people vulnerable on the ground through the creation of taxonomies of vulnerability. For instance, Kipnis (2001) proposed a taxonomy of seven types of vulnerability that affect people's capacity to give informed consent (cognitive, juridic, deferential, medical, allocational, infrastructure, social). Although this taxonomy offers some useful distinctions, it is also problematic as it implies that everyone 'who fitted into any of those categories [is] vulnerable, and that everyone capable of unfettered consent [is] not' (Levine *et al.*, 2004:45-46).

In contexts of displacement, Rogers *et al.* (2012)'s taxonomy identifies and classifies sources of vulnerability and associated duties that exist towards those recognised as vulnerable. It includes three overlapping types of vulnerability: inherent, situational, and pathogenic. Inherent vulnerability arises from our corporeality, affective and social natures. Situational vulnerability is contextual, influenced by social, political, cultural factors. Pathogenic vulnerability arises from prejudice, persecution, injustice (Rogers *et al.*, 2012 cited in Hudson, 2018). It could also arise 'when well-intended protection policies either exacerbate existing or generate new vulnerabilities' (Meek *et al.*, 2013 cited in Hudson, 2018:32); a point that resonates with the fundamental premise of this research.

Against this backdrop and with the desire to practice otherwise (Manning, 2016, Oyinloye, 2021), I explored with Educators three main ethical aspects related to the 'do not harm' principle: notions of respect, transparency, and vulnerability. Moreover, an approach that moved beyond considerations

27 [The Nuremberg Code 1947](#)

28 [Declaration of Helsinki, 1964](#)

29 [The Belmont Report, 1978](#)

of what ethical dilemmas meant to what they did shed light on localised perceptions of beneficence or harm and the consequent impact these conceptions had on notions of consent, privacy, and protection (Fox et al., 2020).

The ethical landscape in Colombia 2020-2022: A crisis is a crisis is a crisis

Crises are to Colombia what rain is to England, an ever-present part of the landscape. Protracted displacement and cyclical violence are ubiquitous and effervescent ingredients for crises as demonstrated by the events that unfolded in the Spring of 2021.

Fieldwork for this research was scheduled to occur in May 2020- December 2021, exactly when the global Covid-19 pandemic shut down the world. Global data on the COVID-19 pandemic showed that, although the pandemic had a negative impact on everyone across borders, it had particularly negative impacts for marginalised people and those living in poverty and with underlying medical conditions (Cuesta & Pico, 2020). Moreover, in Colombia, displaced women were particularly vulnerable as they are likely to work in informal and low paid jobs, lack legal and social protections and are mainly responsible for unpaid care related work (Cuesta & Pico, 2020). Research also showed that, overall, the impacts of the pandemic were exacerbated for women ‘simply by virtue of their sex’ (Branicki, 2020:874). Therefore, considering the damaging impacts of the pandemic on the target population of this research and as new Covid-19 variants developed, fieldwork was postponed until conditions improved.

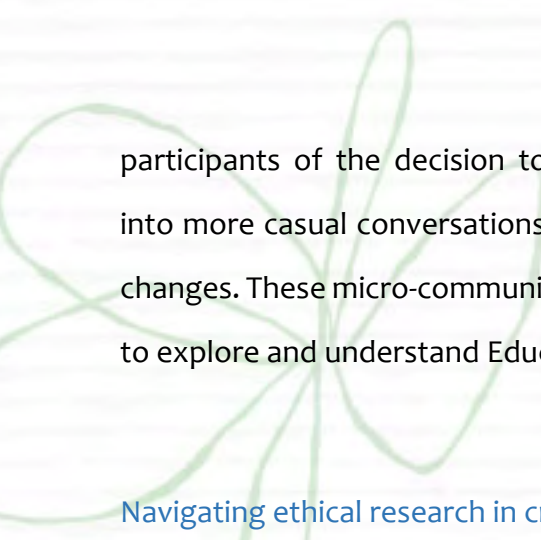
However, before the pandemic was over, another crisis emerged in early 2021. In an effort to manage the impact of the pandemic, the Colombian government introduced tax and health care reforms that triggered a severe political crisis (Rodriguez-Peña & Cabrera, 2021). People rose on mass across the country resulting in hundreds of people being murdered, disappeared, or jailed (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022). Those reforms would have seeded unrest in any year, but proposals to amend the health system during a pandemic caused uproar ([National World](#), 2021). The protests, termed as the longest and most destructive mass protests in recent history, lasted for over a month

and had rippling devastating effects. Human rights defenders picked up the pieces dealing with the aftermath of torture, forced disappearances, and the murdered (Hernandez & Marczak, 2021).

Against this backdrop of compounded violence and disease, I started a tentative dialogue with potential participants online as mentioned in the methods section above. This preliminary information-gathering exercise, to which I had ethical permission to conduct, was fundamental in bearing witness to the development of the crises and learning about the tragic personal and collective losses people were experiencing. In this context, ‘ethically important moments’ (EIM) (Gillemin & Gillam, 2004) became a crucial tool to navigate this complex ethical landscape. EIM are defined as small-scale issues (not necessarily ethical dilemmas) that arise from quotidian interactions. These moments emphasise ‘the difficult, often subtle and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research’ (Gillemin & Gillam, 2014:262). Importantly, engaging with EIM fostered reflexivity as an ethical notion (Gristy, 2015) which implies that a researcher has the willingness to acknowledge ethical dimensions of a situation; the aptitude to recognise them when they come into play, and the ability to think through ethical issues and respond appropriately (Gillemin & Gillam, 2014). In this project, EIM were initially signalled by intuitive discomfort and paralysing fear of causing harm to research participants but became a crucial tool that facilitated difficult conversations with potential participants during challenging times.

At that juncture, after deliberating³⁰ the options and consulting with key participants, I opted once again for postponing fieldwork on ethical grounds for several reasons. First, ongoing consent was an integral part of my approach to ethics and as the political crisis became more violent and protracted, Educators’ motivations to take part morphed and became irreconcilable with the purposes of the research. Educators had an urgent need to disseminate stories they perceived to be ignored by the mainstream media and expected the research to become an alternative medium of dissemination. Second, Educators were experiencing serious logistical (access to Internet connection), financial, and emotional challenges, and thus pursuing their participation in those circumstances was likely to cause additional emotional distress and harassment. Also, measures to provide emotional support, should participation in the research create distress, became unfeasible. To my surprise, after notifying potential

³⁰ The decision was informed by direct communications with key contacts, early observations, public information, data, and statistics (news, reports) and informal conversations with friends living in Colombia. In that way, my decisions were informed by a conglomeration of ‘small stories’ (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013:8).



participants of the decision to postpone the interviews, communications continued and evolved into more casual conversations that were invaluable in building trust and informing methodological changes. These micro-communications (which I detail further below) became a vital and eloquent tool to explore and understand Educators' notions of respect, transparency, and vulnerability.

Navigating ethical research in critical contexts: the role of relational ethics

From the outset, this project's ethical protocols categorised potential participants as highly vulnerable and in need of special protection measures. Consequently, a feminist understanding of crises and ethics was essential and informed the development of the ethics protocols. Branicki (2020) defines a feminist understanding of crisis as an awareness that crises are:

[M]ultiple, contextualised and made up of enduring and overlapping phenomena that are enmeshed and embedded within each other to a significant extent. Crises compound and confound each other within webs of relationships informed by care (880).

A relational approach to ethics (also known as ethics of care or feminist ethics) is critical of linear conceptions of ethics that are 'based on abstract principles' (Farrimond, 2013:16) and that 'tend to omit considerations of pre-existing structural disadvantages' (Branicki, 2020:873). Instead, a relational approach seeks to respond to need by taking 'care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone' (Gilligan, 1993 cited in Branicki, 2020:873). Additionally, and of relevance to this research, it also highlights the importance of 'reciprocal care and relational needs' which challenges neoliberal ideas of individualism (Branicki, 2020:87; De Waal, 2021). It also considers trust as an essential element of caring, 'because without openness about vulnerability and an empathetic quality of understanding towards others, connections are eroded' (Branicki, 2020:879).

All these aspects, in addition to EIM, were vital in informing this study's ethical approach and methodological changes. Considering the fragile context of the research setting, a relational approach to ethics was also fruitful in providing opportunities for Educators to contribute to the research as equals and making them responsible and active in the production of knowledge (Fox *et al.*, 2020).

Relational ethics tools are vital in navigating the 'ethical hyper-sensitivity' that ethical reflexivity can induce in researchers. It is a helpful approach to keep a balance between ethical awareness throughout the lifecycle of the research without over analysing 'every interaction for ethical aspects' (Farrimond, 2013:95), particularly when exploring notions of vulnerability, transparency, and respect.

A note on balancing ethics of care and delivering results: exploring alternative samples and focus

Considering the lingering global pandemic, the explosion of a political crisis, the need to act ethically and the urgency to deliver research results, I considered a radical change of the research focus. First, through an academic contact, I was introduced to a collective of exiled Colombian women living in Spain. The organisation had different branches in several Spanish cities and was politically and socially active in supporting women's rights and empowerment, both in Spain and Colombia. With the group leader, I explored the possibility of conducting focus groups and interviews with different members of the Collective, and later perhaps, a possible visit to observe their work in Spain. However, the opportunity never materialised as the key contact had limited time and pressing commitments. She also put me in touch with a similar organisation based in London, but they declined to take part in the research.

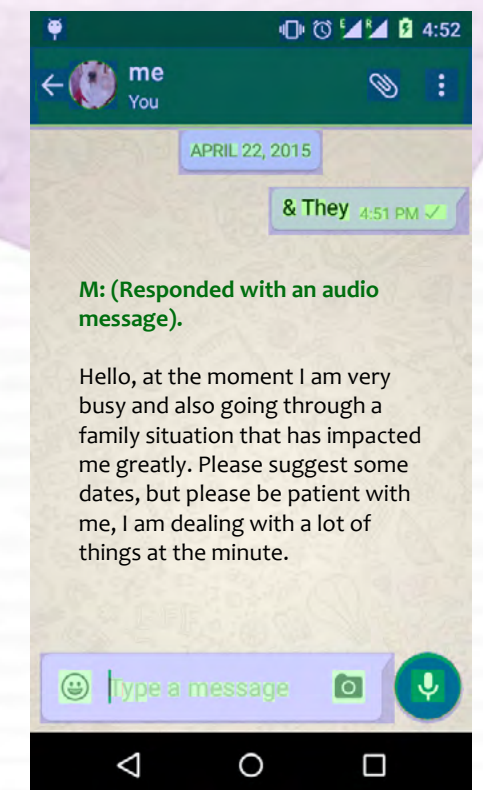
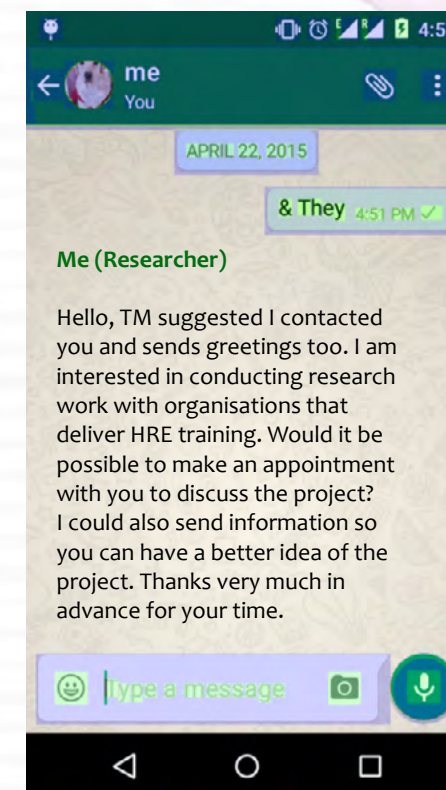
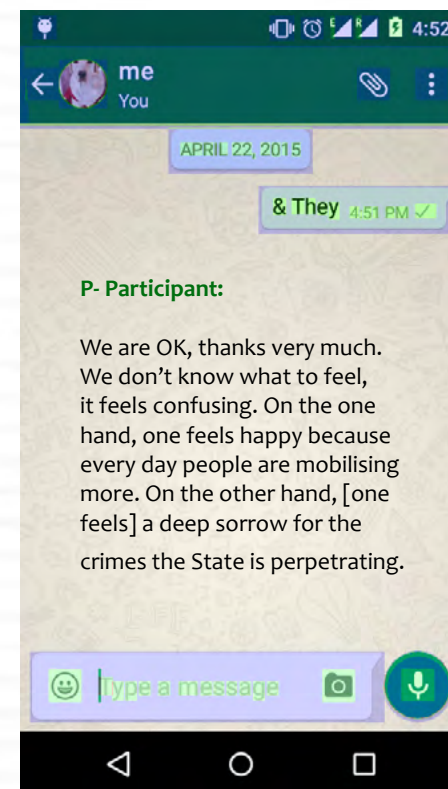
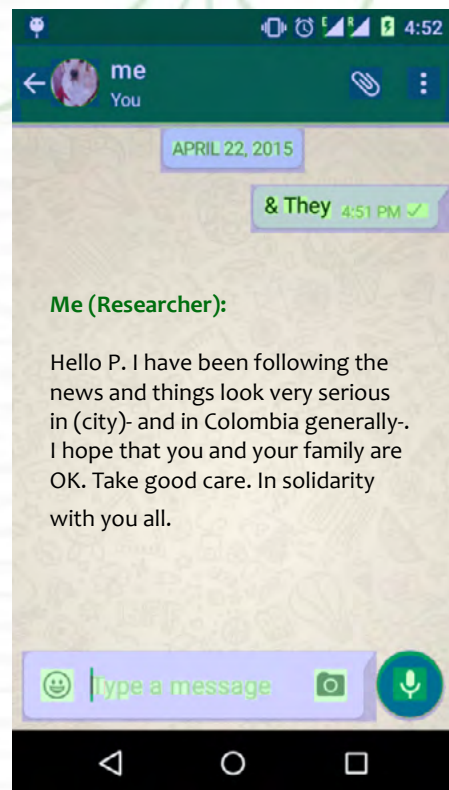
The second option was to conduct archival work with the [Living Refugee Archive \(LRA\)](#) in London. The LRA is a UK based archive that houses a collection of resources and artefacts related to refugees and forced migration. The LRA has a strong interest in engaging in research that explores issues of inclusion and exclusion related to archival materials, the dominant narratives in archives, and accessing the archive. However, this approach was not feasible because documents and artefacts of interest were only available in the library, which remained closed to the public at the time.

Although these efforts did not come to fruition, it is important to acknowledge them as part of an ethical process of care that accounted for the needs of both participants and researcher. This acknowledgement is also an important feminist value as it honours invisible, hidden efforts to conduct ethical research.

The power of micro-communications: Highlighting the opacity of notions of vulnerability and transparency

The opacity of vulnerability

WhatsApp messages with participants (original text in Spanish translated by the researcher)

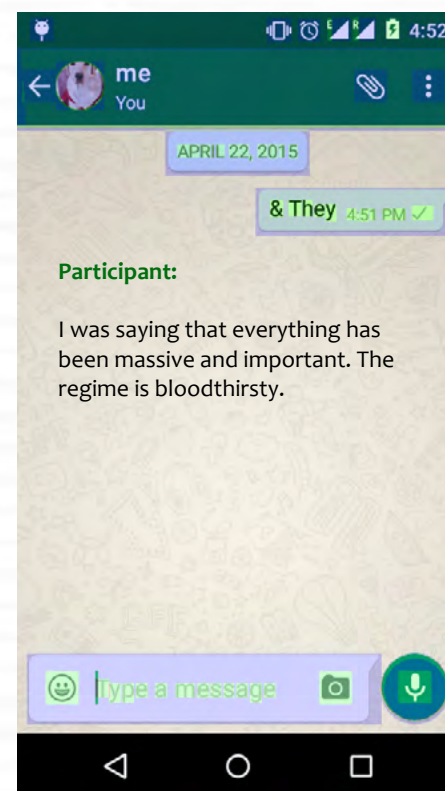
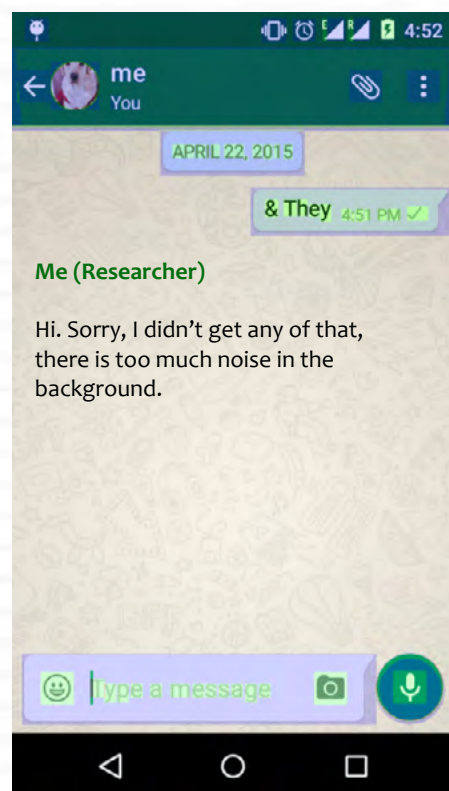


The complex ethical landscape in Colombia provided ideal opportunities to explore notions of vulnerability and transparency in research. Brief text communications like the ones depicted above were helpful throughout the different phases of research because they provided valuable insights into Educators' motivations to take part in the project, and their notions of vulnerability and transparency. I call these WhatsApp texts messages micro-communications as they were succinct but effective tools to recruit and communicate with participants.

During the recruitment process, these micro-communications needed to be clear, concise, and have the right tone and level of formality (not too formal, not too informal). The approach worked as most women answered the unsolicited texts immediately, and those who could not commit gave insights of their challenging circumstances:

In the exchange above, I was able to see that my reply to M remained unread for weeks. In this case, in the absence of a written response, her WhatsApp profile communicated the reason for her absence. Looking at her profile photograph, I inferred that there had been a death in her family. The profile picture and status included a black band and a sentence indicating mourning, which informed my respectful silence. As the crises became layered and prolonged, micro-communications became a powerful source of communication because although they tended to be frequent, and short, their written, visual, and auditory eloquence shed light on Educators' quotidian experiences and ethical positionings. In the example above, the visual dimension of the micro-communication was voicing the silence behind the absence of text, profile pictures communicated what Educators were experiencing in their day-to-day lives. As the research progressed, Educators continued to send frequent informal messages about their quotidian experiences and evolving perceptions of the crisis. These micro-communications also highlighted different and shifting perceptions of fragility and sensitive topics (Hydén, 2013) amongst Educators.

Audio messages were another valuable aspect of these micro-communications and became vital for the research in two main ways. First, during the recruitment process, voice messages helped expedite the building of trust and therefore the willingness to engage in the research project. For example, listening to regional accents and expressions provided me with insights about the person's background, which in turn gave me a vantage point to find points of connection, communicate more effectively, and create a sense of familiarity. Second, voice mails also provided alternative and rich contextual information about where women lived and worked. For instance, during the political crisis I received a voice message I could barely understand because of the background noise:



In this context, background noises were eloquent in providing insights into women's day-to-day activities and helpful in prompting key discussions about women's actions during the crisis, which in turn led to discussions on notions of vulnerability. Voice messages shared during protests, at home, at work were rich in actions that radiated agency, as women remained engaged both with their day-to-day activities and with my research. For example, I received voice messages from Educators leading protests in defiance of government's banning of public gatherings. Educators' actions demonstrated that they saw their work as human rights defenders, educators and community organisers as paramount

and did not hide away from high risk and danger.

In that light, micro-communications became fundamental in dispelling concerns about participants' sense of fragility or what they might consider sensitive topics, for example. They were also vital in aligning the research interest with those of the women and engaging participants in difficult conversations in moments of crisis. Importantly, these micro-communications were eloquent in their innocuousness and brevity, they shed light on important invisible undercurrents, and on what was left unsaid between the lines and yet was vital for their work.

The opacity of transparency: Balancing the scale of benefits in research for participants and researchers

I once wrote an irritated response to an article claiming that refugees and asylum seekers benefitted from taking part in research because sharing their views could be a cathartic, agentic, and beneficial experience. It gave them the 'right to be heard' (Powels, 2004:18; Alexander, 2010), the article claimed. In that context, a 'right' carried the same connotation of 'empowerment', a generous researcher has the power to grant that right to a powerless mute participant. This is a common mantra in research, particularly with participants deemed vulnerable. It is not uncommon to hear that they might benefit from telling their story, especially in challenging circumstances as it presents them with an opportunity to have their voices and stories heard (Branicki, 2020; Falb, et al., 2019).

Now, transparency in research ethics refers to a researcher's obligation to provide clear information about the objectives, procedures, the extent of benefits/negative impacts of, and any deception employed in the research. Transparency is a crucial aspect of informed consent. In my critique to the article, I problematised the claim that participating in research provides participants, unequivocally, with a voice, and that telling their stories is generally beneficial. I found the claim deceptive and condescending and as a result lacking in transparency.

Early conversations with Educators warned against including interview questions about causes of displacement to avoid evoking past trauma. As the crisis developed and violence became a daily reality, encouraging participants to give their views on empowerment as a cathartic exercise had a tone of falsehood and deception. It was likely that recollection of past and present violence would have a negative impact on their mental health. Because I am unqualified to provide mental health

support and was unable to secure local provision, it was clear that ‘telling their stories’ was not in their best interest in the context of heightened crisis.

In fragile contexts, lack of transparency, from a researcher’s point of view, may also occur because of lack of awareness of the nuances of what needs to be disclosed or what might be perceived as deceptive. For instance, implying that taking part in research is akin to ‘claiming a right to be heard’ carries paternalistic and deceptive undertones. It assumes that research is the only valid channel to be heard and that participants lack other avenues to have their stories told, spaces that could offer them tangible benefits, relief, and support.

In the context of this research, transparency also meant being clear about the limits of the research and personal boundaries of engagement. This research was not, for some participants, the right conduit to share their stories either. As the political crisis evolved and violence and compounded despair exploded, I sensed that Educators’ motivation to take part in the research was linked to an expectation to share their stories via social media and take part in political actions. At this juncture, it was important to be transparent with Educators about personal limits of engagement. Specifically, it was crucial to be clear with Educators that taking part in the study did not imply an agreement to disseminate information on their behalf or actively engage in proselytising campaigns with Colombian expatriates in England. This disclosure could have set me back with recruitment, as Educators might have perceived these limitations as off-putting. Another outcome could have been the loss of trust because of my reluctance to engage in political actions they perceived as urgent and just.

Beyond revealing or acknowledging sources of deception, transparency is also about disrupting power relations in research. Here micro-communications also facilitated a more egalitarian relationship between the Educators and me. Text communications reduced multiple identity markers (Colombian woman living abroad, researcher) to just another one of their many of contacts. I did not hold absolute power in the flow of conversations and the relationship with participants began to change.

Transparency in this project was underpinned by efforts to ensure that elements of deception were not hidden behind a narrative of concern or empathy. Transparency was also multi-directional and processual as the research setting changed. Transparency from both researcher and participants was fundamental in fostering a research environment that was respectful, inclusive, and open. Finally, as stated in the introduction, I wanted to do and be better in this project. It was important to me that

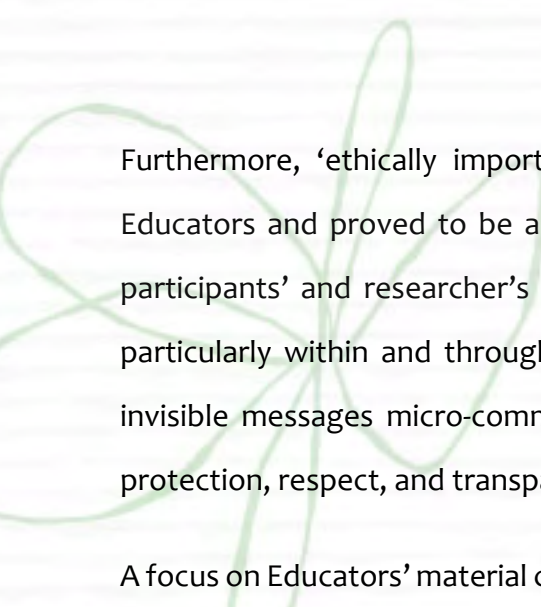
Educators had a valuable and enriching experience that made them feel that taking part in research was a valuable social role and encouraged them to participate in research in the future (Farrimond, 2013).

Conclusion

This research project was an empirical, qualitative, and interdisciplinary project guided by three epistemological lenses: FMS, HRE, and FVM. It used thematic and diffractive analysis to engage with the data. These methodologies were grounded on the everyday (as in real, complex, not linear) conditions of Educators’ lives, moved away from binaries and focused both on commonalities and differences when exploring notions of agency. The combined methodological approach was unique and effective in highlighting knowledge that tends to remain hidden and obscured. It was powerful in generating knowledge regarding notions of agency that could make a difference in the world by understanding what, when, how, and for whom differences matter (Barad, 2007).

Methods of data collection included document analysis of Law 1257 (2008), observations, personal communications (micro-communications), twelve interviews with Educators, and auto-ethnography. Document analysis of Law 1257 (2008) provided valuable insights into how notions of agency and vulnerability were advanced by legal discourses. Moreover, micro-communications with Educators were vital in highlighting the role material conditions played in shaping Educators’ notions of respect, harm, transparency, and vulnerability. They were a valuable tool to inform ethical approaches and methodological changes. Although the next chapter expands on the use of auto-ethnography as a method from a posthuman perspective, this chapter engaged with the critiques of the method and the reasons to override them in this research.

This study was guided by relational ethics. It conceptualised ethics as a process rather than a one-off procedural exercise. This approach facilitated discussions with Educators about mutual understandings of vulnerability and respect. It advanced that conceptualising ethics as an on-going process offers opportunities to understand localised notions of vulnerability and protection. Moreover, the research setting and circumstances (forced displacement, global pandemic, political crisis) offered an extraordinary opportunity to question notions of vulnerability and protection from the ground up.

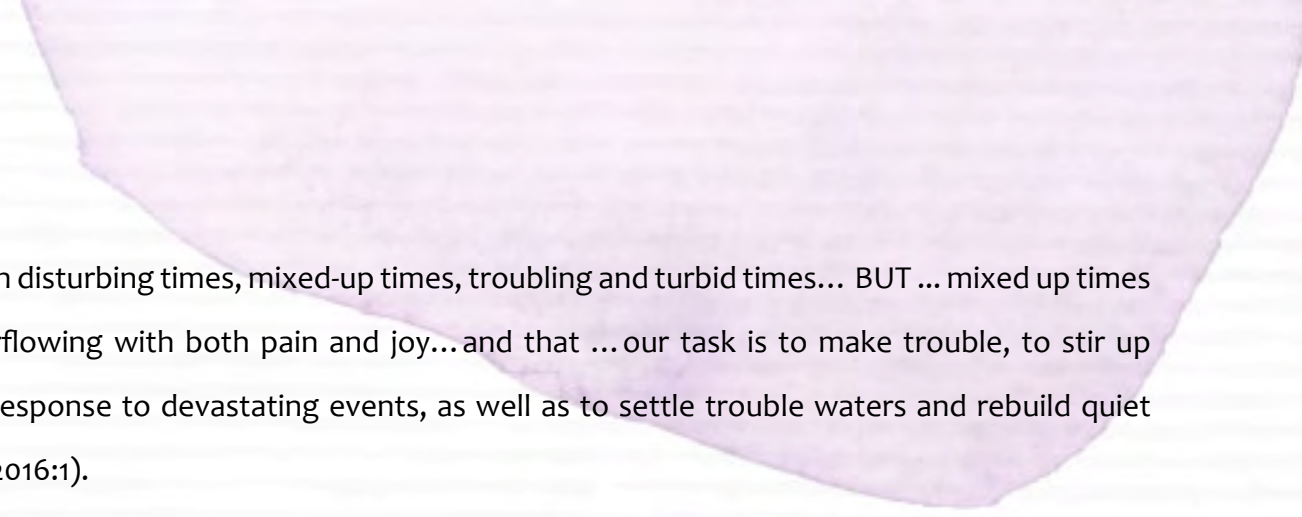


Furthermore, ‘ethically important moments’ (Gillemin & Gillam, 2004) guided interactions with Educators and proved to be an effective ethical tool to navigate a fragile context by highlighting participants’ and researcher’s needs, vulnerabilities, and priorities. Awareness of these moments, particularly within and through micro-communications, highlighted the eloquent yet succinct and invisible messages micro-communications conveyed that troubled universal ideas of vulnerability, protection, respect, and transparency.

A focus on Educators’ material conditions was important as it emphasized that notions of vulnerability are neither permanent nor absolute, that some people may be vulnerable in certain circumstances and not in others (Levine *et al.*, 2004); that not all displaced people ‘lack autonomy and agency at individual or collective levels’ (McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp 2015:29); and that participants have the right to determine where the threshold lies between ‘ordinary’ and ‘more than ordinary’ vulnerability (Hudson, 2018).

These tools and approaches were an effective ethical compass to gauge the fairness of exploring conceptualisations of empowerment amidst police brutality, poverty, anger, and injustice. Importantly, ethical engagement with Educators in a context of protracted displacement and violence meant taking time and space to build trust, to have honest and clear conversations throughout different phases of the research to align expectations and clarify limits. This research ethical approach demonstrated that ethical challenges ought not to deter researchers from conducting research with populations deemed vulnerable in fragile contexts, but encourage them to engage with the challenges cautiously, respectfully, and patiently to create and develop meaningful ethical partnerships. Essentially, in exploring how we – Educators and I – ‘inhabited uncertainty together’, before, during and after fieldwork, provided a valuable space to explore Educators’ conceptions of ethics that in turn guided the methodological changes needed. In doing so, a focus on materiality decentred my ethical (institutional) values and ‘centred on those of the participants’ (Oyinloye: 2021:3). This shift encourages an ethical research practice that opens spaces for conversations that disrupt our settled ethical compass so fiercely aligned with the global north. This does not mean neglecting our obligations as researchers not to cause harm as established in European protocols. It is instead an invitation to consider and be alert to alternative, localised, or hidden notions of vulnerability, respect, harm, and protection. These considerations are important beyond contexts of war or conflict, because as Donna Haraway

reminded us:



We live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times... BUT ... mixed up times are overflowing with both pain and joy...and that ... our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle trouble waters and rebuild quiet places (2016:1).

Despite the furious external setting, Educators taught me that my role as a researcher, regardless of context, is to create those quiet places for reflection, for celebration, but also for troubling and joyful disruption. My job is to create joyful disruptions like those of Cage, Broomberg, and Chanarin; but also, to listen, to attend, to contemplate, and to look harder and beyond the spotlight.

Chapter five: A shifting and porous ‘shape called I’³¹: A posthuman take on auto-ethnography as a method

Preamble

Piercing eyes: grounded on displacement

One of my earliest memories is bathed in early morning sunshine and shock. I was probably no taller than two feet off the ground, and I haven’t made these calculations lightly; I have been recalling this memory often in my life. I judged my height against the eye level of another child who was sitting against the wall as my mother, and I passed by. As I grew older, I learnt to fear this part of our city, a local cheap market populated by people from the periphery, sinful, dangerous, unknowable people: thieves, prostitutes, indigenous people, street children. But that morning, long ago, I was free of judgement. One of the sensations that lingers in my memory is the feeling of being overpowered by strong smells and the multitude of giant people around me. From that morning, I also remember the piercing eyes of the boy sitting against a wall.

I also have a clear memory of my mum proudly wearing a silver necklace that my father had given her for her birthday. It was a silver necklace with a small Capricorn pendant. My mum has always been a determined walker, always in a hurry, with numerous things to do. I remember that my arm extended almost fully to hold her hand, and I don’t remember being out of breath while walking with her, but I barely had time to stop and smell the fish and the urine around us. She was also likely feeling scared. She always feared that part of the city and clutched her purse close to her body. She mistrusted the people, especially the women, hanging outside the *cantinas* (bars), their revealing outfits and exaggerated make-up made them sinful, and dangerous by default. Although my mother has always been a vigilant walker, I doubt she saw what happened next coming.

All I remember was the piercing-eyes boy leaping in front of my mum like lighting from the dirty earth. In a flash, he snatched my mum’s necklace off, ran away and immersed himself in the sea of people. ‘Thief, thief, catch the thief’, my mother shouted while we chased him amongst the forest of people.

I don’t remember how I kept up with her, I don’t remember being picked up, but somehow, I remember a whirlwind of shouts that were taking us deeper into the forbidden streets behind the market. I don’t

know how long we ran chasing the child thief. All I remember was my mother’s sudden stop. She would not go any further, and seeing that no one came to her rescue, - of course there was no police to help her- she had to accept defeat and turned around. I was shocked to the bone. It took me years to figure out what happened. The child, a ‘*gamín*’ or street child as they are known in Colombia, is not, heartbreakingly so, a rare occurrence. When I was growing up, street children were common, and people mostly feared or ignored them. What took me years to realise is that these children are the sons and daughters of displacement and violence, not criminals. Stealing is an act of survival. They were outsiders, often covered in the mud from which they built their temporary houses (*tugurious*) and colonised areas of the city that we all learnt to fear and exclude. Exclusion was easier than listening to the stories that prompted these displaced people to colonise our city.

Auto-ethnography as an FVM method

Initially, a traditional auto-ethnographic method was helpful in two main ways. First, it guided reflections on key ontological and epistemological predispositions (detailed in chapter one) and their implications for the research. It informed the following questions: what cultural baggage do I bring to my research and why would that matter? What issues are likely to be strange or familiar? How would my perceived identity place limitations on my research? How would participants react to my history of voluntary migration? What is my relationship to displacement and why would that matter? Foster et al. (2005) propose exploring similar questions to elucidate the connection between life experience and research. These preoccupations were prompted by my undergraduate training in Anthropology and Sociology and by previous research experience. From that professional baggage, I was familiar with the history of auto-ethnography as a method and its crucial link to culture.

31 Expression borrowed from Jane Bennett’s book: *influx and efflux: writing up with Walt Whitman* (Bennet, 2020:3).

From an anthropological perspective, 'culture is inherently a group-oriented concept. Culture and people have a symbiotic relationship, the notion of culture predisposes the co-presence of others' (Chang, 2008:54). From that perspective, auto-ethnography is the study of others as a primary focus through links with personal experience. Ellis et al., (2011) describe the method as an approach to research and writing that 'seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience to understand cultural experience' (Ellis et al., 2011:273). Specifically, auto-ethnography is a form of ethnography that focuses on:

[W]hat we have in common with others, it focuses equally on the other who are pre-requisite to the existence of the Self; it recognises that "there cannot be a Self without an Other" (Roth, 2008:5).

In this anthropocentric context, *Self* is understood as contained and defined by cultural identity. In this light, although auto-ethnography aims to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation of the researcher's experiences, it does not focus on 'the self alone, it aims to understand others (culture/society) through self' (Chang, 2008:48). Interestingly, notions of the self (auto) in the method have evolved throughout the years as different emphases on the 'self' have shifted. When anthropologists first introduced the term in 1975, the notion of self (auto) did not refer to the researcher but to the informants. In contemporary use, auto refers to the ethnographer's self (Chang, 2008). In this chapter, I contribute to this conceptual evolution by disrupting notions of self and identity from an FVM perspective.

Incidentally, auto-ethnography is different from biography as it aims to connect 'the personal to the cultural linking the self to the social' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:739), and unlike autobiography, it goes beyond writing of selves (Denshire, 204). For example, 'in biography the *I* is placed in personal contexts and aims to develop insights from that perspective that may be political or not'. In contrast, 'auto-ethnography is about placing the *I* firmly within the cultural context and all that implies' (Ettore, 2016:2). Auto-ethnographic accounts, unlike autobiographical ones, consider the complexity of the self and expose the individual 'in a matrix of political activities as one passes through one's cultural experiences. Unlike biography, 'auto-ethnography is a relational pursuit' (Denshire, 2014:831), and recognises the diversity of narratives and experiences. Furthermore, in asking the epistemological

question 'how do we know what we know?' auto-ethnographers demonstrate that the method is more versatile than autobiography because 'it reveals several levels of consciousness that link the personal to the cultural' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:739).

Simply put, in auto-ethnography, 'knowledge comes from political understandings of one's social positioning as well as experiences of the cultural freedoms and constraints one encounters' (Ettore, 2016:2). The personal story shared in the introduction illustrates this point, as it is an example of bearing witness to displacement and how prejudices are born. In this instance, the story offers a window into the reality of a country that has endured a long history of displacement and violence without an appropriate welfare infrastructure. The story is not just about a memory, through an auto-ethnographic lens it takes the light away from the childbearing witness to an innocent theft, to asking questions about the conditions that foster the constant presence of street children, prostitutes, and thieves.

As the research progressed, I started to use auto-ethnography as a tool that recognised how an individual is connected to others including the more-than-human. Therefore, as a method, and in alignment with an FVM epistemology, auto-ethnography in the context of this research challenges old paradigms of representation. It challenges the 'impossibility of universal narratives' and recognises that stories are complex and meaningful, an approach that helps people make sense of themselves and others (Ellis et al, 2011:275). Moreover, in telling and de-constructing our own stories, we acknowledge openly that research is not value free. In this way auto-ethnographers are sceptical of positivistic research by questioning 'grand narratives which claim objectivity, authority and researcher neutrality in the study of social and cultural life' and reject 'the assumed ubiquity of stable meanings, existing independently of culture, social context and researcher activity and interpretation' (Ettore, 2016:3). With this in mind, the exploration in this chapter contributes to posthuman conceptualisations of auto-ethnography that move beyond the human and traditional notions of subjectivity and identity (Gale, 2023, Wyatt & Gale, 2013, Braidotti, 2013).

The second appealing reason to use auto-ethnography was the writing style. Auto-ethnographic accounts tend to add an evocative element that could make others empathetic; it discloses 'the number of ways personal experiences influence the research process, and accommodates subjectivity and emotionality' (Ellis et al., 2011:274). However, auto-ethnography is more than telling, stories need

to be analysed. The idea is to frame personal stories around theoretical tools ‘to explore how others may experience similar epiphanies, and to highlight familiar cultural patterns to insiders and outsiders alike’ (Ellis *et al*, 2011:276). Importantly, the method also aims to make cultural experience engaging and produce accessible texts for wider audiences, which is a fundamental aim of this research.

The method also guided reflections on perceptions of being an insider/outsider and the implications for the research. As an insider, being a native Colombian gave me access to cultural particularities that were useful in the research process as detailed in the methods section above. As an outsider, (because of the time living abroad) I had access to global narratives of displacement, protection and agency that were important for this work.

As I engaged with personal perceptions of home and belonging, the insider/outsider binary started to disintegrate and became more like a folding: I always felt like an outsider growing up while I felt at home in my adoptive countries. To the question: where are you from? I always, without hesitation, answer that I am Colombian. If given the opportunity to qualify my answer, I disclose that I also hold other passports and experiences. Being a citizen of several countries grants me privileges, rights, comforts, and experiences that I doubt I might have access to had I stayed in Colombia. At the same time, I cling strongly to my Colombian regional accent, to my love to dance spontaneously and unapologetically, to key words and expressions that signal effortless familiarity and solidarity amongst Colombians. All the places I have lived in (the landscapes, the animals, the plants, the experiences, the quality of the water (or lack of), the people, their words and particular expressions capturing never-imagined feelings and concepts; the mountains, the seas) have shaped my sense of being in the world. I am no longer an easy categorisation between being an insider or outsider. That sense of home, of belonging feels like a folding made of different layers that twists and turns and changes shape depending on what is needed at any given time.

Nevertheless, sticking to the binaries a little longer, I am a Colombian native, and as such, I do have insights into the culture and language that would take time for an ‘outsider’ to identify and decipher. I am certain this native status, in conjunction with participants’ strong sense of solidarity, helped me secure and conduct interviews during a global pandemic and a political crisis. The intangible valuable knowledge of recognising and responding to locals’ sense of humour, swear words, levels of formality and informality were immensely helpful in conducting fieldwork in such a fragile context and from the

distance, and in ‘managing’ the space when Educators, inevitably, divulged heart-breaking stories.

However, this ‘insider’ knowledge also carries prejudices that are detrimental. Awareness of historical patterns of corruption made me suspicious of the role partner organisations may have played in the complex political landscape in Colombia. As the research progressed, however, my positioning continually shifted between the insider/outsider binary, debilitating notions of identity framed within this binary. To think with and about this binary disruption, I used Haraway’s (1988) work to challenge

[T]raditional understandings of insider knowledge [that] assumes a singular cultural identity where in reality notions of identity are fluid, problematic and contingent (585).

In this light, auto-ethnographic data were no longer only about my experiences, these data did not ‘stand, speak, or act alone’ (Jones, 2005:783); they were a strand of a fabric, part of a multifaceted and relational pattern; they were stories about entities that affect and can be affected (Braidotti, 2013).

Therefore, to reconcile the use of auto-ethnography as a method in a research enquiry underpinned by FVM and diffractive epistemologies, I offer three reasons. First, an evocative and accessible writing style is important when engaging audiences beyond academia and helpful in linking theory with experience. Moreover, recognising that positivistic research practices erase the voice of the researcher in the name of objectivity, using personal narratives places me firmly in the research assemblage as I also explore personal notions of empowerment and vulnerability. Second, starting from an insider/outsider binary was helpful in dismantling entrenched binaries that are linked to notions of identity. It provided the foundations to question other persistent binaries that inform notions of identity (including researcher identity), such as material/discursive, subjectivity/objectivity, micro/macro, group/individual, local/global, mind/matter, vulnerable/empowered. Finally, engaging with auto-ethnography as a method was a starting point to visualise and challenge my perceived stubborn human-centred positionality (in between disciplines and geographies), and experiment with alternative ontological and epistemological notions that move beyond traditional, linear, and anthropocentric views of the world.

With these reasons in mind, the following section kicks off the exploration of using auto-ethnography as a method when de-centring the human.

An attempt to ‘decentring of the (I/eye)’³² in auto-ethnography

I wrestled with the decision to use auto-ethnography as one of the methods of data collection for a long time. From a traditional social science practice perspective, I understood the need to unpack my positionality, epistemological, and ontological assumptions in the name of rigour and transparency; but surely, I could do that through the safe and sanitised distance of academic language.

The discomfort of using auto-ethnographic data masked a contradiction. In one breath, I exalted the importance and power of personal narratives –just not mine- to highlight important aspects of theory and common threads of experiences. I believed that the use of people’s experiences to exemplify abstract theoretical concepts was an effective way to make theory tangible, and a form of writing and thinking I longed to learn. In the next breath, however, I linked rigour with distance and formality. Despairingly, I imagined this approach putting off certain readers who would dismiss the work casting it as not formal or serious enough. This fear of dismissal made me hesitate. I followed dutifully the traditional academic path and read about the merits and criticisms of using auto-ethnography as a method, but it was a letter that cracked the armour that protected my fear of using personal narratives to explore notions of agency in displacement. A letter. But also, and equally, a handkerchief. I expand further below.

Ringrose and Zarabadi (2018) urge researchers to take risks, to experiment with theory. They believe in the richness and new discoveries that come out of exploring the entanglements of research, the process of ‘researcher-in-becoming, a subject who becomes with its research, its participant and its data’ (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:211). They argue that a researcher is a ‘fractured I or eye, the organ that becomes different in each encounter’ (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:211). With this in mind, I started to engage with personal experiences – the same way Educators did - of living in different cultural and geographical contexts, to find how my ‘multiple and relational I’ (Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018:212) informed interpretations and understandings of empowerment and vulnerability. This chapter is the result of accepting their invitation to experiment and take risks with theory. I focus on the role two objects play in shaping personal notions of agency and vulnerability. Thinking with these objects and listening to their hauntings (Barad, 2017) is a conceptual tool that moved the spotlight away from

binary and human-centred notions of vulnerability and agency.

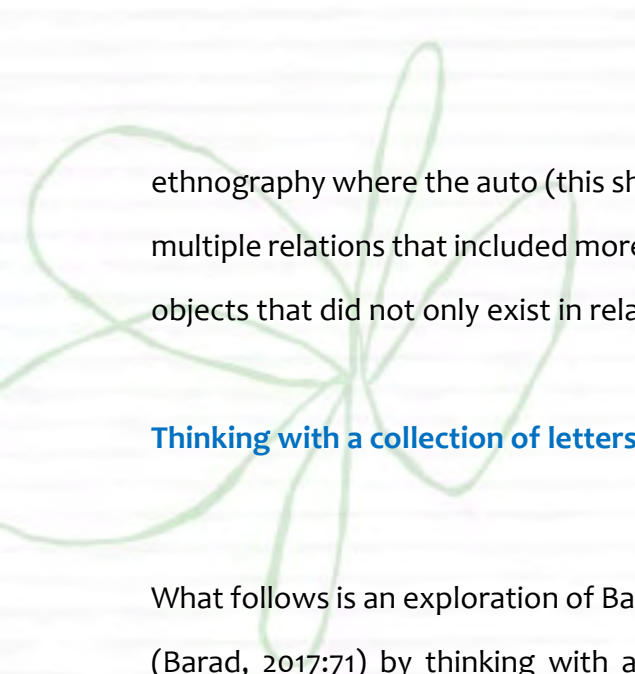
A journey with two objects to decentre the eye/I

It was during the third year of my PhD that I went to see Apphia Campbell’s performance of Nina Simone’s music and activism: [Black is the colour of my voice](#) (2022). In her performance, Campbell used several objects that highlighted certain happenings/aspects of Simone’s life and her political stances. Campbell’s beautiful and powerful voice in combination with the ‘voices’ from the objects made for a moving, provocative, and powerful performance. Early in the same year, I attended a discussion on Reynold’s work on ‘re-membering as a sacred practice’ (2019) and Barad’s methodology of ‘travel hopping as a temporal diffraction’ (2017).

Inspired by these three events at different moments in time during the process of ‘researcher-in-becoming’, I felt the urge to think with two objects that had been haunting me during the research process. I have been carrying them with me for many years as I changed homes, countries, and continents. As I delved deeper in FVM, I accepted that I was/am/will [be] affected by these two objects, they are an integral part of my sense of agency, and at times, of feeling vulnerable. Therefore, this exploration is an attempt to include ‘matter and material affects’ in my research (Smartt-Gullion, 2018:2) and to help me de-centre the I/eye within an auto-ethnographic method.

Therefore, inspired by Campbell’s performance (2022), Reynold’s (2019) and Barad’s (2017) work, and Mortimer-Sandilands’ article: *Landscape Memory and Forgetting: thinking through my mother’s body and place* (2008); this chapter explores what thinking with two objects did to the research process. I had two aims in this venture. First, to explore and understand how the discursive and the material interact and why the vibrancy of beloved objects (a collection of letters and a handkerchief) became hard to ignore as the research progressed. These objects were/are indeed vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010) that haunted and forced me to think with them, I could no longer ignore them as part of my research entanglement. Explaining this incessant murmuring, Barad argues that ‘hauntings are not immaterial, they are not mere recollections or reverberations of what was. Hauntings are an integral part of existing material conditions’ (Barad, 2017:74). Second, in engaging with the vibrancy and agency of these objects, I hoped the process would shed light on alternative reconceptualisations of auto-

32 See Ringrose & Zarabadi, 2018.



ethnography where the auto (this shifting and porous shape I call I) was revealed to be constituted by multiple relations that included more-than-human entities that have agency and the capacity to affect, objects that did not only exist in relation to a sovereign self.

Thinking with a collection of letters and a handkerchief

What follows is an exploration of Barad's invitation to do 'the difficult work of tracing entanglements' (Barad, 2017:71) by thinking with a collection of letters and a handkerchief. This exploration is a 'recognition of the material kinship with' moments, objects, and the more-than-human (Barad, 2017:82).

Embarking on this exploration of entanglements and material kinship also required me to re-think the nature of time from a linear to a diffractive reading. Barad (2017) describes diffractive reading as a methodology that:

[I]s a matter of reading insights through rather than against each other to make evident the always-already entanglement of specifics ideas in their materiality. The point will not be to make analogies, but rather to explore patterns of difference/ différence – differentiating – entangling – that only sprout from, and remain entangled with, specific material conditions in their intra-active restructuring, but are unfolded in the pattering in ways that trouble binaries such as macro/micro, nature/culture, center/periphery, and general/specific that tempt and support analogical analysis (64-65).

The invitation to use a diffractive reading to trouble entrenched binaries in human rights and forced migration studies was appealing and generated fruitful questions such as: would a diffractive reading and recognition of material kinship shed light on alternative perceptions of agency? Of rights? Would it alert me to data that glow (MacLure, 2013)? What would it mean, on the ground, in terms of practical solutions for those who are forcibly displaced?

A collection of Letters

I have always liked the intimacy of written correspondence, the wondrous artwork of stamps. As a scribe in foreign lands, I delight in the adventuring of finding post offices in remote places, in the urgency to tell stories from the road, to connect with those who are part of me, who are my anchor; the ones who stay 'behind' while I explore.

I also enjoy the materiality of writing. I notice and consider the thickness and colour of the ink or the graphite of a pencil, and the difference it makes when writing. I note the surroundings from where I write. I enjoy feeling the texture and smell of the paper, the feeling of the pen or pencil in my hand, the shape and flow of my handwriting and how it reveals on paper. I enjoy how letters capture moments in time, not only the textual content, but also the atmosphere around you: stains of coffee or tea, tears or sweat or the occasional squashed insect. Our own handwriting also tells a story of its own, whether it is clear and polished or hurried and unintelligible; it captures the speed of desperation or joy, the lightness or darkness we feel while we write. Reading others' letters carries similar pleasures. The joy of seeing someone else's handwriting and words, and most movingly, knowing the time that it took to write and post the letter, that effort never goes unnoticed in my world. The act of writing letters gives me comfort and makes me feel connected and anchored.

What my collection of letters might have done was to nurture the cracks of feeling lonely and unrooted in places away from idealised notions of home. Thinking with Barad (2007), letters helped me trace entanglements, which are 'an integral part of an embodied practice of re-membling'. It was not about connecting me with a nostalgic past; tracing entanglements 'is not about going back to what it was... but to produce openings, new possible histories by which time-beings might find ways to endure' (Barad, 2017:62-63).

And produce an opening this collection of letters did. Above, I wrote about my initial hesitations of using auto-ethnography in this research. I hinted at how a letter started to crack the positivistic armour that justified my reluctance of using personal narratives to explore notions of agency in forced displacement. The letter cracked my armour because letters have an affective capacity to make me listen and pay attention.

The letter I alluded to was a reply to a young ethnographer from the Global South from two academics

(May Al-Dabbagh & John O'Brien, 2021) who recognise the value of knowledge produced beyond traditional sites of learning. In their reply letter, Al-Dabbagh and O'Brien highlight a paradox present in Western-based academic audiences regarding ethnographic work:

While Western-based academics are genuinely interested in knowledge about the world beyond the West, they often want these findings presented in a way that fits within their pre-existing templates for how they already believe the rest of the world to work... they are on the lookout for what Talal Asad would call the familiar recurrent “dramas” of the Global South... Where are the beleaguered refugees? ...The oppressed women? Where is the “they” that is clearly distinguished from the “we”? (2021:76).

The letter inspired me in three main ways. First, in this chapter I embarked upon exploring what it meant to de-centre the human in auto-ethnography. Before engaging with FVM ideas, I saw letters as simple temporal and geographical representations of one's history. Here, location is an important element in contexts of displacement. I always associated letters with notions of being rooted, of having a permanent address where one can send or receive letters. It was this relationship between letters and notions of being rooted that made me wonder about their role when exploring notions of displacement. What meaning would letters have for people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes? What would letters mean (to send and receive them) when you lack a permanent address? When you lack (or are developing a new) sense of belonging? Letters, I always thought, assumed a notion of being rooted. However, the more I thought through/with letters, I realised that letters have nothing to do with geography or attachment or location, they are about power. I explore this link between notions of agency and voice below.

Second, in terms of writing style, I initially considered an epistolary approach for this thesis. Thinking of this thesis as a collection of letters felt less daunting, more flexible and accessible. An epistler writes a letter knowing, or hoping, that there is a reader -an audience – for their letter, if not now, eventually. The invisible audience in addition to the familiarity with writing letters was an important methodological approach that helps the writing process.

Finally, the letter to the young ethnographer highlights a fundamental epistemological position of this research by emphasizing the importance of:

Find[ing] new ways of constructing the “we”... [of inviting] the audience to sit with discomfort... [of unpacking our] own positionality slowly so [we] don't leave [our] audience guessing'... of the importance of finding those who are interested in the thrill of entanglements rather than the comfort of binaries (Al-dabbagh & O'brien, 2021:76).

By encouraging ethnographers to trouble current perceptions of the ‘we’ and to ‘sit with discomfort’, their letter aligned with epistemologies that value and recognise notions of the ‘we’ and ‘I’ that deviate from humanist standpoints. It implies a recognition of the more-than-human in auto-ethnography and how shifting relations across matter shape our temporal, spatial, shifting, porous notions of belonging, identity, and agency.

The letter also aligned with this research epistemological approach in that it encouraged the use of a monistic approach (Dolphin & van der Tuin, 2012); it focused on and valued everyday conditions of people's lives in shaping their sense of agency (Conaghan, 2013); and aligned with indigenous beliefs that have for centuries recognised the agency of matter (Todd 2016; Rosiek et al., 2020; TallBear, 2017).

Thinking with letters as material objects beyond their discursive content and human-centred origin was valuable in exploring notions of displacement. In the interviews, Educators spoke of multiple and intergenerational experiences of forced displacement; their experience of being rooted was more the exception rather than the rule. To be clear, thinking with letters was not just about praising the beauty of letters and the power of language, it was a platform from where to ask questions about how we connect with others and the role objects play in shaping those connections. Thinking with letters helped me question my initial binary positions of either being rooted or displaced, of having a voice or being silent, of being visible or invisible. It shed light on an ontological spectrum of belonging and the agentic role material objects play in shaping notions of being and agency.

A Handkerchief: ‘A travel hopper must risk her sense of self’ (Barad, 2017:70).

Speaking about temporal diffraction, Barad said that what we need is ‘an understanding of temporality where the new and the old might coexist... multiple temporalities – are diffractively threaded through and are inseparable from one another’ (Barad, 2017:69). And this is where my handkerchief comes

in: it was given to me by a great auntie in Colombia the last time I saw her, so it became a precious object. I got to know this auntie mostly through my mother's memories of her. Her memory becomes stronger as my mother and I age, and the further away we are from Colombia. Every time my mother talks about her, she adds more details to her memories; it feels like she is caressing the memories as they pass through her heart.

My mother told me about the time Anita, that was/is the auntie's name, had a blue cow and a ginger cat she adored. She taught my mother to connect with and respect animals and plants. Every time my mother talks about her; I could almost experience the coldness of the grass on their bare feet on their way to fetch water in the early morning. I could almost smell the freshness of the ferns, the smell of jasmine, the scent of flowers I don't even know the name of; through my mother's stories and memories, I remember things I have never experienced.

Quoting Abram, Mortimer-Sandilands (2008) talks about how 'oral cultures develop a collective meaning and memory by inscribing their stories on the landscape, rather than on paper. Each part of the topography evokes a part of some tale that quietly resounds in one's awareness' (Abram, 2005:177 cited in Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008:270). Is it possible that by re-membling and returning again and again to the memory of those plants, landscapes and animals, my mother developed an ability to transpose those stories to encourage or support ideas of agency when she felt vulnerable?

Mortimer-Sandilands continues:

A storied landscape is a warehouse of memory that are external to the individual body... the act of remembering involves a recognition of a relationship between the body/mind and the external world that is not only determined by external forces (2008:274).

This is relevant because Anita sat in the middle of a line of strong women –despite being considered vulnerable by others - who had deep connections to their surrounding landscape. Anita grew up deaf and never married. She lived in a rural area with her single mother –an unspeakable and shameful fact -. Despite all of this, she learnt to read, worked the land, and flourished in her context. Engaging with the handkerchief allowed me to travel hop, 'to re-turn my attention to a multiplicity of entangled colonial histories condensed into single moments' (Barad, 2017:69) of Anita's life. All these memories

were relevant because they connect me to stories of vulnerability, agency, and displacement within my own maternal line. Thinking with the handkerchief I realised that because Anita remained unmarried and had a disability, she enjoyed freedoms her married sisters did not have.

I do not wish to romanticize Anita's life for effect, she might have wanted to get married, I will never know. Anita's life also changed when her mother died, and she became dependent on her sisters. However, unlike them, in her later years, Anita engaged with the world joyfully, she had female allies who looked after her. Anita's sense of vulnerability and agency must have fluctuated many times, just like Educators recognised that women are powerful in subtle and overt ways, and vulnerability does not last forever.

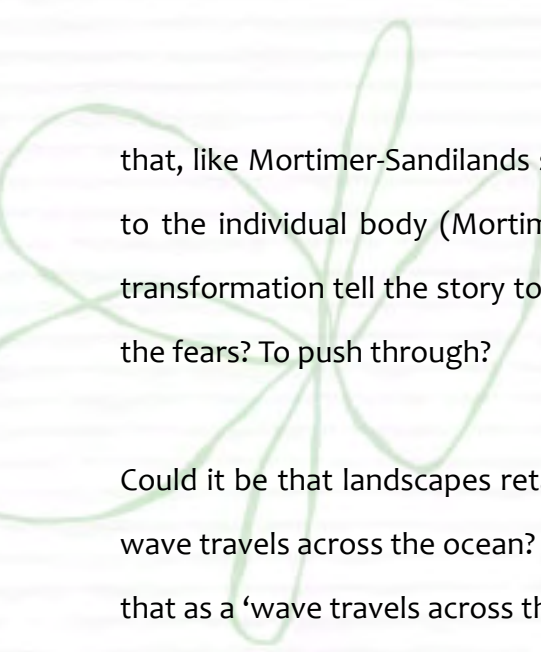
According to Barad (2017):

Memory is not a fixed record of the past, memories are alive; the past is never finished, and the future is not what will unfold, the world holds the memories of its iterative reconfigurings (73).

And that

Travel-hopping involves making the journey in spacetime, tracing the multiple histories with one's body, putting the self at risk as part of a committed response-ability to those who have died and those not yet born. It entails re-cognising material kinship with this exploded/imploded moment in time (82).

Reading Barad, I am reminded of the murmurings that persist in landscapes. It brings to mind a memory from my future past. A few summers ago, I was walking with my young niece through the brambles of an overgrown Cornish path. My niece, a five-year-old North American urban little girl, was not used to country walks. My brother and I persisted with the walk, even when it became difficult. He was adamant that his children should toughen up, and I was obstinate to show them the - rough - beauty of my new home. We were getting scratched and impatient, and my little niece started to cry and complain. Saving face, I asked her to help me clear the way because she was wearing the perfect boots, she was strong, and we could make it down to the bottom if we both worked together. The change was immediate and powerful. She dried her tears with the back of her hands and started kicking the brambles with her little legs. We encouraged each other; we made it to the bottom to the clear path. We all celebrated her bravery. I still do, often, quietly, from the distance. Could it be



that, like Mortimer-Sandilands said ‘a storied landscape is a warehouse of memory that are external to the individual body (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008:274)? Would the landscape that witnessed this transformation tell the story to others? Would this landscape whisper to others to be brave? To fight the fears? To push through?

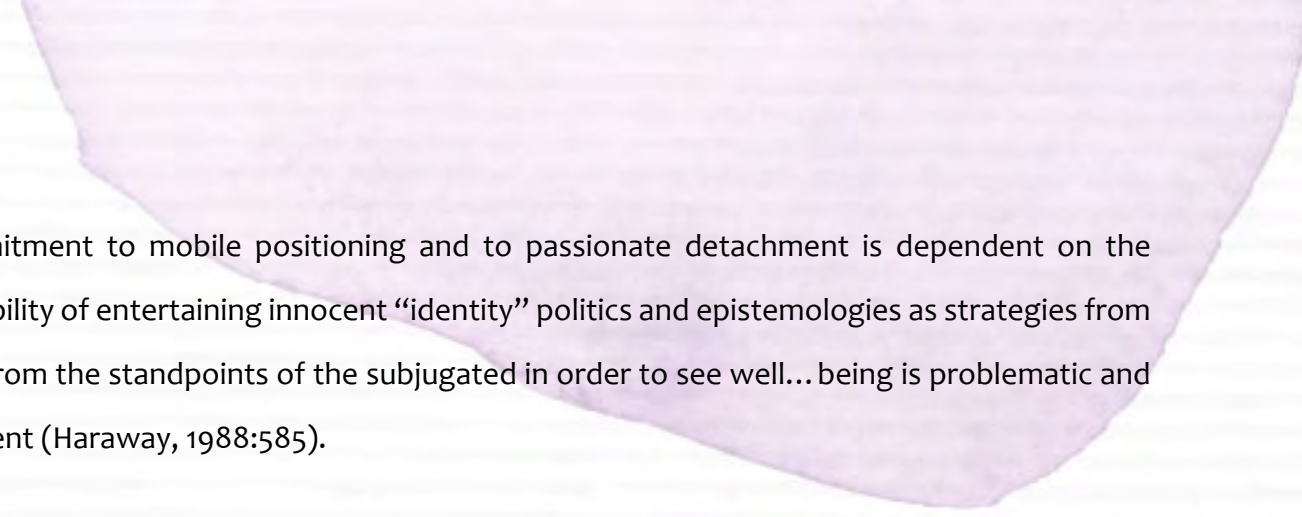
Could it be that landscapes retain the echoes of our memories, of our experiences, the same way a wave travels across the ocean? Woollett (2013) beautifully describes the cycle of a wave. She explains that as a ‘wave travels across the ocean, the water does not travel with it. Inside the wave, the water particles rise and fall in a circular motion, ending up more or less where they started’ (Woollett, 2013:10). In the interviews Jasmin told me: ‘I feel empowered when I am able to confront unjust acts even if my legs are shaking’. Magnolia, a knowledgeable human rights defender also told me that ‘the more empowered she became, the more vulnerable she felt’.

The ethics section above described how taxonomies of vulnerability were helpful tools to define vulnerability. However, what thinking with letters and a handkerchief gave me that linear taxonomies failed to illuminate, was the movement, the lines of flight that exist within vulnerability, the circular motion between states of agency and vulnerability, and that we all, sooner or later are bound to experience one or the other.

Moving beyond human-centred auto-ethnography through a process-oriented notion of I

The process of thinking with two objects was valuable in problematising binary thinking (for example, insider/outsider, individual/community, material/discursive, subjectivity/objectivity) and notions of self in auto-ethnography. It was helpful in visualising an auto-ethnographic method where the *auto* did not focus/start with the human, but an *auto* that was relational, process-orientated, and porous. It gave space to consider how both the human and the more-than-human affect each other.

This alternative view of auto-ethnography, seen through FVM and diffractive lenses, de-centres the agency of humans as the most important, and disrupts ‘innocent identity politics’ (Haraway, 1988:585). Building on Kuhn’s notion of ‘passionate detachment’ (1982), Haraway recognises that:




A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of entertaining innocent “identity” politics and epistemologies as strategies from seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well...being is problematic and contingent (Haraway, 1988:585).

Moving away from the spotlight binary thinking holds, helped me understand that indeed, ‘being [one thing or the other] was problematic and always contingent, it was a spectrum, a folding more than a binary. It was a shifting, multi-layered process. Haraway’s work has been fundamental in this research in providing epistemological tools to deconstruct entrenched binaries. Her work reminds us that:

Passionate detachment requires more than acknowledged and self-critical partiality’ (1988:585), and that ‘objectivity is not about disengagement but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where “we” are permanently mortal, that is, not in “final” control (Haraway, 1988:595-596).

In this light, alternative conceptualisations of auto-ethnography move away from innocent, linear, and anthropocentric perceptions of notions of Self and recognises the researcher, as part of a research entanglement. Alternative conceptualisations of auto-ethnography ought to focus on ‘how beings render each other capable in actual encounters’ (Haraway, 2016:126), on de-centring the human, on not being afraid of tracing entanglements (Barad, 2017), and on recognising kinships with human and the-more-than-human. New conceptualisation ought to go beyond illuminating social and cultural patterns to ask other more interesting and relevant questions such as ‘what shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what?’ (Haraway, 2016:2).

In her work, Kim TallBear (2017) speaks about how indigenous peoples in North America never forgot about the interrelatedness of all things. In this study, Educators also attested to resisting this amnesia, as they also ‘forgot to forget’ (Braidotti, 2013) and talked about the fundamental role the-more-than-human played in contributing to their sense of agency:



In our network, we have our ancestral practices of protection; we know we need to ask the divinities for protection, because if we don't protect ourselves, our energy is taken away. Of course, we talk about political (tangible protections), but also the advice that comes from our ancestors, plants, rocks, objects that protect, that channel everything that flows...

Azalea

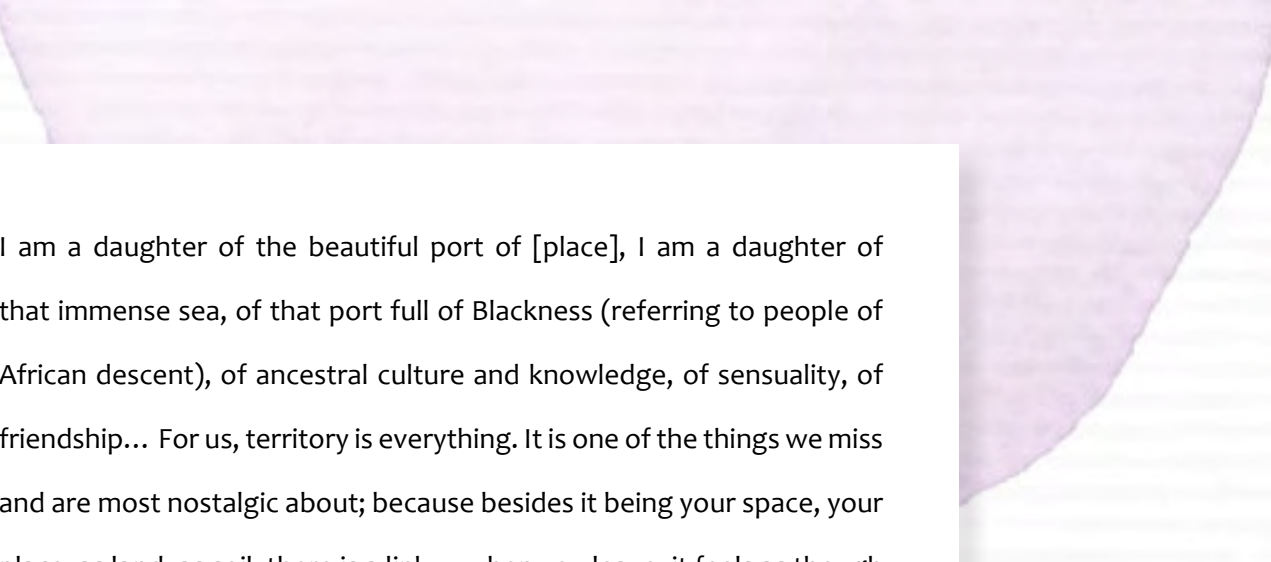


Azalea's experience resonated with TallBear's view, as a Dakota indigenous scholar, when she said that:

Indigenous peoples emphasize and recognise the importance of long-standing relations to place and complex forms of relatedness of peoples and nonhumans in particular places... Indigenous people consider identity to be the product of a constitution of human and nonhuman communities (TallBear, 2017:185).

In TallBear's view, notions of identity are intrinsically linked to place. Educators, especially those who grew up in rural areas, talked about how integral memories of their 'territory'³³ were to their sense of identity during their experience of displacement. For example, when asked about her story, Azalea chose to describe evocatively the place she came from:

33 They used the word 'territorio' in Spanish instead of land, which I found an interesting word choice.



I am a daughter of the beautiful port of [place], I am a daughter of that immense sea, of that port full of Blackness (referring to people of African descent), of ancestral culture and knowledge, of sensuality, of friendship... For us, territory is everything. It is one of the things we miss and are most nostalgic about; because besides it being your space, your place, as land, as soil, there is a link... when you leave, it feels as though you have left your centre (your navel) behind, it feels as though you have left your being behind.

Azalea

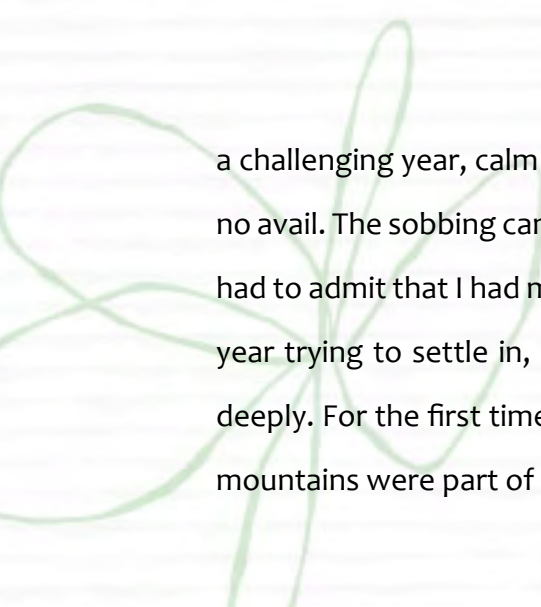


Azalea's observation resonated with me strongly. After her interview, I wrote in my fieldwork journal:

I was moved by Azalea's poetic, unapologetic, and honest description of how much [name of town], the sea, her land (territory as she called it. I found curious the choice of word. Other participants have used this word as well. I would have used land instead ... but maybe the word territory carries a different depth?) made her who she was/is. It reminded me that I had felt something similar many years ago when I first left my mountainous and volatile town to move to the flatness of Miami and its surrounding beautiful blue sea.

I felt dislocated, strange, but justified those feelings as a normal part of the process of relocation. I felt a lingering sadness, nostalgia for the familiar streets, food, sense of humour, friends. All very normal, all part of uprooting and re-rooting, or so I thought. Until I flew back to Colombia a year after I had left.

I remember looking outside the plane window as we were landing and looking at the immensity of the mountains. I started to cry uncontrollably. I could not stop. I tried to reason myself into calmness with increasing anger, frustration, and shame: it is normal to be emotional, it has been



a challenging year, calm yourself down. Enough! Don't be ridiculous, put yourself together! To no avail. The sobbing came from the pit of my stomach, from deep, deep down. I surrendered. I had to admit that I had missed the mountains deeply. Yes, it was true that it had been a difficult year trying to settle in, but it was also true that I had missed the mountains, the landscape, deeply. For the first time in my life, I had to acknowledge, I had to admit to myself, that these mountains were part of my blood.

These experiences resonate with indigenous epistemologies that recognise the interrelatedness of the human with 'nonhumans of all kinds - land formations, nonhuman animals, plants, and the elements in very particular places – their “homelands” or “traditional territories” (italics in the original, TallBear, 2017:186). In this light, a conceptual recognition that there is no separate 'I' from the 'we' (both human and the more-than-human) would be a tremendous shift for FMS where ideas of protection and prevention are foundational. This conceptual shift could inform more effective support and protection policies during the different stages of displacement (before, during, after).

Turning back to auto-ethnography, TallBear (2017) suggested that one way of reassessing notions of self (including the auto in auto-ethnography) is to conduct 'multispecies ethnography' where:

Scholars apply anthropological approaches to studying social relations between humans and nonhumans... nonhumans are now being considered “alongside humans in the realm of *bios*, with legible biographical and political lives”. Multispecies ethnography shows how “organisms [e.g., animals, plants, fungi, microbes] shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces” (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010, cited in TallBear, 2017:187).

This position, in turn, resonates with arguments that posit auto-ethnography as a feminist method because it 'creates transitional, intermediate spaces, inhabiting the crossroads or borderlands of embodied emotions' (Ettore, 2016:4). These transitional spaces have echoes of Gloria Anzaldúa's work. In her seminal work *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa talks about *la mestiza* (a racial term used to indicate a mixed person from Spanish and Indigenous descent) and the intermediate space in which she lives. Anzaldúa argues that being the result of two cultures, she 'walk[ed] in one culture and out of another but [was] in all cultures at the same time (Anzaldúa, 1987

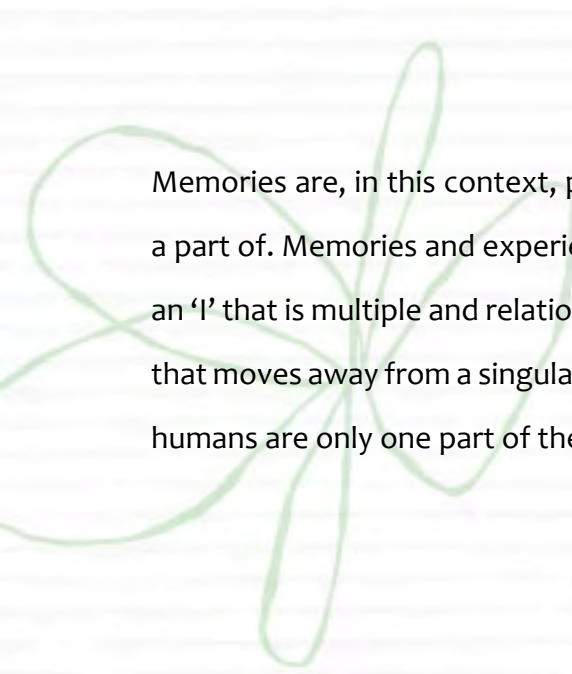
cited in Ettore, 2016:4). What is relevant to the argument here is that:

La mestiza is in the state of being beyond binary ('either-or') conceptions. *La mestiza* is the state of being 'both' and 'and'. *La mestiza* has a tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions (1987: 101). Inhabiting the crossroads forms the *mestiza* consciousness. *La mestiza* must live without borders and be a cross between an insider and an outsider and she must be herself a crossroads (Anzaldúa, 1987 cited in Ettore, 2016:4).

The sentence '*La mestiza* is the state of being 'both' and 'and'' resonated with notions of a fluidity, of constant shifting that shapes a porous 'I' and 'we'. It resonates with the ebbs and flows of being. It brings to mind the notion of *Nepantla* as explored by Anzaldúa. *Nepantla*, in its original Nahuatl form 'is a word that means to be in a space—theoretical and abstract—where two seemingly opposed views must be negotiated and synthesized' (Anzaldúa, 2013, cited in Tamboukou, 2020A:7). However, Anzaldúa re-shaped the concept as she 'focused on transition rather than synthesis, she saw it as a space wherein ruptures and shifts happen... the locus and sign of transformation' (Anzaldúa, 2009b cited in Tamboukou, 2020A: 7).

Building on Walt Whitman's writings, Jane Bennett redefines the notion of a transitional space as an 'interval between influx and efflux' and explores 'what concept of “selfhood” is appropriate to a worldview that decentres human beings' (Gilson, 2021:974). Bennett takes the expression influx and efflux from Whitman's poem a *Song of Myself* where he wrote about a sea breathing itself in and out; he described the sea as waves, and an “I” partaking in that process' (Bennett, 2020:x). Bennett argues that 'Whitman's work disclosed a 'process -oriented self' (2020:xv), one that is constantly influencing and being influenced by the world around it' (Gilson, 2021:975). Bennett identifies in Whitman's work a conceptualisation of influx that reflects a:

[P]orosity of the self to energies both human and nonhuman'; an idea of efflux as 'the creative capacity of the self to alter whatever is taken in'; and the “and” of influx-and-efflux, the interval between impression and expression where the process of transformation takes place (Gilson, 2021:975).



Memories are, in this context, part of the overall ever shifting assemblage of which we, humans, are a part of. Memories and experiences do not fix us into a bounded self; memories show us a notion of an ‘I’ that is multiple and relational. This conceptualisation of a porous and multiple I, informs a notion that moves away from a singular to a multiple (auto) in auto-ethnographic work. It acknowledges that humans are only one part of the story, a thread of the fabric of existence.

Conclusion

Starting with a traditional auto-ethnographic approach this chapter delineated the process of how perceptions of self, identity and belonging fluctuate. A traditional auto-ethnographic method was helpful in exploring the researcher’s positionality as informed by personal experience. An initial focus on finding recurring patterns and cultural themes, on making the familiar strange, opened epistemological spaces to disrupt notions of selfhood in auto-ethnography.

As an inter-disciplinary project in FMS, HRE, and FVM, explorations of positionality were also helpful in elucidating nuanced notions of agency that could inform notions of protection and the role the more-than-human plays in rendering others agentic.

Engaging with the process of ‘researcher-in-becoming’ triggered and sustained an exploration that troubled entrenched binaries in auto-ethnography, specifically the insider/outsider and the individual/group binaries. Moreover, thinking with two objects provided a point of departure to de-centre the human, and to trace and explore the entanglements of which I was temporarily part. This approach propelled me to “‘read against the discourse” and interrupt comfortable reflexivity’ (Pillow, 2003, cited in Denshire, 2014:841). Thinking with two objects highlighted the role material objects played in shaping temporal notions of agency. Through ‘travel hoping’ (Barad, 2017) within my own maternal line, I found that in agreement with Educators’ interviews, notions of agency and vulnerability fall within a spectrum, and that they emanate from different sources, including material objects, animals, plants, and landscapes.

An FVM epistemological lens was useful in acknowledging that notions of identity ought to account for both the human and the more-than-human in perceptions of selfhood and agency. In that sense, through a conception of a process-oriented notion of self, this chapter advocates for the need to move beyond human-centred auto-ethnographic methods. Moreover, problematising established human-centred notions of identity and agency implied abandoning a safe epistemological harbour in search of a conceptual shift that could accommodate alternative notions of being, agency, and protection.

Chapter six: Empowerment for what?

Preamble

And just like that, henceforth, you are empowered!

I can pinpoint with exact certainty the moment that my interest in notions of empowerment was born, or at least a seed of curiosity started to grow. It was 2005 and I had been living in Niger, West Africa, for almost 2 years. I was a community health agent with the United States Peace Corps living and working in a remote small village at the edge of the Sahara. One day, during one endless unbearably hot afternoon, I started to read a report. In those hot days, there was not much to do but to sit around and surrender to the heat while drinking tea. I felt excited and curious about the report because it was a recent brief published by a major organisation on the impact of installing a water pump in a village nearby.

A water pump at the edge of the Sahara is a terrific idea if you have ever witnessed –or attempted to get water out of a deep well in the Sahara. It is not an easy task; one look at women’s callused hands tells you it is extremely hard work. And women do this while they are pregnant and with children on their backs. Early on in my stay, I tried to do it once and ended up, pathetically, with crippling back pain for days.

Hence my excitement about reading the report. I was feeling empowered already on behalf of the women: no more back pain or callused hands to start with. But the report used one sentence that ripped off its credibility in a flash. It claimed that the water pump had made a *positive* impact on women’s lives because *it saved them time* and therefore contributed to their empowerment. I do not remember if the report mentioned the impacts of having access to clean water, not only for women but for everyone in the community, but I was struck by that one important fundamental sentence: *it saved women’s time* and the assumption that there was a direct correlation to their sense of empowerment.

The sentence bothered me because based on my experience living there, I knew that people’s concept of time was completely different from ours, the idea of saving time would have been considered foreign and nonsensical. This annoyance turned into curiosity that propelled explorations on temporality and agency included in chapter nine.

Returning to the story though, back then, based on what I witnessed day-in and day-out, getting

together at the end of the day to get water was a social opportunity for women to gather, to share news, to gossip, to be with others in the middle of a busy day. I would argue that, in fact, the water pump might have had a detrimental impact on women’s social lives. However, beyond desired or actual impact, the main issue remained: it was obvious the women were never consulted. The positive impact was assumed and predicted through Western perceptions of empowerment.

This was not an isolated incident either. After leaving Niger, I witnessed similar situations in different contexts, particularly with women considered vulnerable. I started to realise that Western notions of empowerment, like the concept of human rights, were considered universally desirable and straightforward. My experience on the ground has shown me, time and time again, that Western ideas of empowerment did not always align with the notions of those whose empowerment is sought, particularly those considered vulnerable or living in contexts beyond the global cultural north.

Introduction: ‘Why doesn’t this feel empowering?’ (Ellsworth, 1989)

Troubling notions of empowerment is not something novel. In the eighties, Elizabeth Ellsworth’s article (1989) critically explored her experience of co-designing an anti-racist course in a higher education institution in the United States. She provided a critique of notions of empowerment, student voice, dialogue, and critical reflection. She argued that if critical pedagogy and teaching for liberation assumptions were left untroubled, there was a risk that ‘pedagogues [would] continue to perpetuate relations of domination in their classrooms’ creating a false sense of achievement while perpetuating the status quo (Ellsworth, 1989:297). Fundamentally, by posing the question: empowerment for what? Ellsworth (1989) exposed the nuance that lies behind notions of agency.

Grounded on Ellsworth’s question, this chapter unsettles rooted notions of empowerment that are linked exclusively to human agency and within a binary framework (if you are not empowered you are vulnerable and vice versa). Using an FVM approach and a diffractive reading of three interview quotes,

I speculate about alternative notions of agency that lay beyond human-centred epistemologies. I engage with ‘data that glow’ (MacLure, 2013) to shed light on how current notions of empowerment may indeed be repressive and perpetuate relations of domination, oppression, and vulnerability while giving an illusion of rendering subjects agentic.

Therefore, instead of starting with European, human-rights-based notions of empowerment, in this chapter, I theorise from the ground up based on Educators’ perceptions of agency and vulnerability. I interrogate the role HRE, and Law 1257 (2008) play in shaping notions of empowerment amongst Educators. Once again, this is not an original approach, particularly in the context of South America. From an educational point of view, Paulo Freire’s seminal work has long advocated for the importance of dialogue in understanding students’ realities and in helping them recognise, understand, and challenge their contextual sources of oppression to transform their realities (Freire, 2017). Freire also noted that:

[R]eality which becomes oppressive results in the contradistinction of men as oppressors and oppressed... consequently one of the biggest obstacles to liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness (Freire, 2017:25).

Transplanting this observation to notions of empowerment, my intention is to understand Educators’ experiences of empowerment -and vulnerability- on the ground as well as what constitutes empowerment and the extent to which these notions are beneficial or detrimental to their sense of agency. I approach these questions with the assumption that HRE programmes deliver a ready-made package of empowerment that by supplementing a well-intentioned teacher:

Talk about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable. Or else [the teacher] expound on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to fill the students with the contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance (Freire, 1970:44).

Thus, I enter this research with a sense of caution about how might normative (as taught and disseminated by human rights and legal discourses) perceptions of empowerment foster a false sense of agency that ‘treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched’ (Ellsworth, 1989:306). Chapters six, seven, eight and nine are outlined following Ellsworth’s cue to trouble notions of empowerment and her invitation to further qualify the question:

Empowerment for what? For human betterment? (Parker 1986), for expanding the range of social identities people may become? (Simon, 1986) for making one’s self present as part of a moral and political project that links production of meanings to the possibility of human agency, democratic community and transformative social action? (Giroux, 1986 cited in Ellsworth, 1989:307).

This invitation to disrupt accepted notions of empowerment is crucial in the context of this research. Chapter three provided an overview of FMS, HRE, and legal theory contributions to conceptualisations of agency. For the purposes of this chapter, suffice to say that from the perspective of forced migration and legal studies measures of protection and reparations underpin notions of agency. Protection implies, for example, providing psycho-social, financial, medical, and legislative support before, during and after displacement occurs. Reparations are understood as remedies for harm incurred because of displacement (Hudson, 2019). This position assumes that access to justice repairs damage, and therefore exercising rights through legal processes equates to empowerment. But how can unspeakable and recurrent violence and loss be repaired?

From an HRE perspective, empowerment derives from a combination of having human rights knowledge, the ability to claim rights, and the capacity to enact transformative actions propelled by the human rights discourse (Bajaj, 2011; Starkey, 2012). I therefore ask: are these definitions of empowerment sufficient and inclusive of women’s experiences on the ground? How do these normative definitions compare to women’s perceptions of the term? Would notions of empowerment in contexts of protracted violence, displacement, and irregular provision of education and justice be defined differently? Would normative conceptualisations of empowerment benefit from people’s experiences in fragile contexts?

Although Educators acknowledged that their sense of empowerment is indeed influenced by human rights and legal discourses as well as feminist ideas of solidarity and equality, they also highlighted the important role ancestral indigenous knowledge and the more-than-human played in shaping their sense of agency. Nonetheless, these sources of empowerment remained hidden because they lay outside normative definitions of agency as prescribed by FMS and HRE. These invisible or silent elements of empowerment are a crucial focus of this chapter. Driven by the story of the water pump in Niger, I question notions of empowerment defined by the ‘victors’, by the ‘educated’, by the ‘experts’. Specifically, this chapter explores the nature of ‘what’ Educators seek a sense of agency towards. It presupposes an understanding of agency that is variable, nuanced, contingent, temporal, and spatial. This focus sheds light on hidden aspects of empowerment that are meaningful to Educators and that lay beyond legal and human rights discourses.

Therefore, considering the fragility of a context of protracted displacement and violence, aware of the notions of agency advanced by FMS, HRE and Law 1257 (2008), and grounded on Educators’ experiences navigating displacement, I ask: is there an intersecting space where Western (perceived as universal) notions of empowerment meet local notions that support agency? What might an intersecting space of empowerment do? Is there a constant influx and efflux of power? What role does materiality (material conditions, the more-than-human) play in shaping notions of empowerment? How would notions of empowerment shaped by humans and the more-than-human differ from current notions of empowerment? What might an FVM notion of empowerment look like?

As elaborated upon in the methodology section above, to explore these questions I employ thematic and diffractive analysis. Thematic analysis of the interviews summarises key themes regarding women’s conceptions of empowerment and vulnerability. Diffractive analysis entails a diffractive reading of three quotes from the interviews. Through this diffractive approach, I speculate on alternative notions of agency. It is important to note that the quotes chosen for diffractive analysis in this, and subsequent chapters were data ‘hot spots’ (MacLure, 2013). Moreover, these quotes and the narratives within were considered important not only because of their subjective contribution but also as evidence and traces of how Educators were situated within assemblages of agency (Fox & Alldred, 2017).

Consequently, chapters six, seven, eight and nine explore and propose an understanding of agency as contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal. In these chapters, I advance the notion of a posthuman cartography of agency (PCA) as a conceptual tool to understand nuanced conceptions and realisations of agency. A PCA is premised on three principles: first, it conceives agency as an entanglement of discourses and the more-than-human; second, it advances that notions of agency are not stable or permanent and need to be re-assessed continuously (through what, how, whom, when coordinates); and third, it conceives agency as relational in nature and therefore advocates for the term revitalisation of agency rather than empowerment.

With this in mind, below I explore the empowerment-for-what coordinate through thematic and diffractive analysis to demonstrate the importance of deconstructing prevalent notions of empowerment and commence to tell a different story of agency.

Thematic analysis

From the interviews, three main themes emerged regarding the nature of the ‘what’ women seek agency towards, namely, that empowerment meant access to justice, that empowerment meant being critical and driving improvement, and importantly that empowerment meant naming, addressing, and healing trauma.

Theme one: Empowerment means accessing knowledge

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as research participants were human rights educators, a strong theme associated empowerment with being able to exercise human rights and access to justice. Educators believed that being knowledgeable and militant about human rights instruments and legal knowledge (particularly Law 1257, 2008) was crucial in fostering a sense of agency. Specifically, Educators spoke about how instrumental this knowledge was in naming recurrent injustices and linking access to justice to notions of dignity. For female human rights educators in Colombia, the country with the

highest number of human rights [defenders killed](#) in 2022³⁴, access to education, health, peace, security, economic opportunities, environmental protection and gender equality were strongly linked to human dignity and notions of what was just and agentic.

Within this theme, I further identified three aspects from human rights and legal education that contributed towards notions of empowerment. First, this specific knowledge made women visible and part of a community; second, it articulated historical grievances into punishable acts; and third it highlighted a pattern of discrimination and systemic violence.

In particular, legal knowledge was strongly associated with notions of empowerment as it allowed Educators to access a legal infrastructure that promised fair and prompt attention to violations and provided guidelines for reparations. As noted above, reparations could be varied across the different phases of displacement, but for Educators, legal recognition of and comprehensive remedies through Law 1257 (2008) was a crucial element linked to notions of empowerment. Furthermore, it was fundamental that this legal instrument (and other relevant Autos) named, condemned, and criminalised systemic patterns of violence against women. It also criminalised misogynistic acts of violence women were accustomed to seeing as discrete and isolated events. The Law made them part of a visible collective that deserved protection, vindication, justice, and reparation. The presence of a law signified a pattern experienced by many, not the few. For Magnolia for example, this realisation was crucial in shaping and strengthening her sense of agency:

Empowerment, I don't know, is a word I learnt, I don't know the meaning of it, I just know that I live it, it is about knowledge, about knowing, about appropriating what is mine, to see myself as a woman who has rights, like someone who has an important role in this society. [Feeling empowered] is what has allowed me to raise my voice, to carry other women's voices with me, because all of these things have profound stories behind them ...for example, I didn't know that the intra-family violence, the sexual violence of which I was a victim was a crime. I thought that was the cross I had to bear for being a woman. So many terrible things we endure because of the chauvinist environment we grew up in.

Magnolia



Magnolia's quote conveys the impact of learning about human rights and legal tools on shaping notions of identity and agency. In the religious and conservative context of Colombia, the conceptual shift from 'a cross I had to bear' to being 'someone who had an important role in society' evidenced the transformational action HRE seeks to foment in learners. Indeed, most Educators spoke about how understanding, appropriating, and disseminating Law 1257 (2008) and other legal tools became fundamental in educating themselves and their communities. For Educators, a sense of agency (both at personal and communal) derived from shared understanding and support of existent laws:

We have a big problem with [lack of] women's rights, especially the right to live. Many women are killed by their partners or girls are married very young. People don't know that Law 1257 tells you that's wrong, that's a crime. People need to know, especially in rural areas with limited access. That's why we are trying to create and support gender committees in local action groups. We tried to deconstruct Law 1257 and link it to day-to-day events that people are familiar with. For example, we produce small pamphlets with key articles linked to their lives. When men tell me that's not relevant to them, that it is women's business, I tell them no! It is everyone's business, and you need to know if what you are doing is wrong.

Margarita



Collective support is a key aspect as it aligns with Law 1257's principle of co-responsibility. This principle recognises that societies and families are responsible for respecting women's rights and ought to contribute towards the elimination of violence against women. It also advances that the State is responsible from preventing, investigating, and sanctioning all forms of violence against women (Art. 6.3, Law 1257, 2008). Educators' experiences highlighted the role legal instruments and human rights knowledge played in shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, from the discrete to the pathological.

³⁴ According to the 2022 Front Line Defenders Report, Colombia accounted for 46% (186 killings) of the total of human rights defenders murdered globally. In particular, defenders working on land, indigenous peoples and environmental rights were the most targeted.

A sense of agency also derived from being perceived as valuable individuals under the law as grievances were formally acknowledged. Legal recognition was an important step in creating a sense of empowerment as individuals felt worthy and visible subjects of rights:

When I started making visible [talking about] the issues associated with forced displacement, Colombia [‘s government] dealt with displacement as if it were a natural disaster, like an earthquake, like dealing with flooding. And so social organisations started to challenge the State, saying that they cannot deal with [displacement] as if it were humanitarian action – and I am telling you all this with my own words, I told you I am not an academic, I only finished high school - So we told the State, no sir, you have a responsibility here, either by doing or not doing [either by action or omission].

We started to pressure strongly for change, as always, it is led by social organisations and movements, and so Law 387, I think that’s when forced displacement is recognised and some protection measures are spelled out. As a result, institutions like the victims’ protection unit were created.

Magnolia



Magnolia’s observation that before communal political action the State ‘dealt with displacement as ‘if it were a natural disaster’ was illuminating. It demonstrated how social movements led by women showed the systematic nature of displacement, unlike the random nature of natural disasters, and as result tangible policies were implemented. In this context, access to human rights and legal knowledge was fundamental in making visible systemic forms of violence that remained hidden behind State omission to protect IDPs. Legal instruments were the result of social action, and therefore represented people’s agency to trigger legal reform. In this case, the personal became political (Bridgeman & Millns, 1998) by accessing knowledge that allowed women meaningful engagement with legal reforms.

Theme two: empowerment means being critical

Contrasting the theme above, another important pattern was Educators’ frustration with the lack of enforcement of hard-won legal victories. Although their experience confirmed that ‘judicial equality did not constitute real equality’ (Lopera & Estrada, 2015:272; Young, 2013) this recognition also fuelled a different type of agency by remaining vigilant about and breaching the gap between the text and the practice of the law.

On the ground, this criticality translated into efforts to document and challenge instances where laws had not been enforced effectively and/or lack of dissemination routes. In Jasmin’s experience, challenging patriarchal attitudes that preclude laws’ implementation played an important part in her dissemination work:

I tell lecturers at the university, you love talking about Law 1257, and yes, it reads well and has lovely things that are supposed to protect women. It talks about all the rights we are supposed to have, that we have the right to demand [justice] and seek the protection of the police... but what use do these laws have if when I go to the police to tell them that my husband beats me and threatens to kill me, they tell me: don’t worry love, you can fix that under the blankets tonight.

Jasmin



This statement evidences the entrenched belief that women’s primary roles are as mothers and wives. This common theme highlighted that failure of implementation often derives from a cultural tendency to protect the family unit and not women’s rights. Educators’ experiences working at this intersecting space between the existence of legal texts and cultural patterns of behaviour gives insights into laws’ blind spots, and how a lack of understanding of women’s material realities when enforcing protection mechanisms precludes access to justice.

Moreover, this legal blindness privileges ‘masculine’ understandings of protection. Educators spoke about how ‘masculine’ protective mechanisms were placing them at greater risk, and thus making law a ‘site of struggle’ instead of a site of liberation for women (Snyder, 2014:370). These *masculine* forms of protection were safeguarding measures that clashed with women’s material needs and realities. I explore this notion further in the diffractive section. Thus, for those Educators who were critical of existing mechanisms that claimed a route to empowerment, a sense of agency derives from highlighting the faults and exploring solutions that are informed and shaped by women’s material conditions.

Theme three: Empowerment means naming, addressing, and healing trauma

Interestingly, a fundamental theme that emerged when exploring notions of vulnerability and empowerment was the need to provide healing spaces for women. As a result of incessant waves of displacement and violence, Educators believed that addressing women’s trauma by providing healing spaces was a fundamental step in building any sense of agency. Magnolia’s experience is indicative of how HRE programmes open and facilitate spaces to provide a sense of healing:

In the workshops we had conversations where things start to come outside, feelings like pain, anger, powerlessness... we were all displaced women, and we had the time and space to talk...I used to invite other displaced women telling them that it was worth going, that in those spaces we could talk amongst and about us, without fear of being judged, without being blamed. It was a space to start conversations.

Magnolia



Acknowledging that healing is an essential step in the process of learning is important. Educators

are aware that their role is not only to provide adequate content but also to create appropriate conditions for learning. In a context of protracted displacement, these appropriate conditions include an acknowledgement of the impact of violence on people’s capacity to learn and providing tools to address trauma:

We -women- are carrying an ancestral pain we need to deal with before we talk about being empowered.

Alheli



There are workshops that have zero impact. We need to recognise that not everyone is ready to be empowered. Before talking about empowerment, we need to open people’s minds to [what empowerment means] ... [because of trauma] people struggle to process information...that’s why we need to include psycho-social spaces in our workshops.

Lily



Through their HRE programmes, Educators provide these healing spaces in diverse forms, which I detail in chapter eight. Importantly, because of the cyclical nature of displacement in Colombia, within this theme there is a recognition that notions of empowerment and vulnerability are entangled, contextual, temporal, spatial and never absolute.

Diffraction Analysis

In the interviews, the importance of materiality (bodies) and the more-than-human (plants, landscapes, the sea) emerged as a fundamental component in Educators' sense of agency. They recounted experiences of suffering multiple threats and having family members and friends kidnapped, tortured, and murdered. A sense of mortality and risk is omnipresent and yet their engagement with their work is undeterred. This continuous commitment with dangerous work emanates agency but also implies vulnerability as Magnolia succinctly put it: 'the more empowered I feel, the more vulnerable I become.'

Educators' accounts of what shapes their temporal and contextual sense of agency and vulnerability conveyed a porosity of the boundaries of these two seemingly opposite states. There was influx/efflux (Bennett, 2020) on Educators' perceptions of empowerment and vulnerability. Therefore, I ask: could matter and the-more-than-human be mobilised to promote notions of agency and justice? Would an FVM approach illuminate the conditions under which this might occur?

The methodology section describes key principles underpinning diffractive analysis and their aptness to speculate about the answers to the above questions. In this section, the conceptual tools that guide my engagement with women's narratives include: a focus on the importance of embodiment and situatedness (Braidotti, 1991); the recognition of matter as vibrant and agentic (Bennett, 2010); privileging relations rather than individuals, assemblages, and distributive agency (Truman, 2019); decentring the human and the primacy of language; and considering the entanglements between matter and language (Barad, 2007).

Moreover, in this and subsequent chapters, I also employ Manning's (2016) 'minor gesture', a concept that:

[M]oves the nonconscious toward the conscious, makes felt the unsayable in the said, brings into resonance field effects otherwise backgrounded in experience ... The minor gesture is the force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, the lines, both structural and fragmentary that articulate how else experience can come to expression (7).

Manning defines minor gestures as subtle shifts that precede more perceptible social change. The concept posits that 'the major' (understood here as the normative) sustains existing power relations, while 'the minor' allows other ways of living to emerge (Orsak, 2016). The minor gesture is a force that challenges received wisdom and common sense (the 'major') by 'offering potentially unlimited experiential variations that suggest alternative forms of being, knowing and doing' (Simmons, 2018:495-496).

Notably for this study, the minor gesture 'creates sites of dissonance, staging disturbances that open experience to new modes of expression (Manning, 2016:2). Thus, starting from this notion of 'quasi-invisible signals' (Manning, 2016: 62), I trace the entanglements of agency in Educators' accounts. An alertness to how minor gestures 'provokes a waiting, a stilling, a listening, a sympathy-with' (Manning, 2016: 62), might illuminate the conditions that foster alternative notions of agency and justice to emerge.

With these principles at the forefront, I selected quotes that 'glowed' (MacLure, 2013) from the interviews and engaged with them diffractively to 'imagine what newness might be incited from [them]' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012 cited Taguchi, 2012:271). The quotes provide a departure point to engage with and illuminate the materiality of oppression and the assemblages that allow inequalities to emerge, persist or reproduce (Truman, 2019).

Unlike thematic analysis, diffractive analysis engages with the differences that emerge and maps the effects of these differences in exploring entanglements of agency and vulnerability. It focuses on what narratives do instead of what they mean.

Diffraction analysis Quote 1 (Q1)

I don't have academic studies, my knowledge is empirical, it comes from my own experience. I lead a women's organisation (who are mostly victims of sexual violence) that seeks access to justice. We were inspired by A's death; she was sexually abused in punishment for leading a campaign to enforce the Autos (legal instruments) that the Court enacted.

When the threats increased, we were told [by government officials] that we were going to be given cars, armed bodyguards, and bulletproof vests. But that was not the protection we wanted, but we had to accept, and she (A) ended up dead. The official statement is that (A) killed herself with the bodyguards' gun...but we very much doubt that, we think it was an induced suicide...she was a very strong empowered woman.

Magnolia



This quote captures the entangled nature of empowerment and vulnerability Educators often described. The more human rights, feminist, and legal knowledge women acquired the more risks they were taking, and therefore the more vulnerable they became. In her interview Magnolia spoke at length about the detrimental impact her work has had on her family. Alongside, her children have been exposed to several episodes of forced displacement and to devastating acts of violence (Magnolia hinted at acts of kidnapping and torturing but she did not elaborate further as it was still evidently too raw for words).

In Q1 Magnolia narrates the story of a close friend (A) with whom she campaigned strongly to disseminate newly enacted legal reforms (Autos) that guaranteed protection and access to justice for women victims of sexual violence. The visibility brought about by their commitment to their work was also their downfall. But instead of deterring them from their work, what A's death did was to catapult women's efforts to pursue justice.

What type of justice? I wondered. Magnolia explained: 'When the threats increased, we were told [by government officials] that we were going to be given cars, armed bodyguards, and bullet proof vests. But that was not the protection we wanted, but we had to accept, and she (A) ended up dead'.

What struck me in Magnolia's interview was that she rejected this type of protection for a long time after A's death, despite the real and persistent threats she received. In her interview, she referred to bodyguards, weapons, and bulletproof vests and cars as masculine ways of protection, and therefore not the type of protection she wanted. But what would a feminist way of protection entail in a violent context? Would minor gestures by minoritarians matter here?

Here I am reminded of Kate Ogg's (2023) work with Kenya's case law. Using a feminist legal approach, her research explored the politics of listening in accessing justice, specifically looking at refugee protection. Ogg analysed refugee claims instead of international legal frameworks and explored how asylum seekers' narratives shaped the content of legal remedies. She argued that the dialogue or 'translation' between local frameworks and asylum seekers' narratives could bring deeper protection for people seeking refugee protection (Ogg, 2022). In Kenyan case law, she found that cases started with and emphasized people's experiences of displacement before embarking on legal discussions. She argued that documenting the person's trajectory of displacement and need of protection was a feminist approach that considered the voice of the person and avoided labelling them as weak or vulnerable. This is important in demonstrating that legal procedures need not exclude people's stories of displacement and that this recognition plays an important part in shaping people's sense of agency.

In that light, Q1 illuminates how women are simultaneously victimised and 'empowered'. It shows the disregard of women's voices in legal systems of procedures of protection. In doing so, Q1 highlights evidence of embodied justice. It illustrates how notions of protection and justice are embodied and shaped by masculine concepts of these experiences. For Educators, masculine protection isolates and places them in further danger. In the volatile context of Colombia, Magnolia's position hints at how an FVM approach to justice and agency might benefit from practices that foster dialogue, compromise, and the inclusion of women's stories as part of legal processes.

'We were inspired by A's death; she was sexually abused in punishment for leading a campaign to enforce the Autos (legal instruments) that the Court enacted'. In her interview, almost always with an apologetic tone, Magnolia repeated often that she had no academic background. However, she

engaged well, powerfully, and eloquently with legal, feminist, and human rights discourses in her quest for agency and justice. However, her extensive knowledge and existing protective mechanisms were neither enough nor effective in providing meaningful protection. Therefore, Educators spoke about the importance of self-protection practices as informed by ancestral indigenous knowledge.

I argue that these adopted practices are minor gestures that represent tangible protection and consequently a sense of agency. Q1 prompts questions about the nature of alternative forms of protection (and justice) in fragile contexts. Haraway (1992) offers a hopeful alternative:

Humanity's face has been the face of man. Feminist humanity must have another shape, other gestures; but, I believe, we must have feminist figures of humanity. They cannot be man or woman; they cannot be the human as historical narrative that has staged that generic universal... feminist humanity must resist representation, resist literal figuration, and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility (86).

Magnolia's experiences allude to current notions of agency that are masculine in essence because, even in the context of South America, they derive from:

Enlightenment figures of coherent and masterful subjectivity, the bearers of rights, holders of properties in the self, legitimate sons with access to language and the power to represent, subjects endowed with inner coherence and rational clarity, the Masters of Theory, founders of state, and fathers and families, bombs and scientific theories... in short man (Haraway, 1992:87).

Thus, what emerges from Q1, a narrative that situates Magnolia within an assemblage of humans, discourses, bodies, weapons, knowledges, is the complex and problematic nature of notions of empowerment. Moreover, in agreement with Haraway's hope that a 'feminist humanity must have another shape' and 'erupt in powerful possibilities' (Haraway, 1992:86), Magnolia's and other Educators' actions are minor and hopeful gestures. Their actions 'provoke a waiting, a stilling, a listening, a sympathy-with' (Manning, 2016:62) that are in fact supporting different types of justice and agency to emerge. The minor gestures Educators spark in their day-to-day lives offer a 'feminist humanity' that can shape not only new historical possibilities (Haraway, 1992), but also alternative notions of agency.

Diffraction analysis Quote 2 (Q2)

My grandmother was very generous and had solidarity with people, we barely had anything, but many people came and went, the doors were wide open always. We used to have an old radio in the main corridor that was stolen many times, but the doors remained opened anyway.

People inherit a want and a need to help others – we cannot escape it.

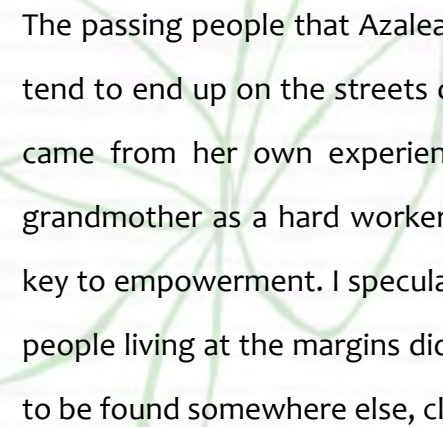
Azalea



What does an old radio that was stolen many times do?

In the interview I failed to explore the story of the old radio. For example, it was unclear whether the old radio was returned, or whether the stolen radios kept being replaced. Did Azalea mean the radio was 'borrowed' - without asking - and returned many times? Why would transient people 'borrow a radio'? Or did the grandmother, who believed in and knew in her bones about the importance of connection, solidarity, and voice; replace the radio every time it was stolen? Was the radio a sort of company to the transient? A sign of connection to a bigger community, from which they might have felt, presumably, excluded? No matter. It was only after reading the interview many times that the radio started to glow (MacLure, 2013) and the focus moved from what stealing the radio meant to what it did.

The radio, as an object, was the needle that bonded people together. These are all speculations of the entanglements of place, bodies, and objects in a context of displacement, in a context of dispossession, transiency, and invisibility. A radio speaks...to you... the one no one else sees. I do not intend to take the radio as a metaphor but as a starting point to trace entanglements of notions of agency, vulnerability, and temporality.



The passing people that Azalea alludes to were likely to be the children of displacement; those that tend to end up on the streets or shanty towns. Azalea's grandmother's solidarity with the transient came from her own experience of forced movement and discrimination. Azalea described her grandmother as a hard worker; a tenacious woman who believed strongly that education was the key to empowerment. I speculate that because of this background, Azalea's grandmother knew that people living at the margins did not have access to education. Their sense of empowerment needed to be found somewhere else, closer to their reality.

The radio was stolen many times. Replacing the radio, keeping the door open kept providing shelter to the constant flow of those seeking refuge, new refugees who had nothing to do with previous thefts. What replacing the radio did was to acknowledge the reality of displacement and dispossession for what it was/is and focused on what was needed.

Azalea's grandmother's supported countless people in their uprootedness while working hard to support the education of her own family. Might this unwavering support to many – and to her family's detriment at times – have been a source of empowerment for Azalea's grandmother? Tracing this entanglement between the radio and the grandmother's relentless commitment to support others, I speculate that what her actions did was to plant seeds of solidarity.

Nowadays, her very well educated and confident granddaughter continues to support others, once again at great personal cost. The granddaughter still remembers the radio, remembers the open-door policy in a household that struggled to feed its own. The grandchild, the woman who now cares for others, fights for others, believes in others, despite their errors and defects, she sees the fragile and imperfect reality for what it is, not for what it should be.

Focusing on engagements between matter and discourse, I speculate that the radio shines light on Azalea's grandmother's commitment to solidarity and dignity. The human rights discourse speaks of access to food, housing, safety as fundamental aspects of dignity. Beyond this discourse, Azalea's grandmother provided all that to countless strangers, and the many stolen radios testify to that. Azalea's grandmother, like the radio, provided a connection, an anchor, and company in the background.

The radio was stolen many times, and perhaps many times replaced, and as such given priority in a poor household. The radio, a paradoxical sedentary marker, highlighted the transient and the

regularity of mobility. The grandmother's house allowed for a flow of visitors that sometimes carried her possessions away with them. There are countless stories about what people decide to carry when they migrate and the stories those objects tell about people's history and identity. Those objects mostly live in the past. In contrast, a functioning radio is situated in the present; it is useful insofar as it speaks of what is happening. The grandmother's house was situated in a country with a long history of uprootedness. A country and a time where and when involuntary movement seems to be the norm; where and when waves of displacement coexist alongside lofty ideas of what it should be.

I speculate that by replacing stolen radios, Azalea's grandmother engaged in incessant minor gestures that 'challenged received wisdom and common sense (the 'major') and offered potentially unlimited experiential variations that suggest alternative forms of being, knowing and doing' (Simmons, 2018:495-496). Despite the numerous thefts and lack of resources, Azalea's grandmother challenged the expected common-sense practice to cease to offer shelter but instead, by keeping her doors opened, allowed space for alternative ways of being, knowing, and doing to flourish under and beyond her roof.

Diffraction analysis Quote 3 (Q3)

The aim of the course was to teach Embera (indigenous group) women, some of whom had been victims of sexual violence, about the different judicial systems available to them [to pursue justice]. They were illiterate and spoke no Spanish. So, we decided to use a translator and role-play to engage them with the concepts we were trying to teach them.

After the session, I thought long and hard about how could we, really, guarantee equal access to justice to those illiterate and isolated women? I contacted a local organisation to work with the women – but only the ones who came forward as victims of sexual violence – to teach them basic writing and reading skills.

After three months, we were invited back to their graduation. I was shocked to find out that before the graduation ceremony, this group of women requested a bus from the local authority to be taken to the ID office. They requested a new identity card where they were able to sign their names instead of the anonymous X the old identity cards carried. These women were between 18 and 60 years of age. Only because of that, our work was worth it. The Embera women inspired us.

Rosa



Rosa is an anthropologist and human rights trainer that works with a government agency. In that role, Rosa travels around Colombia working with diverse communities in rural and urban areas. Because of this role, she also has the capacity to influence the delivery of the training and the retributions participants receive for taking part in the programmes.

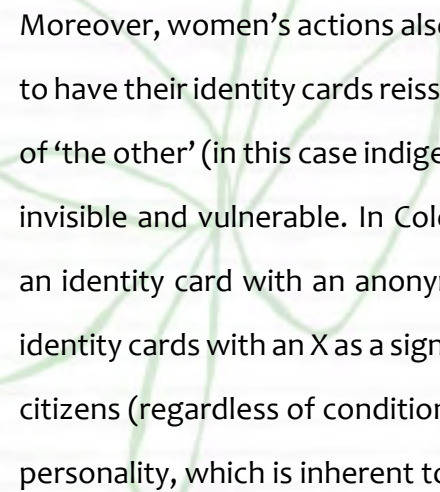
In Q3, Rosa closes the story by stating that the indigenous women's action to ask for a new identity card was an unexpected but welcome outcome and an example of agency. As a human rights Educator, her role is to disseminate and inform people, particularly victims of sexual violence, about the official

avenues to access justice. The success of her role, the measure of empowerment, focuses on the number of women who register as official victims of sexual crimes, and therefore become eligible to receive holistic support to access justice. The inspiration Rosa alludes to refers to the idea of 'early reparations' in the process of accessing justice. Rosa believes that offering literacy programmes and other initiatives identified by victims themselves could be an effective form of early reparation for a crime, instead of having to wait for a final judicial decision that focuses on punishment and final retribution.

According to Rosa, in seeking justice, victims generally engage in lengthy processes that culminate with an assessment of the severity of the crime and the harshness of punishment it deserves. Based on that assessment, victims might be eligible to claim reparations. Introducing early reparations would enable the State to provide the minimum material conditions to allow victims to feel a sense of autonomy and dignity while engaging in lengthy judicial processes. Undoubtedly, this might have an important impact in terms of legal remediation and access to justice, however, looking at the interaction diffractively, I argue that the Embera women's actions made visible hidden sources of vulnerability that may be mislabelled as empowerment.

First, Rosa's quote hints at the multiple legal constructions of justice – and therefore empowerment – the Embera people could exercise. In Rosa's experience, customary law in indigenous communities tends to handle sexual violence privately, in contrast with official policy of identifying, registering, and documenting victims and crimes publicly. In Q3, literacy training is only offered to those who came out publicly as victims of sexual violence, only to those who decided to engage with the government's judicial system.

I speculate that the Embera women's actions illuminate the entanglement of notions of empowerment and vulnerability and the temporal nature of these entanglements, they needed to embrace public victimhood to access individual empowerment. The State judicial system demanded of them to come forward, to challenge their own cultural constructions of justice, to name themselves victims of a crime in a public space. As a reward, these women might have access to early reparations and exposure to what a different type of justice might feel like. In this case, the women shed light on their location within a justice assemblage and how legal systems (and their conceptions of justice and empowerment) were also part of an assemblage of agency.



Moreover, women's actions also made visible systemic colonial practices of oppression. By requesting to have their identity cards reissued the women highlighted a system that by pretending to be inclusive of 'the other' (in this case indigenous illiterate women) continues to keep these women, these citizens invisible and vulnerable. In Colombia, identity cards are fundamental for everyday activities; having an identity card with an anonymous X renders them meaningless. The State may argue that issuing identity cards with an X as a signature is evidence of compliance with its obligations to acknowledge all citizens (regardless of conditions of literacy or ethnic group background), and provide a right of legal personality, which is inherent to humans by the mere fact of existing.

However, I see this action as a minor gesture by Minoritarians. Embera women's actions shift the spotlight from interpreting this act as empowering (having the agency to request new identity cards) to making visible systemic practices that perpetuate discrimination and isolation in the name of inclusion and human rights. Yes, the action inspired someone (the Educator) with the power to implement changes that might benefit future victims should early reparations be adopted by the State. But the Embera women's actions also showed that binary (individual/group, empowerment/vulnerability) conceptions of empowerment are problematic.

Conclusion

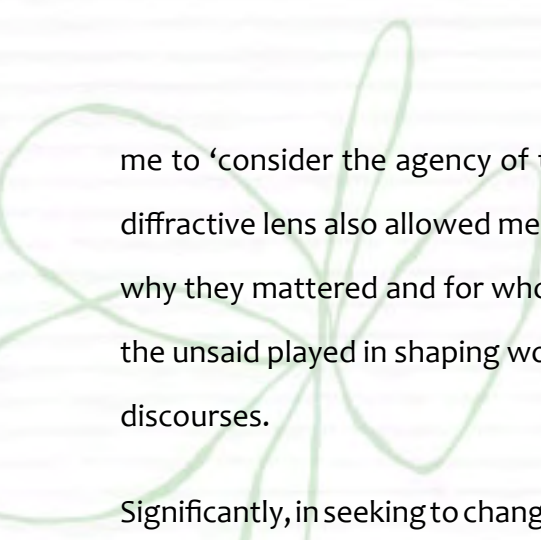
Grounded by the question 'Empowerment for what?', in this chapter I explored the nature of the 'what' Educators sought empowerment towards. To do so, I employed thematic and diffractive analysis of interview data.

In the first section, thematic analysis revealed three main themes. The first theme recognised the key role human rights and legal knowledge played in shaping notions of agency. Educators reported that HRE programmes made visible and addressed aspects of systemic violence, and in doing so generated a sense of individual and collective agency. Interestingly, in contrast, the second theme highlighted the importance of being critical of unquestioned engagement with legal instruments. Educators highlighted the importance of working in transitional spaces where normative discourses (human rights and legal knowledge) meet cultural positionings that preclude the enactment of law. This criticality informed a contextual sense of agency.

Thirdly, a universal theme was the recognition that providing healing practices was a fundamental path to foster agency. In a context of cyclical trauma and displacement, possessing normative knowledge and having access to legal infrastructures are not sufficient conditions to foster a tangible sense of agency. Educators believe that no meaningful learning (and therefore a real sense of agency cannot be experienced) can occur without providing avenues and spaces for both personal and collective healing.

Importantly, another common thread was the notion that perceptions of empowerment were intertwined with feelings of vulnerability. This notion of agency as an entanglement, always fluctuating, presented a different view to how legal theorists, historically, have perceived power as a restrictive force that operates on women externally; an external force that restricts them from doing what they would otherwise choose. In this vein, a nonbinary, fluctuating, vibrant materialist notion of agency pays better attention to the ways in which power affects women's interior desires and needs (Eichner and Huntington, 2016) and goes beyond normative legal and human rights notions of empowerment.

The diffractive analysis engaged with three quotes from the interviews. Using Manning's (2016) minor gesture as a conceptual tool, I speculated on the entanglements of place, objects, and bodies to understand alternative notions of agency. Identifying minor gestures in three different quotes allowed



me to ‘consider the agency of the material in the production of knowledge’ (Taguchi, 2012). Using a diffractive lens also allowed me to pay attention to the differences that emerged, how they mattered, why they mattered and for whom. This focus also shed light on the role the hidden, the invisible, and the unsaid played in shaping women’s notions of agency that transcended the human rights and legal discourses.

Significantly, in seeking to change the conversation about human-centred notions of empowerment and vulnerability, this chapter offered a starting point to deconstruct prevalent notions of empowerment. By exploring the nature of *what* women Educators in Colombia seek empowerment towards, this chapter highlights the complexities and contradictions normative notions of empowerment carry on the ground. It also shines light on the importance of including practices of healing and protection as a crucial aspect of agency.

Therefore, inspired by Nigerien women, water pumps, Ellsworth’s work, and FVM, this chapter forms the foundation of a posthuman cartography of agency. It advances that exploring the question ‘empowerment for what?’ provides a crucial coordinate in an entangled notion of agency. The following chapters explore other coordinates to identify conditions that can render subjects contextually, spatially, and temporally agentic.



Chapter seven: Empowerment for whom?

‘All things that are, are equally removed from being nothing.’

(John Donne as cited in Leach, 2013:ix)

‘The problem was that we did not know whom we meant when we said ‘we’.

(Adrienne Rich, 1986: 17 cited in Neimanis, 2017:1).

Preamble

‘On the fifteenth of May, in the Jungle of Nool,

In the heat of the day, in the cool of the pool,

He was splashing... enjoying the jungle’s great joys...

When Horton the elephant heard a small noise.

So Horton stopped splashing.

He looked toward the sound.

“That’s funny,” thought Horton. “There’s no one around.”

Then he heard it again! Just a very faint yelp

As if some tiny person were calling for help.

“I’ll help you,” said Horton. “But who are you? Where?”

He looked and he looked. He could see nothing there

But a small speck of dust blowing past through the air.

“I say!” murmured Horton. “I’ve never heard tell

Of a small speck of dust that is able to yell.

So you know what I think?... Why, I think that there must

Be someone on top of that small speck of dust!

Some sort of a creature of very small size,

Too small to be seen by an elephant’s eyes...’

(From Dr Seuss’ Horton Hears a Who!)

Three women in Bilbao

It was a sunny Saturday in December, and I was elated to be in the Basque country at last. I was there attending a course in law and gender from a sociology of law perspective. Although the venue for the course was deep into the Basque country in a small beautiful rural town, I had ventured out that Saturday to explore Bilbao. I tend not to look up information about the places I visit opting instead to wander and familiarise with the place through my feet. That's why I, usually, don't mind getting lost. However, because that Saturday my time was limited and because I had heard so much about the Basque Country's exquisite cuisine, I had two main priorities: visit the Guggenheim Museum and the food market in the old town.

I walked from morning to evening, and in that wandering three ephemeral encounters stayed with me. These brief encounters lingered in my mind because for the past three and a half years I had been thinking about gender, notions of empowerment and vulnerability, law, and lines of flight. Well, to be precise, they were not really encounters; I just happened to be passing by while people on the streets of Bilbao were minding their own business. I heard what they were talking about or observed what they were doing while we were sharing a random intersection of time and space in Bilbao.

The first conversation I overheard was happening outside the Guggenheim Museum. It is impossible not to linger outside that beautiful futuristic structure. The building transports you: I imagined myself in a foreign alien world hundreds of years away, in the past or the future. There is also a giant spider outside that just captures you in an invisible web and entangles you in its beauty. The spider, called *Maman*, is the work of the French artist Louise Bourgeois, in honour of her mother who was a weaver. The spider is stunning; it captures beautifully both strength and fragility. In the past few years, spiders have helped me think through and with posthuman concepts that I perceive as elusive and abstract. I owe a lot to spiders, so I lingered outside the Guggenheim Museum with *Maman*.

Whilst I was there and not, while I was being mesmerised and transported by the building and the spider, I overheard a few sentences said by a woman, in a familiar accent, so naturally my ears and

heart pricked up. The woman was speaking with a Colombian accent in this double foreign land, so that stab of familiarity brought me back to the present and the past at once. The woman was saying to the other person:

'You see, it has been so hard, he broke my heart, we lost so much ... (and after a brief pause) but at the same time, if that would not have happened, I would not be where I am now...' [end of eaves dropping]

I did not hear the rest of the conversation, but that just sounded like a line of flight to me. A line of flight on the streets of Bilbao. As I walked along the river and marvelled at the beauty of the city, the subtle architectural gestures that add beauty to functionality, I came across the second conversation. Once again, a familiar accent using a uniquely Colombian word made me wonder for a split swirling second: was I in Colombia? Another woman talking about heartbreak again. This time she was sitting on a table outside a café, her voice was intense and loud, with that sharpness that conveys the rawness of anger and hurt:

'*Marica*,³⁵ he left me for that other bitch! I keep thinking how is she better than me? ... who cares ... I am just not the right woman for him, a better someone was out there... *Hijo de puta!*³⁶' [end of eavesdrop]

Another Colombian woman talking about heartbreak and loss on the streets of Bilbao. I recognised immediately the anger, despair, and frustration the swearwords she used carried. 'A better someone was out there' ...that magnanimity struck me as another line of flight.

The last encounter was at the bus station. I had half an hour to spare and spent every minute of it unashamedly observing the intriguing woman sitting next to me. Her grey hair, curved spine, wrinkled hands, and walking frame told me she was old. I couldn't see her face clearly, not only her hair covered her face, but she was also awfully busy arranging plastic bags around her walking frame. I was intrigued,

³⁵ In my experience growing up in Colombia, this was a vernacular derogatory expression used for homosexuals, especially men. However, it seems that the word has been appropriated in the vernacular to signify a friendly relationship, something akin to Mate or Dude.

³⁶ Son of a bitch.

mesmerised, fascinated. Her walking frame was covered in small plastic bags that she had knotted around. At the bus station she was busy adding some more to the knotted collection. She started by smoothing each plastic bag out, folding them carefully into a strip that then would be tied neatly around the walking frame. When she finished adding the new bags, she started undoing the old ones and started the process again.

A bag lady? She did not look homeless. She was wearing fabulous brand-new-looking dark green corduroy trousers. She was also wearing a lovely, weathered leather belt, leather hiking boots and a dark blue gilet. I was enthralled. She was oblivious to the noise, to the woman having an annoying loud phone conversation next to us, of me watching her every move. She was a different type of bag lady and with that thought I left to catch my bus. I went back to immerse myself in the theory of law and gender.

Eduardo Galeano (1991) once wrote about a similar woman. *The book of Embraces* is one of my favourite books by one of my favourite authors. It is a book I often re-turn to and re-visit for reassurance and comfort, it is a book in which I know by heart the pages of my favourite passages, a book in which I know by heart the texture and colour of the pages, a book that has familiar stains and underlines and marginalia that we have both accumulated through the years. This book opens with this epigraph:

Recordar [To remember]: from the Latin *re-cordis*, which means to pass back through the heart (Galeano, 1991:n/p).

In the context of South America, Galeano's work focuses on the importance of memory, remembering and revisiting ideas of identity. In the 'Passion of Speech/1' Galeano writes:

Marcela was visiting the snowy North. One night in Oslo, she met a woman who sang and told stories. Between songs, she would spin yarns, glancing at slips of paper like someone telling fortunes from crib notes.

This woman from Oslo had on an enormous dress dotted all over with pockets. She would pull slips of paper out of her pockets one by one, each with its story to tell, stories tried and true of people who wished to come back to life through witchcraft. And so she raised the dead and the forgotten, and from the depths of her dress sprang the odysseys and loves of the human animal who goes on living, who goes on speaking (1991:19)

Putting aside the focus on the importance of language and speech as part of identity, like Barad's, his work reminds me that I should not forget, for a minute, that there are material effects of yearning and imagining (Barad, 2017:78). In Horton's tale above, the elephant continues to describe how he engages with the diminutive speck of dusk, and eventually discovers *Who-ville* and all the *Whos* who inhabit that world. Thinking with the fleeting encounters in Bilbao, with Horton, and an FVM lens has helped me move away from asking, or at least focusing intensely about what it all meant; but to focus on what stories do.

Stories have become like seeds that were heard/planted long ago and are now starting to germinate, their roots 'interwoven in the web of human relations' (Tamboukou, 2020B:14). My job, as a feminist researcher, is not only to 'find a position within them, so that I can be-in-the-world-with-others' (Tamboukou, 2020B:14), but also, for the purposes of this chapter, to be aware of the multitude of *Whos* who inhabit the world. Before engaging with FVM, I would have prioritised questions of meaning, instead my gaze has now shifted to what is set in motion and to what stories and the stuff in the world do.

Galeano's story about the Oslovian storyteller resonated with Ursula Le Guin's *the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. Le Guin's theory was inspired by the Carrier Bag theory of evolution developed by anthropologist Elizabeth Fisher. Fisher suggested that 'humans' primary tool or "cultural device" was not the knife or the spear or club, but rather the containers they used to carry food from the place it was found to their home' (Hundert, 2020: n/p). Le Guin borrowed this concept for her theory of fiction; Hundert explains:

The truer story, [Le Guin] argues can be represented better as a carrier bag, an ongoing gathering-up and letting-go, rather than the classic "man vs. x" narrative scaffold. But [Le Guin's] essay is not just about rethinking fiction; it's about rethinking the human story itself, rethinking the "Ascent of Man" and that which will follow (Hundert, 2020, n/p).

Thus, if it is about rethinking the place of humans and that which will follow, seeing stories as ever-unfolding, unfinished, in constant motion is important for conceptualisations of agency and displacement. I argue that notions of agency and vulnerability are not absolute; they are entangled, always in motion, ravelling and unravelling. I further argue that the story of displacement needs to be told differently. What would happen if we took movement, rather than sedentarism, as the

norm within human societies? What would a notion that sees constant movement as the norm do to conceptualisations of agency and vulnerability? To ideas of protection?

In Le Guin's theory, there is space for all the necessary elements of a whole (conflict, competition, pain, loss) that are 'neither [in] conflict nor harmony since the purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but a continuing process' (Hundert, 2020:n/p). Here, continuity without resolution is key, 'in the bigger picture of the "life story," there appear to be no fixed beginnings or endings—only change' (Huddert, 2020:n/p). Braidotti and others concur that processes and transitions are the norm, pain is unavoidable, suffering is optional (Murakami, 2008; Braidotti, 2008). It is not about denying the pain, the loss, the vulnerability, but rather about finding different ways of working through these states and living with them (Braidotti, 2008).

From an FVM perspective, a few questions arise: what relevance might stories have for the more-than-human? Why focus on the importance of stories when we are trying to move away from the primacy of language, the human, representation? Do stories matter in FVM? Donna Haraway offers some insights into these questions through her work with environmental and racial justice movements in Colombia. She linked Le Guin's theory with three carrier bags that she received as gifts in Colombia to talk about the symbolic resonances of their materiality and the act of carrying them.

In essence, Haraway highlights how communities have already been writing an alternative story for a long-time in spite of and in resistance to dominant neoliberal discourses, violence, and oppression. Haraway argues that stories put across different ways of thinking that help us to re-imagine the past, present, and future in ways that position us to resist the status quo (including discourses of empowerment, vulnerability, displacement, protection) collectively and non-violently. Because, in fact:

It matters what stories we tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with (Haraway, 2016:3).

Thus, in this chapter, I continue to argue that the story of empowerment needs to be questioned, reimaged, and told differently. We need to envision a notion of agency that transcends the human and includes the more-than-human; one that recognises temporal, spatial, and contextual dimensions of agency, one that is entangled with different actants³⁷, with different storytellers, with different Whos. A notion of agency that is always continuous, evolving, never a finished story.

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore *the* diverse subjects (*the Whos*) that HRE, and legal discourses seek to empower. More specifically, the focus is on the question of to *whom* does a notion of empowerment apply. From an anthropocentric perspective, I explore the extent to which it can be said that human rights education and laws provide a sense of empowerment that is applicable to all people equally. From a post-humanist perspective, I build on discussions from chapter five to explore alternative subjects and entanglements of agency beyond the human. From this perspective, the subjects and agents of agency encompass abstract entities such as legal knowledge, human rights organisations, governmental agencies, funders and other actants in any given entanglement of agency.

These explorations are guided by thematic and diffractive analyses of the interviews. Thematic analysis focuses on target audiences for empowerment as defined by HRE and legal discourses. A diffractive analysis of three interview quotes focuses on aspects of materiality that trouble human-centred notions of agency. In this analysis, the questions who is being empowered, why and by whom guide the exploration. I also seek to identify 'others' who render humans and more-than-humans capable of contextual, spatial, and temporal agency (Haraway, 2016). I conclude by exploring whether a deconstruction of the subject of agency could inform alternative notions of protection, displacement, and agency that move beyond human-centred conceptions of empowerment.

³⁷ For Bruno Latour, an actant is anything that has agency; everything that contributes to how interactions take place. In his actor-network theory, every node in the network (including humans, nonhumans, the-more-than-human) shapes the way in which interactions in the network will occur (Gershon, 2010). For Bennett, 'an assemblage is not governed by a central power and is made up of many types of actants: humans, nonhumans; animals, vegetables, and minerals; nature, culture, technology' (Bennett, 2005:445).

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis focuses on people as learners and legal subjects who are categorised as in need of protection and empowerment. From the point of view of HRE, a measure of empowerment derives from any strategy that supports the full development of people's personalities, which in turn contributes to community cohesion (Starkey, 2012). From the perspective of FMS, a fundamental tenet of empowerment is the capacity to seek, access and secure protection measures and justice in contexts of displacement and fragility.

Generally, Educators in this research work with populations who have experienced multiple episodes of displacement, violence and discrimination, with a particular focus on women and girls. All Educators pay close attention to the needs of specific groups with high awareness of intersectional needs and challenges. From the interviews, three main subjects in need of empowerment emerged. First, individual target groups included women, children and young people. Second, collective target groups included Afro-Colombian and indigenous people. Within this theme, notions of empowerment transcended the individual and focused on groups' empowerment. Third, empowerment of the role of human rights educators beyond other identity markers (gender, cultural, social or political background). In this case, the role of HRE is considered as an actant in the assemblage of agency. Thus, empowerment of the role of human rights educators emerged as a key factor validating human rights and other epistemologies as part of the discourse of empowerment.

Feminist and intersectional perspectives also inform thematic analysis. A feminist perspective is helpful in tracing the beneficiaries of the human rights and legal discourses, and accounting for intersectional forms of oppressions (Tuana, 2021). Additionally, an intersectional approach considers crossing patterns of discrimination (because of racism, ageism, sexism) that women of colour (minoritarian women) experience. It is also mindful that these experiences tend to be neglected within relevant discourses (for example within feminist or antiracist discourses) and as a result women of colour tend to be doubly marginalised (Crenshaw, 1991:1243-1244).

In terms of intersectional forms of oppression, in the context of this research, I identified seven axes of oppression that are linked to different characteristics: age, gender identity, sex, cultural background (including religious beliefs and politics stances), ethnicity, literacy, and location (rural, urban, suburban/ghetto).

This section unfolds by describing the conditions that categorise each group as vulnerable and how, according to Educators, they are being empowered. It focuses on the nature of the type of empowerment needed by each subject and why, and the human rights prioritised for each group of people as an avenue to reach empowerment.

Theme one: Empowerment for Individual Target Groups

Empowerment for women

Given the historical and intersectional sources of violence and discrimination affecting displaced women in Colombia, women were seen by Educators as a priority group in need of agency. For example, for many women, experiences of violence in private and public spaces are commonplace:

There was a lot of intra-family and gender violence at home, when I was growing up, there were so many of us, we didn't have much.

Azalea

Feminist theory helped me understand that the violence and abuse, I suffered when I was growing up wasn't my fault, or a cross I had to bear for being a woman.

Magnolia

[Name of woman] was an empowered woman, she fought hard for the Autos (legal instruments) to be respected, but in punishment she was raped, vanished, and eventually murdered.

Magnolia

In a context of immanent violence and displacement, Educators found that in addition to accessing fundamental human rights, such as education, safety, employment, and health; a vital element of empowerment was to learn to navigate a state of victimhood. To receive State support, victims of violence and displacement must register with State officials who will validate their claims.

Educators believed a crucial aspect of empowerment was for women to recognise when the label of victim becomes detrimental to their sense of agency. Because of official categorisations of victimhood, a perpetual association with powerlessness and vulnerability has hindered women's sense of self-worth and empowerment. As a path to empowerment, Educators consider it important to discuss with women the implications of adopting a label and embracing it as a fundamental part of their identity:

When you are labelled as a victim, that's a double-edged sword. I use it in the sense that it is needed to claim [my] rights, but when I call myself a victim, because it is true that I have endured many painful things in our territory... but I don't want to carry those things with me, because it is a heavy load that traverses your body, that seeps through your body. [And every time you use the word it reminds you] of all the mistreatment, of all the things that have been stripped off you, not only material but also spiritual things that in the end make you a victim.

Azalea



Educators are thus alert to and cautious about the challenges of accessing justice and protection, and the role these processes play in shaping women's notions of agency. Although in theory, as encapsulated by different legal protection tools, Colombia has strong legislation to protect IDPs, on the ground there is a lack of alignment between reality and the legal texts. This lack of synchronicity is not unexpected (Snyder, 2014), but Educators feel women were paying a detrimental price for engaging with legal systems and constructs that did not reflect their material reality and, in effect, kept re-victimizing them. Indeed, Educators believe that legal instruments were, often, precluding women's empowerment:

The law sounds beautiful on paper, but it is meaningless on the ground; I have experienced! I have accompanied students to police stations to denounce rape, and police officers' response is that they deserved it because no one told them to go out dancing and getting drunk.

Jasmin



In chapter six, I discussed the frustrations Educators encountered when engaging with normative discourses and legal processes that re-victimise women and negatively impact their sense of agency. Here the emphasis is instead on acknowledging how different actants of the assemblage of agency impact women differently, particularly considering their intersectional needs. The focus is on the recognition that on the ground women have complex, diverse -and at times conflicting- needs, and that different discourses can foster a more tangible sense of agency.

Empowerment for children and young adults

Most Educators stress that empowering children and young people through education is a crucial avenue to shape notions of empowerment that are tangible and sustainable. Specifically, Educators believe that acquiring human rights knowledge at a young age is fundamental in enabling young people to stop cycles of violence. In Colombia, many children are recruited as combatants³⁸ starting a cycle of uprooting that is difficult to break (Roshani, 2018). Specifically, and considering a key function of human rights education is to promote community cohesion, Educators believe that children and young people living in rural areas need to be prioritised as subjects in need of empowerment.

In seeking to empower children and young people in remote rural areas, I identified two important themes. First is the importance of material conditions on shaping a tangible sense of empowerment

38 In the Colombian context, forced recruitment of children and young people as combatants is a common practice by both revolutionary and paramilitary groups.

for young rural people. Second is the importance of achieving a balance between the power of human rights concepts and creating false expectations in the name of empowerment and human rights.

For Educators working with this population, it is evident that material conditions play a crucial role in shaping children's notions of empowerment. They point out that for children and young people living in poor, isolated, rural areas, knowledge about human rights is not enough if the infrastructure to claim rights is absent or irrelevant to their needs:

It is better to go where there is no government presence because the State is fascist... they have a mandate to protect people, but they don't do that properly. They come up with a lot of norms, rules, laws that are never enforced. They don't talk to communities, if you don't take the time to talk with people you don't know what they really need. [State officials] arrive with meaningless rules and regulations that have nothing to do with children's needs; with the needs of indigenous, or Afro-Colombians or peasants, they assume they all have the same needs, but that's not the case ... they legislate from their desks not from within the territory.

Iris



In this instance, the State's *de facto* invisibility is seized by Educators as an educational space free of regulations. As a result, Educators are free to promote a tangible sense of agency that aligns with children's and young people's contextual needs and available resources. For example, Educators working in remote rural areas witness the on-going impact continuous forced displacement has on children's and young people's capacity to learn and belong. In this case, Educators design educational interventions that use informal community schools as an alternative to formal education that is regulated by the State. Importantly, this approach also contributes towards a communal sense of agency. Daisy's practice, for example, is premised on the notion that access to relevant knowledge, particularly human rights and cultural knowledge, is vital for young people to form a strong personal

and communal sense of agency:

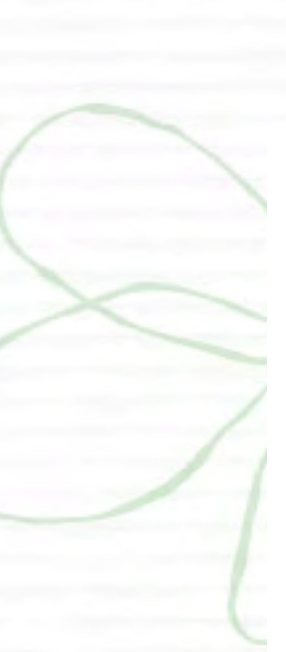
It is very important to invest in informal schools because in that way we educate to empower, we empower to serve, we serve to transform and we transform to generate changes, deep changes in our communities, in our extended families. We leave these footprints in our children and young people. They are inheriting this knowledge that will be projected into our communities in the small things, in the elemental and the everyday.

Daisy



Thus, from the perspective of those working at the margins (of State protection or predominant ethnic or social groups) a sense of empowerment must start from people's quotidian experiences. Moreover, considering the intersectional vectors described above, in contexts of poverty, rural isolation, protracted displacement and violence where legal and human rights infrastructures are rather abstract and/or non-existent, a sense of empowerment often starts from being listened to, and from sharing stories of destitution and violence. Once again, the power of shared stories is fundamental in breaking a sense of isolation, vulnerability, and victimhood.

The second theme that emerged was Educators' emphasis on the importance of knowing the needs of the individuals and communities with whom they work. Awareness of these needs informs approaches that strike a balance between exercising the power of human rights without creating false expectations in the name of empowerment. This approach supports a sense of agency that derives from the ordinary not from abstract conceptualisations of rights. For example, in Violeta's experience, equating access to education with access to employment or a higher social status is misleading. She advocates instead for a sense of empowerment that is meaningful within isolated rural communities and derives from people's contexts:



[Where we work] the context for formal education is not favourable. The idea that studying gives you access to a good job does not apply here. The idea that connects knowledge with a good job or better social and financial standing is lost here, so young people end up working for the drug trade... what we need is flexible education. I know of a programme that is tailored to people's time availability - for example peasants don't have much time because of their work-. [In this programme] they go to your house based on your availability and the content of the modules is guided by people's knowledge, by their chores. For instance, if you work on the land, subject content will be linked to cycles of the seeds you plant, the things you weave, the medicinal plants you grow.

Violeta



Violeta's experience highlights the importance of having a critical approach to universal discourses of empowerment. Although unequivocally, Educators agree that access to basic human rights (in this case access to education) is a key foundation for personal empowerment; disperse communities living in remote rural areas pose extraordinary challenges to universal ideas of agency as advanced by the human rights discourse. In these remote areas, where access to education is fractured and sporadic and employment opportunities scarce, Educators' experiences show that a tangible, temporal and contextual sense of agency derives from alternative discourses and approaches. In this context, notions of agency are particular, not generic.

These insights are important considering that youth is the current focus of the World Programme for Human Rights Education ([UNESCO, 2022](#)) that aims to work with young people to move them from 'mere beneficiaries [of rights] to see them as actors of change' ([UNESCO, 2022](#)). The World Programme envisions the empowerment of youth through their agency to 'fulfil their role as active citizens, to take action and uphold their human rights and those of others, and to participate meaningfully in public affairs and democratic decision making processes' ([UNESCO, 2022, n/p](#)).

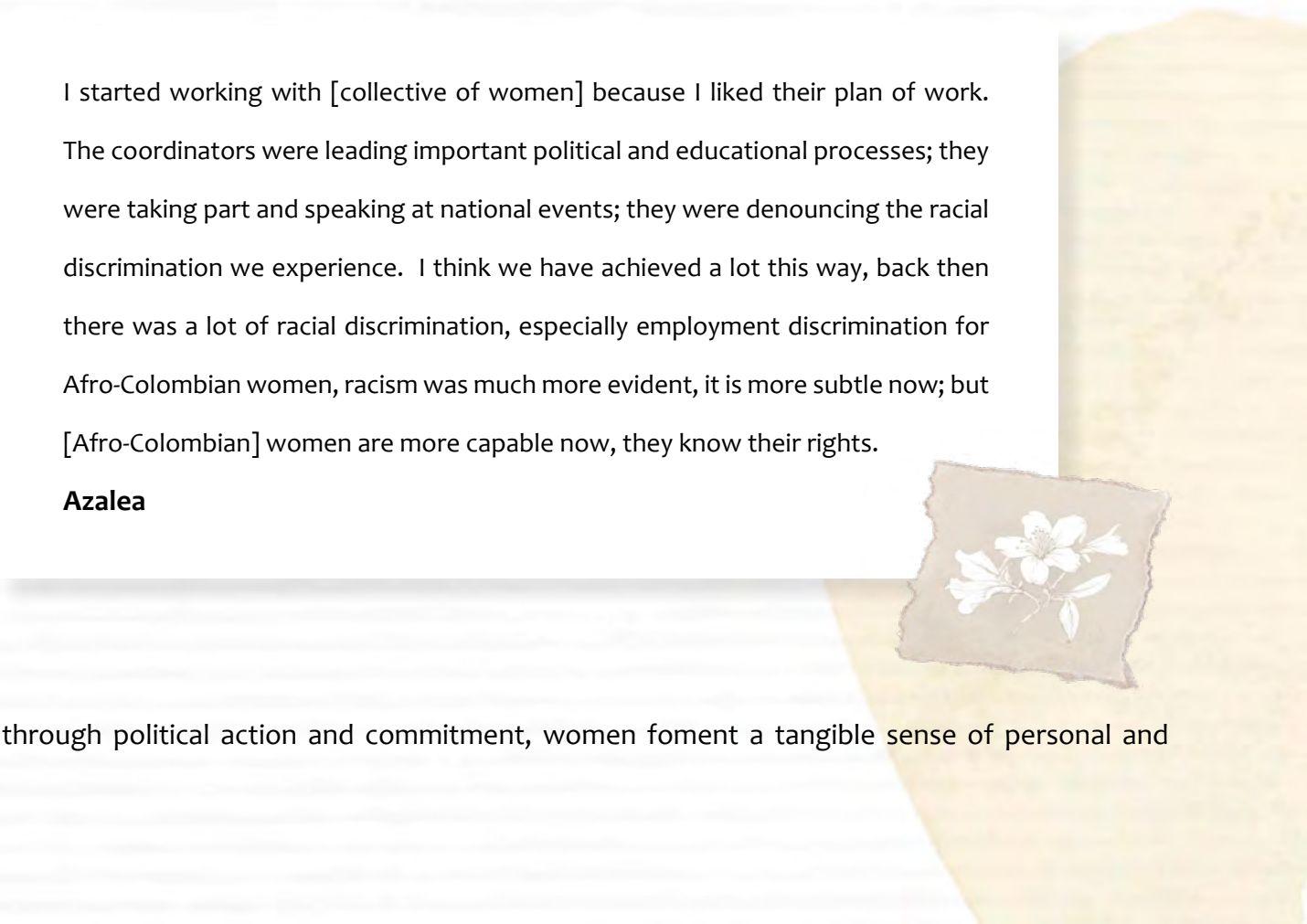
However, as illustrated above by Violeta, promoting a sense of empowerment derived from

'meaningful participation in public affairs and becoming active citizens' in a context where democratic or civic structures are non-existent or non-functional is a fallacy. It is an approach to empowerment that reproduces inequalities rather than deconstructing them (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2012). Instead, supporting and promoting educational programmes that focus on relevant local practices, that engage children and young people on their real terms, not on imagined realities, have the potential to generate a tangible sense of individual and communal agency.

Theme two: Empowerment for the collective: moving from the 'I' to the 'we'

Despite the focus on the importance of individual empowerment, for some Educators, tangible empowerment derives from a communal sense of agency. Some Educators advocate particularly for the empowerment of Afro-Colombian and indigenous ethnic groups because they have been historically subjugated and neglected.

To promote a communal sense of agency, Educators focus particularly on nourishing political and cultural aspects of agency. To do so, Educators focus on creating and sustaining strong active movements that elevate their voices to relevant political and legal spheres:



I started working with [collective of women] because I liked their plan of work. The coordinators were leading important political and educational processes; they were taking part and speaking at national events; they were denouncing the racial discrimination we experience. I think we have achieved a lot this way, back then there was a lot of racial discrimination, especially employment discrimination for Afro-Colombian women, racism was much more evident, it is more subtle now; but [Afro-Colombian] women are more capable now, they know their rights.

Azalea



Thus, through political action and commitment, women foment a tangible sense of personal and

communal empowerment not only by exposing deep-rooted racism and discrimination, but also by starting to change the predominant negative narrative that keeps them subdued at individual and group levels:

[Our people's narratives] teach us that it is indeed possible to free ourselves from stereotypes, from stigma; because we believe in them, and through that we perpetuate them. We are learning and understanding that those are mental barriers [we need to overcome]. We are looking at creating a library with writers from our territory with our own stories...The goal is to expand the knowledge we were given at school, that colonial knowledge that has nothing to do with us, the stories we hear do not include [our] people who also helped build this country.

Lily

Within this political and cultural agenda, Educators also believe that understanding of personal and collective responsibility, not only rights, also supports a tangible sense of agency. Specifically, having a personal commitment towards rescuing, nourishing, and sustaining a clear cultural identity:

[Empowerment] means to show who we are, to make visible our territory, to know who we are, we don't know [the depth] of our cultural identity, it is not just about music. Cultural identity is to know where I am from, where I come from, [to know] that I am a woman who recognises and acknowledges all the potential in our territory. It is to acknowledge the wise men and women, to respect ancestral knowledge; it is about appropriating our cultural identity in our day-to-day lives.

Lily

This focus on responsibility is important. Within the international law regime, the African Charter is unique in that it has a distinctive emphasis on collective rather than individual rights. Moreover, the Charter also includes clauses on responsibilities (Steiner *et al.*, 2008). This means that the Charter gives a 'forceful' attention to individuals' duties which makes it 'the first human rights document to articulate the concept of duty in any meaningful way' (Steiner *et al.*, 2008:508).

Leaving aside legal scholars' preoccupation with the notion of duty in the Charter as it 'may impinge in clear and serious ways on the definitions of rights' (Steiner *et al.*, 2008:506), what is relevant for this research is the juxtaposition between individual and group positionings. This legal context positions rights and responsibilities in a binary; it implies an understanding of solidarity that is mutually exclusive (either to groups or individuals). Educators in Colombia disrupt this binary by working towards a relational – or entangled- sense of agency. Within their fragile and marginal context, Educators practice a relational ethics of rights and responsibilities with both human communities and the more-than-human. I revisit this point in the diffractive section below.

Lily's experience is a case in point; her stance goes beyond exercising her right to take part in a cultural life (ICESCR³⁹, Art 15 (a)) as an individual. Like Lily, Educators believe that personal agency needs a communal component. This position, like posthumanist and decolonial perspectives, challenge individualistic, possessive, and competitive notions of subjectivity. In this sense, focusing on solidarity and responsibility, Educators in Colombia highlight the importance of relationality and interconnectivity, both fundamental aspects of African, and in Lily's case, Afro-Colombian epistemologies.

This relational quality of mutual responsibility and respect brings to mind the notion of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a concept derived from expressions found in several languages in Africa, which could be roughly translated to: 'each individual's humanity is expressed in relationship with others' (Le Grange, 2020:132). Although *Ubuntu* requires the human to enter more deeply into community with others, the concept should not be equated with humanism. Le Grange (2012) argues that *Ubuntu* needs to be understood as a microcosm of the Shona construct *Ukama*, which means relatedness of all things. Le Grange believes that a human who authentically cares for another human being would also care for the self and for the more-than-human world. This positioning aligns with posthumanist thinking where

‘ontological privilege is not ascribed to the human’, and where relational care and protection is given to both the human and the more-than-human (le Grange, 2020:133).

By shifting the focus from an individual to a communal sense of agency, Educators in Colombia recognise (and reclaim) that “‘we” are in this together’ resulting in a ‘renewed claim to community and belonging by singular subjects who ha[ve] taken a critical distance from individualism’ (Braidotti, 2008:6). This is important in reconceptualising notions of agency because ‘far from falling into moral relativism’ this positioning results ‘in a proliferation of locally situated micro-universalist claims’ (Braidotti, 2008:6) and sources of temporal and contextual sense of agency.

Theme three: Empowerment for the human-rights-educator role

An important emergent theme was Educators’ awareness of how their work legitimised (or empowered) the role of human rights educators as a distinct actant. Beyond feeling agentic as women or as a member of an ethnic group, Educators recognise that the work they perform as human rights educators or defenders renders the role capable of having an impact. Their reflections transcend their own becoming human rights educators to include the journey of legitimisation of the role as a separate entity.

Most Educators have risen through the ranks of their organisations, and that experience, exposure and informal learning have provided them with insights as to how a role could be ‘powerful’ or agentic beyond a personal sense of agency. For instance, Magnolia describes how human rights educators and defenders, mostly coming from the margins, have to fight to be recognised outside the spheres of formal education:

Early on, I attended meetings and introduced myself as a human rights defender. People looked at me, I am very short, they looked me up and down; they asked me if I was a lawyer. I responded that I was not a lawyer but was a human rights defender. They told me that it was not my place because everyone attending were

lawyers, they asked me to return with my leader. But, I persisted, by myself, and eventually was allowed in. But everything was so complex, the violence increased, and the State did not provide any protection for human rights defenders or women leaders, especially with our backgrounds: we were not lawyers, but women from the ghetto, women with dirty shoes, full of mud, full of invasion, women from the periphery. Mistreated, stained, who would recognise us as human rights defenders?

Magnolia

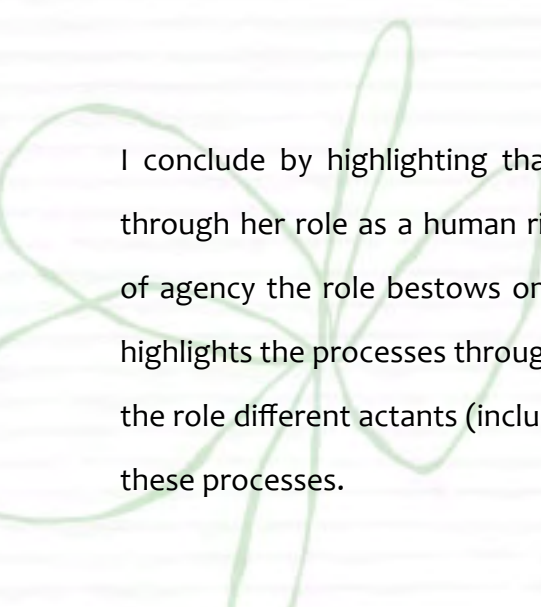


Educators dared to ‘talk back’, the kudos of the role, they work hard to develop, make them brave to speak up, which always is ‘a courageous act, an act of risk and daring’ (hooks, 1989:5). Here, the notion of duty to a role is fundamental as it propels actions and commitment, even at a personal cost. In fact, thinking of the role of human rights educators as an actant is important because it reveals the detrimental impact their work/role have on their bodies. Most Educators report the profound repercussions the roles have on their physical and mental health as exemplified here by Rosa:

[When] I started documenting women’s stories [to register them as victims in need of protection], I started to develop panic attacks... I was recently documenting a case that took 8 hours; the following week I developed herpes. I knew it was related [to the stress of the stories I had documented]. I tried to exercise, to go to therapy, to use alternative medicine; we need all this because our bodies absorb all this pain. It is still very hard for me to hear these stories; every single story impacts me very much.

Rosa





I conclude by highlighting that the charismatic woman (Zulver, 2022) who gains empowerment through her role as a human rights educator/defender also becomes vulnerable through the sense of agency the role bestows on her. Thinking of agency as an assemblage of different actants also highlights the processes through which informal knowledge becomes legitimate epistemologies, and the role different actants (including human and the more-than-human) play in igniting and sustaining these processes.

Diffraction analysis

In this section, I trouble human-centred recipients and instigators of agency. Starting from a notion of distributive agency and relationality (Bennett, 2004, 2005, 2010; Truman 2019), I explore how different actants in an assemblage of agency affect and are affected. Through this exploration, I argue that conceptualising ideas of victimhood, vulnerability and/or empowerment as static, linear, and individual need to be revised.

Through a diffractive reading of interview data, I speculate about the implications of conceptualising agency as an entanglement of actants and focus on how Educators in Colombia mobilise matter and the more-than-human to allow different types of justice and notions of agency to emerge. Grounded on a conceptualisation of agency that is distributive and relational, as opposed to individual and human centred, I explore how Educators' work prioritises becoming rather than being (Braidotti, 2013), and how this focus illuminates nuanced experiences of agency.

Who is who in an assemblage of agency?

Using an FVM approach has been helpful in keeping a firm focus on materiality and the more-than-human when exploring notions of agency amongst Educators. Indeed, Educators' perceptions and experiences of agency evidence the inadequacy of human-centred notions of agency and provide grounds to speculate about notions of the concept that 'cross the human-nonhuman divide' (Bennett, 2005:446). Ringrose and Renold (2014) believe it is helpful to think of the notion of agency as an assemblage because:

It illustrates the connectivity between objects and bodies. It is a way of mapping the ways things are coming together, the directions, speeds, and spaces of connections, and what the assembled relations enable to become or also block from becoming (773-774).

In engaging diffractively with the data, I start by exploring whether the signifier of being a victim could be re-signified by people claiming justice (Ringrose & Renold, 2014). This exploration considers the following actants as part of the assemblage of agency: the human rights discourse, legal instruments (in particular Law 1257, 2008), notions of displacement, notions of vulnerability and empowerment, human rights educators, people (of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, sex, sexual orientation, genders, professional positionings, displaced, sedentary), (different types of) knowledge, political positions, weapons, bullet proof vests, cars, houses, shelters, chocolate (as means of income and vector to cultural identity), music, food, objects, rituals, the Church, a waste-dump, mud, nuns, rivers, mountains, the sea and plants.

With this in mind, I start from an FVM position that sees 'agency as distributed along the ontological continuum of all the beings, entities, and forces' that make up the assemblage of agency in this context (Bennett, 2005:451-452). The speculations below are grounded on awareness that 'not all actants have the same agentic capacity at every location on the spectrum, because different actants are differently embodied' (Coole 2005 cited in Bennett, 2005:453).

Diffractive analysis Quote 1 (Q1)

At the time, I was working as a primary school teacher in [name of school inside the municipal waste-dump] where there was so much mud, we struggled to walk...I was working with a Nun who was very hard working, charismatic, and powerful. We organised many things for the community, we did amazing work because it was such a large community [of displaced people]. We had 25 committees at one time. The Nun worked very hard and was loved by everyone until she was herself displaced by a new priest who felt threatened by her power and influence. He made sure she was removed and recalled to the convent; people protested to no avail. The church authorities won. I worked with other nuns, but it wasn't the same. Sister [name] had very strong leadership skills. They moved her to the convent, not even to a different community; they took her inside to waste her life away [Alheli smiles sadly]

Alheli



Q1 encapsulates the recurrent entanglement between agency and vulnerability that has emerged from the interviews and evokes strong personal memories of vulnerability. I remember well the municipal waste-dump Alheli describes: a source of shame, sadness, and danger in my hometown. It was not far from where I grew up, but simultaneously a world away. Paradoxically, it was a marginal space in the centre of the city, a subaltern space I was taught to fear and to believe it full of dangerous people with dirty, muddy shoes and clothes. Where I come from, mud is a source of shame, a marker of poverty, of destitution, of ignorance. From the distance one could tell the location of the dump by the constant circling of vultures above; from up close, by the putrid smell of decomposing garbage. The waste-dump smelt of poverty and displacement, of vulnerability and resentment, of isolation and danger. It was beyond official control; it was a world unto itself.

Through Alheli's account I learnt, for the first time, about the sense of community inside the waste-dump, about the vibrancy the Nun sparked amongst those deemed disposable⁴⁰, about commitment and solidarity with *what* and with *whom* others considered disposable. The single story I knew was about the devastation, the marginality, and the vulnerability of it all. However, an FVM approach brings different stories to the fore: the stories of agency and vulnerability as experienced and advanced by the Nun, the waste-dump, the church, and the patriarchy.

With these actants in mind, I explore the following questions: who ought to be the primary subject of agency and why? Who benefits from this positioning? and, how does a more-than-human perspective 'dismantle hidden agendas of colonial practices at all levels of society without returning to an idealized anthropocentric past?' (Zembylas, 2018 cited in le Grange, 2020:131).

Actant one: A Nun's work

The stories about the ephemeral encounters with three women in Bilbao are premised on heartbreak and marginality. They are also, simultaneously, stories about the agency of mobility, of moving on, of exercising a temporary and contextual sense of agency. The Nun's story in Alheli's account has a resonance with these stories. Alheli's brief but powerful descriptions of the Nun's work glimmer with a strong sense of agency. The Nun's story exemplifies the entanglement of vulnerability and agency that Educators often spoke about in the interviews, highlighting different layers of internal displacement, and the paradoxes of seeking a universal and final sense of agency. The Nun endured a different type of displacement: a forced retrieval from the world to the isolation of a convent where she was told what to do. Powerful no more.

Nonetheless, her work building resilience and supporting a sense of community in the waste-dump, showed a tremendous sense of spatial and temporary experience of agency that in true feminist spirit was built through alliances and collaborations without the need to control. The Nun's practice exemplifies what Braidotti (2008) calls affirmative ethics:

Affirmative ethics is an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including

40 Disposable translates as '*deshechable*', an actual word used in vernacular Colombian Spanish to refer to destitute homeless people, usually suffering from drug or alcohol addiction or mental health problems.

the non-human or 'earth' others. This practice of relating to others requires and is enhanced by the rejection of self-centred individualism. It implies a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or inhuman, i.e.: environmental inter-connections. This is an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings for subjects constituted in and by multiplicity (6).

The Nun's work was a conduit of agency that supported processes that transformed negative actions into positive passions. Her work was as a steady stream of continuous minor gestures and of affirmation of hope as she created conditions for endurance, and the possibility of a different more hopeful future (Braidotti, 2008). Therefore, focusing on the Nun's work, not on her as an individual, is useful in visualising the 'currents of agency' that are present in the assemblage: the influence and resources of the church, the conditions of isolation and freedom created by the lack of official presence, and the constant influx of displaced people and rubbish to be processed.

The intention here is not to speculate on the number of lives the Nun's work might have been able to change or the amount of resilience she was able to build or support. The focus is instead on what the Nun's temporal and contextual sense of agency did, the hidden agendas it highlighted. For example, the Nun exercised temporal, spatial and contextual agency facilitated by the institution of the Church. Simultaneously, through her work, the Nun legitimised (empowered) the institution that vanished her. Her work rendered her role (as a representative of the church) powerful beyond her person, in a similar way to what Educators reported in the thematic analysis. A focus on the Nun's work illuminates hidden patriarchal and colonial practices that keep women away from positions of leadership and influence.

This focus shows the multi-layered, dynamic, and distributive nature of agency. It illustrates that the subjects of agency are intertwined and interdependent. This speculation shows the flow of agency across the assemblage, from the Nun, through her work, through the church, through the conditions of isolation in the waste-dump. It shows that notions and subjects of agency are constantly changing; it brings to light 'what the assembled relations enable to become or also block from becoming' (Ringrose & Renold, 2014:773-774).

Actant Two: The waste-dump

In Alheli's account the waste-dump featured prominently as a landscape of disposable humans, nonhuman and the more-than-human. 'There was so much mud, we struggled to walk...' Alheli said and reminded me of the United States' weather warfare in Vietnam. During the war in Vietnam, the USA deployed a weather-manipulation strategy to defeat the enemy. Through operation POPEYE, the USA Army intensified the monsoon season by seeding the clouds with silver iodine to increase rainfall in selected areas. Operation Comando Lava poured millions of gallons of defoliants over the jungles of Southeast Asia to turn mud into an impassable obstacle. These interventions aimed to muddy up the Ho Chi Minh Trail that served as conduit of enemy supplies and personnel (Smith, 2006; Certini *et al.*, 2013). These interventions softened road surfaces, caused landslides, washed out rivers, and maintained saturated soil conditions beyond the normal time span (Certini *et al.*, 2013).

In the context of Vietnam and the Colombian waste-dump, mud commanded attention, inspired fear, affected and was affected (Bennett, 2004). The stories I associate with the waste-dump are of desolation, death, and extreme vulnerability and passivity. All those people who arrived at the waste-dump were at their lowest: they were dispossessed, destitute, dirty, muddy, violent, disposable. They were all perceived as vulnerable without a speckle of agency and in need of protection. However, the waste-dump featured in Alheli's experience was a space not entirely devoid of agency, where mud and rubbish reigned supreme. In her article *The Force of Things*, Jane Bennett (2004) develops the notion of Thing-Power materialism that accounts for a conception of materiality that:

Seeks to promote acknowledgment, respect, and sometimes fear of the materiality of the thing and to articulate ways in which human being and thinghood overlap... It emphasizes those occasions in ordinary life when the us and the it slipslide into each other, for one moral of this materialist tale is that we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world (349).

In the waste-dump assemblage of stories, agency, bodies, bacteria, time, nature, remind us that there is 'a nonhumanity that flows around but also through humans' (Bennett, 2004: 349; Iovino, 2014). Mud can slow you down, trap you, compost you, undo you; it is a thing-power with the 'curious ability

to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (Bennett, 2004:351). In her interview, Magnolia stated proudly to have been made of mud, perhaps because encounters with mud undid her sense of human exceptionalism and because mud could also be agentic, luminous, and radiant (Galeano, 1991).

Diffraction analysis Quote 2 (Q2)

We were discussing reparations and there was a serious confrontation between trans- and peasant women. One peasant woman furiously protested when a trans-woman wanted breast implants as a reparation [for a sexual crime of which she was a victim]. A peasant woman said that she had been denied breast implants after having a mastectomy because of breast cancer. She was told she did not qualify [to get breast implants] because she was too old... Another peasant woman told the trans-women present that they were not true women because they will never get pregnant as a result of sexual abuse. This comment triggered a serious argument about discrimination that another woman interrupted by saying that she was struggling to receive hormonal treatment for severe menopausal symptoms. That's when I decided to separate both groups, so we could understand their realities better, the complexity of it all. Trans women have been victims of a myriad of practices of violence and discrimination, but have also been receiving more attention, and in some regions displacing women...that's a discussion we have pending...

Rosa



Beyond the complexities diverse subjects encounter while accessing justice, Q2 disconcerted me and created an affective impact. There was a singularity, a texture that did not fit into any category or theme I identified previously. It 'sparked fascination, exhilaration, incipience, suspense, intensity' (Ringrose & Renold, 2014:773) and hence a need to read it diffractively. Thus, from the encounter

above, I focus on breast implants to think about notions of justice, agency, and protection for different actants with contrasting needs. I speculate on what alternative notions of agency and justice might look like in fragile contexts and for multiple subjects with diverse prerogatives.

Thinking with breast implants is an FVM approach that rescues the ontology of the body to explore notions of agency and justice. This is not a novel approach for Educators who often start from the materiality of the body to revitalise students' sense of agency. They are indeed apt at exploring the 'conditions under which bodies are encultured, psychologised, given identity, historical location, and agency' (Grosz, 2004:2). In the encounter above, the corporality of the people involved alludes to the multiplicity of stories regarding which bodies matter and why; who deserves to be empowered or protected and why; and whose empowerment implies whose vulnerability and why. Indeed, a focus on the physicality of bodies provides 'more complex understandings on how the personal, the political and the material are braided together' (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008:16). Through a diffractive lens the goal is to highlight the multiplicity of subjects and needs without putting them in opposition to each other and explore how to move beyond discourses of representation (Truman, 2019).

Moreover, starting from the recognition that bodies are othered by disease, violence and gender politics, I explore how engaging with existing normative justice systems perpetuates processes of 'othering' and renders subjects vulnerable. Q2 provides a glimpse at how bodies are coded and assembled, not only socially, but also through the human rights and legal discourses. However, the encounter also produces a moment of rupture that Rosa seized and from where a different type of justice may emerge.

The ontology of the body: what can a body do to inform notions of justice and agency?

Considering the propensity and increase of plastic surgery in Colombia (Ossa-Gomez *et al.*, 2020), and speculations on the role cosmetic procedures play in shaping people's sense of agency (Carrion *et al.*, 2011), Q2 evidences how bodies are 'othered inside contemporary ideals of heterosexual feminine embodiment' (Ringrose & Renold, 2014:777; Renold, 2006). Q2 highlights how women's identity is still shaped by aesthetic values and reproductive capacity. Moreover, despite Colombia's strong judicial apparatus to protect women victims of violence, access to education, employment and health care

remain limited. It is therefore unsurprising that victims request such medical interventions as a notion of reparation, as part of a process of justice.

FVM stresses the importance of exploring different forms of thinking about representing the body. This 'enfleshed' or 'embodied' materialism is important because it implies confronting boundaries and limitations; it is a way to do justice to the complexities highlighted above (Braidotti, 2002). Starting from the ontology of the body not only exposes male dominated structures of justice and agency that discount relationality, but also offers possibilities to transform patriarchal feminisation processes into more flexible, multi-layered, and relational processes of becoming (Braidotti, 2002).

In Q2, breast implants-the nonhuman-have the power to shape people's sense of humanity and identity, and presumably, a sense of agency. These people are not alone. Worldwide, breast augmentation procedures are on the rise (Coombs *et al.*, 2019; Braidotti, 2002) as they fashion bodies people wish to inhabit and embody. Bodies that allow them to fit in, to perform within a given social structure; they also may at once facilitate belonging and legitimise experiences of violence. In this light, bodies are discursive constructions but also material stuff. As discursive constructions, the bodies above, are spaces where social power and material/geographic agencies intra-act (Alaimo, 2012). In this context the 'discursive embodied category' of being a woman (Ringrose & Renold, 2014) as defined by the presence or absence of breasts matters because it conflates discourses of representation (what femininity must look and feel like), the materiality of oppression (gender-based discrimination), and patriarchal systems that value women's bodies only in relationship to their reproductive and aesthetic qualities.

For Educators and the people with whom they work, recurrent violence and displacement are omnipresent, an inter-relational and collective experience. In this context, the corporality of trans- or cisgender women, of indigenous or Afro-Colombian women are interconnected through the violence they experience and surrounds them. Alaimo (2018) defines trans-corporeality as seeing all creatures as embodied beings that are 'intemeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them' (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018:1).

Breast implants leak or may cause undesirable side-effects (Coombs *et al.*, 2019; Braidotti, 2002). They may turn bodies toxic, but in the Colombian context, they are not the only source of toxicity. There

is vast evidence of the negative impacts aerial fumigation of glyphosate have on humans, animals, and the environment (Hurtado and Velez-Torres, 2020; Riaño *et al.*, 2020; Rawat *et al.*, 2023). Aerial chemical fumigation in Colombia has been used since the 1980s as a strategy to eradicate illicit crops (Hurtado & Velez-Torres, 2020), but its toxicity has also impacted human and animal health, water, and legitimate crops. It has created a 'toxic dispossession' (Hurtado & Velez-Torres, 2020) as toxicity flows trans-corporeally through the environment, animals, food, violence and trauma. It is because of this trans-corporeality that bodies are continuously made toxic: disease, contaminated water, gene mutations, trauma, violence are all interconnected and present in the flesh.

In this context, Rosa's action to separate the groups, 'so we could understand their realities better, the complexity of it all' not only demonstrates how Educators engage with the ontology of diverse bodies in their quest to support agency, but also offers insights of the shaping forces that informs notions of agency beyond binary conceptions of identity and cultural expectations. In this case, Quinn's (2021) analysis of what toxic bodies can do is useful here. Using Alaimo's (2010) concept of toxic bodies, Quinn (2021) argues that toxic bodies have the potential to bring back marginalised humans to the centre 'not as the bounded figure of the traditional human rights discourse, but as a fulcrum of myriad more-than-human systems and practices' (Quinn, 2021: 697) because:

Toxic bodies may provoke material trans-corporeal ethics that turn from the disembodied values and ideals of bounded individuals toward an attention to situated evolving practices that have far-reaching ... consequences for multiple peoples, species, and ecologies (Alaimo, 2010 cited in Quinn, 2021:697)

'Situated evolving practices' are key in a conceptualisation of agency that is relational, multiple, temporal, and contextual. In this case, it also highlights the relational nature of vulnerability. Q2 exemplifies a clash between two groups of people with varying degrees of vulnerability, both groups in need of protection and reparation and willing to engage with official discourses of agency and justice. The people involved in the encounter experience different and intersecting notions of victimhood and vulnerability: they are victims of violence, cancer, displacement, and discrimination. They are bound by vulnerability, pain, loss, fear, and toxicity. They are all in it together: they are all victims seeking a sense of justice.

Therefore, to decolonise notions of justice and agency that are human-centred and individualistic, we need to practice otherwise (Manning, 2016). Rosa's approach is an example of such practice: it was an act of 'little justice'. Rousell (2020) conceptualises the notion of 'little justice' on four propositions: that justice is a *performative* gesture by which ethical encounters are negotiated (Manning, 2016); that justice is a multiplicity that works 'across differences' and is 'internally differentiated, but is still grounded and accountable' (Braidotti, 2013:49); that justice is a process that is embodied and embedded in the actualisation of micropolitical events (Massumi, 2015); and that justice is a 'speculative experimentation that produces new forms of togetherness amongst species, practices, technologies, and modes of existence' (Haraway, 2016, Stengers, 2005 cited in Rousell, 2020:1398).

Rosa's actions are foregrounded on those propositions. By facilitating the space to have crucial 'pending conversations', her actions show an awareness of the multiplicity of subjects and needs; she responds to the situation temporally and spatially in ways that 'were sensitive and productive of difference' (Rousell, 2020:1399). As mentioned previously, inspired by her practice, Rosa proposed the implementation of early reparation processes as part of official avenues of justice. In that light, early reparations are also little justices and minor gestures (Manning, 2016) that are localised, embedded, and embodied acts that aim to foster contextual and temporal notions of agency. These minor gestures and/or justices recognise the multiplicity of subjects and the diverse ways in which revitalisation of agency can be supported.

In essence, considering people's different embodiments gives us a more 'adequate cartography of our real-life conditions and clears the ground for more adequate and sustainable relations' (Braidotti, 2008:10-11). Considering a porous notion of identity that moves away from the assumption that individuals are bounded, coherent entities and fundamentally autonomous, is helpful in recognising 'that human bodies, human health, and human rights are interconnected with the material, often toxic, flows of particular places' (Alaimo, 2018; Neimanis, 2017:2). A relational conception of self has important implications for notions of agency and vulnerability. It disrupts the human rights discourse dependency on individualised, stable, and sovereign bodies and instead proposes a conception of bodies whose borders are 'always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation' (Neimanis 2017:2).

Diffractive analysis Quote 3 (Q3)

Those practices of self-protection are now an integral part of the political exercises that we are promoting. But people question these things... why do you need certain plants and objects in your meetings? People don't understand... that's why we keep some of these beliefs secret, the same way indigenous and Afro-Colombian women keep their own protection practices secret. When we get together, we find the right space to exercise those protection rituals, that's why, I think, we are still alive.

Magnolia

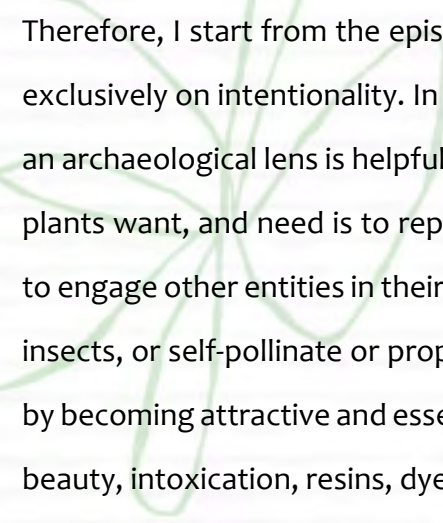


The agency of plants: plants as protectors

A crucial emerging theme from this research was Educators' belief in relationality and the agency of the more-than-human in revitalising and shaping their sense of agency. This positioning, in turn, problematises the 'conceptual and empirical inadequacy of human-centred notions of agency' particularly in fragile contexts (Bennett, 2005:446). Focusing specifically on the role plants play in protecting women in a context of protracted displacement and unspeakable violence, I initially wondered: what does it mean to talk about the agency of plants? Bennett (2005) helped me qualify the question further:

What is this power [plants] wield? Can it be described as a kind of agency, despite the fact that the term is usually restricted to intentional, human acts? What happens to the idea of an agent once nonhuman materialities are figured less as social constructions and more as actors and once humans are themselves assessed as members of human-nonhuman assemblages?

How does the agency of assemblages compare to more familiar notions, such as the willed intentionality of persons, the disciplinary power of society, or the automatism of natural processes? How does recognition of the nonhuman and nonindividuated dimensions of agency alter established notions of moral responsibility and political accountability? (Bennett, 2005:446)



Therefore, I start from the epistemological position that agency is grounded on relationality and not exclusively on intentionality. In this light, van der Veen's (2014) exploration of plants' agency through an archaeological lens is helpful here. Van der Veen (2014) starts from the singular assertion that what plants want, and need is to reproduce. Because of lack of mobility, plants have developed strategies to engage other entities in their quest to reproduce. As a result, plants rely on the wind, other animals, insects, or self-pollinate or propagate from root fragments. Other plants have engaged with humans by becoming attractive and essential to their survival (as poison, medicine, fibres, spices, food, flavour, beauty, intoxication, resins, dyes, timber, shade), and in the Colombian context, protection. Likewise, plants also protect themselves and other plants by communicating through chemical signals to ward off predators or alert about imminent pests or dangers (Tudge, 2006; van der Veen, 2014).

Although we are not used to stories where humans are not the protagonists (Tsing, 2015 cited in Querejazu: 2022), some scholars have emphasized the historic relationship between people and plants as reciprocal, as co-evolution. Keeping in mind the primary aim to reproduce, it is possible to reconsider that processes of domestication – which are often assumed to be initiated by humans - could have equally been brought about by plants and animals. It could have been 'a clever evolutionary strategy for advancing their own interests' (Pollan, 2001 cited in van der Veen, 2014:801).

As depicted in Q3, for Magnolia and other Educators, the more-than-human plays a vital part in protection practices that are tangible and effective. In their everyday lives, the more-than-human is recognised and acknowledged as a vital player in the world (Bennett, 2010). In this context, 'people and plants occupy the same, mutually constructed ontological realm' (van der Veen, 2104:801).

The emphasis Educators place on protection is vital here because from an FMS point of view, protection of vulnerable people underpins their work. An important point Educators raise is the question of who protects who and how. Elsewhere in her interview, Magnolia refers to masculine systems of protection that paradoxically places Educators at higher levels of exposure and vulnerability. Labelling this undesired protection as masculine lodges the question of what other types of effective protection might exist. I wondered: *who* would have the agency/power to protect these women -and their

families – who work and live in contexts of high and volatile risk? Plants emerged as the answer. In discussing notions of empowerment, Educators emphasise the importance of their relationship with plants and other more-than-human entities (rivers, places, the sea), as opposed to individual agency, in revitalising knowledge that sparks temporal and contextual agency.

Citing DNA evidence and seeing seeds as archives, van der Veen (2014) illustrates the interconnection between plants and people. Following the spread of agriculture in Europe, and specifically tracing the trajectory of a species of barley, van der Veen (2014) concludes that:

The material properties of the plants allow us to unravel the complex interactions between plants, climate, and people. These properties of plants, as we have seen, are not fixed. They change in the context of their relation with people - and this process is mutual; people are changed too - and the properties of plants thus form archives of past human and plant behaviour (804).

van der Veen uses the term 'emplantment (instead of embodiment) to denote a 'reverse form of embodiment where human/plant interactions have left a signature in the physical make-up of the plant'. This occurs, for example, 'through certain type of soil improvement methods that leave a chemical signature in the seeds of the crops that will in turn benefit humans and plants' (van der Veen, 2014:803). This emplantment and embodiment echoes the notion of trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2018) that sees all creatures as 'intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them' (Alaimo, 2018:1).

As we consume and interact with plants, they inhabit and shape us. In this sense, relationality blurs boundaries and binaries (Querejazu, 2022), it disrupts the premise that humans are contained, bounded, autonomous entities. Educators live in a world premised by relationality, where the human and the more-than-human co-exist, affect, and are affected. In this sense, Educators are living a posthuman life, where the more-than-human play a crucial part in their sense of being agentic and protected.

Indeed, Educators' experiences show that nothing occurs in isolation and agency is relational. Their experiences echo ancestral epistemologies that never forgot the interconnectedness of all things (TallBear, 2017) and that a sense of agency is the 'result of collective co-creation' because we are transformed by our intra-actions with the world of which we are part (Querejazu, 2022:10). In Colombia, Educators' experiences and engagement with plants show that there is an intrinsic understanding of nature as being:

Vibrant and overflowing, material and energetic... continually doing things, things that bear upon us . . . as forces upon material beings... (Bennett, 2005:448)

And a belief that:

[T]he more kinds of bodies with which a human body can productively affiliate, the greater the prospects for an intelligent way of life: "as the body is more capable of being affected in many ways and of affecting external bodies . . . so the mind is more capable of thinking" (Spinoza, 1992:199 as cited in Bennett, 2005:448).

Educators in Colombia understand that in terms of protection and agency, plants and the more-than-human are agentic, vibrant, and effective:

If we know we are going to meet with so-and-so, we get the nettle plant, for example, to make sure we arrive at the meeting protected. But we can't talk about these things, we find the time and space to conduct these practices of protection.

Magnolia



We receive political guidance [from the elders] but also protection advice that comes from ancestral practices... we need to channel the energy and that is very helpful. We have the waters, [grow and care for] the plants; I have a container that I always carry with me [with the mixture of plants and water].

Azalea



Although, Educators were rather secretive about and protective of these practices, they were eloquent about the permanent high risks in which they operate, and how ancestral practices of protection (that include the more-than-human) are an integral part of their temporal and spatial sense of agency.

Conclusion

This chapter continues to disrupt human-centred notions of agency by focusing on the diverse actants of an assemblage of agency. Through FVM and diffractive lenses, it focuses on diverse subjects of agency that include the human and the more-than-human.

The thematic analysis of the interviews through FMS, HRE, and FVM lenses focuses on the subjects *who* Educators considered ought to be prioritised (to foster a sense of agency) because of precarious conditions that put them at high risk of vulnerability. The priority groups in need of agency include women, children, and young adults; collectives, such as indigenous and Afro-Colombian people; and the importance of empowering (legitimising) the role of human rights educator/defender.

Focusing on points of convergence is a productive exercise because it highlights patterns of victimisation amongst certain groups as well as prompting questions that move the focus away from what the themes meant to what the themes did (Kuntz, 2023 cited in Harding, 2023). In that light thematic engagement with the data provides insights into the important role the more-than-human plays in shaping Educators' sense of agency, and the need to explore these perceptions through a diffractive lens that focuses on differences rather than commonalities.

Therefore, a diffractive reading of the data considers a notion of agency that is multiple, relational, temporal, spatial, and composed of many actants that affect and are affected. It also considers actants beyond the human as generators of agency and protection. Thus, through a diffractive reading of three quotes from the interviews, I speculate about the notions of agency as experienced by three different actants in an assemblage of agency. This focus opens a space to explore conceptualisations of agency that include the more-than-human. From this position, a diffractive engagement with the data illuminates alternative notions of justice, protection, and agency that emerge when the human and the more-than-human intra-act. It sheds light on how women working and living in a violent context trouble the notion that humans (and human discourses) are the sole generators of agency. Educators' experiences also show that relationality matters when shaping notions of temporal and contextual agency.

Moreover, Educators' practices also show the importance of engaging with the ontology of the body to revitalise a sense of wellbeing that feeds into notions of temporal and contextual agency. Thinking with breast implants and trans-corporeality is a helpful tool to decolonise notions of agency that are human-centred and individual. In fact, Educators' engagement with the ontology of diverse human bodies and ancestral practices of protection that include the more-than-human exemplifies a way of practicing otherwise (Manning, 2016). In this context, practicing otherwise involves deconstructing ideas of justice and doing little justices (Rousell, 2020). It involves seeing all subjects in the assemblage of empowerment as important without putting them in opposition. It involves privileging relations rather than individuals and opening spaces for 'pending' and important conversations as a fundamental part of fostering agency.

Using thematic and diffractive analysis is a powerful tool to tell different stories about notions of agency that move beyond the human. This approach tells stories of agency that highlights and appreciates different forms of justice and protection. In doing so, it dismantles hidden colonial and patriarchal agendas of practices that universalise ideas of agency. Through their work and their practices, Educators are telling diverse and divergent stories of agency, and this is vital because if Educators don't tell their own stories of agency, they will be told and shaped by others for their use and to the detriment of the women in Colombia (Lorde, 2017).

Chapter eight: Empowerment how?

The first step is to identify what it is that you need empowerment for, to be clear about what it is that you really want to achieve. Then, you need to break concepts down, make them tangible, understandable, I think that is fundamental. We also need to recognise the potential that already exists, we need to understand women's contexts, skills, qualities and needs. It is crucial to know the territory, because it is useless to build a bridge where there is no river.

Margarita



Preamble

Tools of the trade

My maternal grandfather used to have huge hands and huge feet. I have a clear memory of his feet because they looked like roots. They reminded me of the strong protuberant roots of some trees: they were dark brown with a landscape of veins and weathered, leathery skin. He worked gathering coffee: he roamed from farm to farm in a mountainous region of Colombia to help produce the marvellous coffee Colombia is renowned for worldwide. He worked seasonally and was involved with the entire process of producing coffee beans: clearing the land, gathering, drying, and processing the beans. He grew up in the mountains and learnt to know them through his feet. I was told he never used shoes growing up.

I met him when he was already old, living in the city and reluctantly using shoes. I remember him wearing leather sandals that gave his feet plenty of room and fresh air, but he would remove them as soon as he landed at someone's home. I felt embarrassed, I didn't understand his reluctance to use shoes; they protect you from broken glass, dirt, mud, and from the foul filth of urban landscapes.

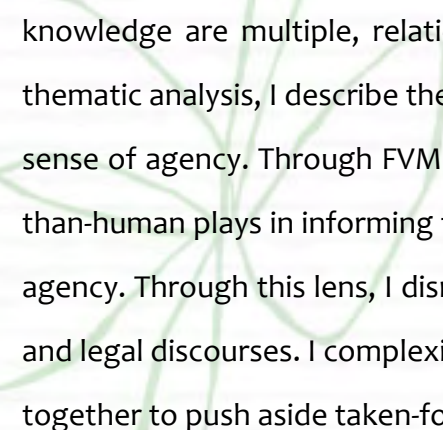
He became very ill towards the end of his life and at that point he refused to wear shoes altogether.

Enormously embarrassed, my grandmother, mother and aunt pled with him to wear shoes to medical and hospital appointments, but he did not budge. He lived barefooted, and he left barefooted. I guess he wanted to feel the earth on his way out the same way he felt it on his way in.

Perhaps because of my grandfather, a story someone told me once, stayed with me. The person told me that her mother had worn the wrong size of shoes all her life until one day an attentive shoe-shop attendant noticed that her feet bulged in the size she requested. The attendant suggested a size up. It was an epiphany. This woman had never considered that she could request a different shoe size or questioned her discomfort or found someone who dared to offer an alternative. Perhaps, like some of the women I interviewed, she thought the discomfort was her cross to bear. Perhaps, like my grandfather did occasionally, she endured the discomfort because that was the norm when you move from deep in the mountains to a city. In the woman's case, it took an attentive shoe-shop attendant to point out that there were other options. In my grandfather's case, he simply knew that he did not have to follow the rules that made him feel uncomfortable for the (cultural) comfort of others. He had no need for shoes. His body did not finish with the skin; he needed that constant connection with the earth.

In the book *Thinking Through the Skin*, Sarah Ahmed *et al.*, (2001) explore 'how the skin involves encounters with others that challenge the separation of self and other' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2001:11). Educators shared similar stories involving the reclaiming of their body – or 'first territory' as Daisy calls it – as a method that works in revitalising their own sense of agency and redesigning the tools, they were given to make sure they fit their purposes. In previous chapters, I explored two coordinates in the cartography of agency: the *what* and the *who*. In asking the question 'empowerment for what?', I argue about the importance of identifying the contextual and temporal nature of *what* propels the need to seek a sense of agency. The question empowerment for *whom*, highlights the importance of acknowledging the interrelatedness of different actants in an assemblage of agency. In this chapter, I explore another coordinate by identifying the tools (the *how*) that facilitate the generation of agency.

From Educators' perspective conceptualisations and sources of agency, or rather notions of revitalising



knowledge are multiple, relational, contextual, and temporal. Therefore, in this chapter, through thematic analysis, I describe the methods Educators use to promote a localised, temporal, and spatial sense of agency. Through FVM and diffractive lenses I pay particular attention to the role the-more-than-human plays in informing the tools and strategies Educators use to spark and sustain notions of agency. Through this lens, I disrupt the ‘knowledgeability and linearity’ installed by the human rights and legal discourses. I complexify what this research generates by bringing matter, affect, and theory together to push aside taken-for-granted practices and epistemologies (Osgood, 2023).

Starting from Margarita’s quote above, I focus on how Educators adopt, transform, or discard the tools of their trade (ready-made training manuals and tools) and ‘work~with and make~with each other’ (Haraway, 2016) ‘to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently’ (St. Pierre, 1997:175). The nature of this type of knowledge morphs and responds to different needs. It goes from passive to active, from colonial to ancestral, from noun to a verb. Taylor *et al.*, (2020) conceptualise this as ‘knowledge-ing’ (2020:29), which is what Educators do with the strategies, methods, and tools they use to generate a sense of agency.

Introduction

In her seminal work, Lundy (2007) developed a model of participation based on children’s voices as defined by article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). She identified space, voice, audience, and influence as essential elements in being able to claim a right (Lundy, 2007). These pillars are widely used when assessing the extent to which human rights are exercised and to inform solutions to promote those principles. Interestingly, according to Educators, most of those principles are missing from their contexts, and therefore their work focuses on facilitating the space, voice, audience, and influence learners need to exercise their rights.

Going beyond Lundy’s model, I propose to consider notions of agency that are contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal. I argue that a posthuman cartography of agency is an effective tool to account for space, voice, audience, and influence.

Two fundamental aims of HRE include the empowerment of learners to promote and exercise human

rights, and to become agents of change to pursue a human rights agenda (United Nations, 1948; Coysh, 2014). In this context, methodologies tailored to diverse audiences, methods that facilitate the breakdown of complex legal and ideological concepts, and approaches that use people’s experiences have been found to be helpful in advancing HRE aims (Coysh, 2014). From an FMS perspective, social pressure, collective action, state protection and enactment and adoption of laws are fundamental to achieving a sense of agency. However, in this work, I trouble human-centred and absolute notions of agency. Educators’ experiences evidence conceptualisations of agency and vulnerability as entangled, and although linked to human rights and legal knowledge, these notions are also part of and born from ever changing entanglements and intra-actions.

The question of ‘empowerment how?’ not only relates to the methods and approaches used to foster a sense of agency, but also to Educators’ uncompromised drive to persist and remain engaged in facilitating these processes. In the interviews, Educators shared stories about the commitment to their work despite receiving threats for themselves and their families. Below, as part of the analysis, I discuss the relevance of the *why* Educators remain engaged in dangerous human rights work at high personal cost. This *why* is a cornerstone that underpins the *how*.

Thus, once again, employing thematic and diffractive analysis I embark on these explorations. Thematic analysis summarises the methods and strategies that worked well for Educators. A diffractive exploration of three interview quotes speculates on alternative methods that could render women agentic.

Thematic analysis

This section focuses on the pedagogical methods and strategies that work well for Educators in different contexts (rural/urban, ages, literacy levels, cultural backgrounds) in Colombia. Four themes emerged about what worked well: consciousness-raising, using of creative methods (music, arts, theatre, play), employing tailored dissemination strategies for different audiences, and incorporating healing (particularly ancestral indigenous) practices as a fundamental element of any method.

Theme one: Consciousness-raising methods

To them [feminist organisations] I owe them my first steps in this process of learning; they gave me my first schooling...I understood that the sexual violence I endured wasn't my fault or a cross I had to bear because I am a woman... They [the feminist organisations] understood early that women needed to learn [to appropriate human rights and legal knowledge] and that they also needed to find pedagogical tools that would help us understand normative issues that are complex.

Magnolia



Consciousness raising is a well-known feminist principle that Educators use as a crucial tool to deliver HRE trainings. Particularly, they believe that raising consciousness about feminist and legal principles is fundamental in seeking agency across the personal/collective spectrum. This approach is also important regarding the question as to why Educators remain engaged with dangerous work, and the implications of these reasons for the methods they use. To investigate this question, Zulver's work is helpful.

According to Zulver's (2022) framework, women who practice feminism in high-risk situations tend to be led by a charismatic leader that use 'particular strategies successfully' that allows them to mobilise as feminists. These strategies include a) the creation of a collective identity; b) the building of social capital; c) the generation of legal frameworks; and d) taking part in acts of certification (Zulver, 2022:63). Other important attributes of successful leaders in high-risk contexts include their shared experiences of fear, loss, trauma, victimisation, and discrimination (Zulver, 2022). Essentially, women mobilise in response to and not because of oppression, and because their actions are based on a strong identity that implies participation (Zulver, 2022).

In the context of this research, consciousness-raising is linked to creating a collective (sometimes

feminist, sometimes cultural) identity. Educators highlight the importance of appropriating human rights and legal knowledge to raise consciousness about personal, cultural, and social issues that affect them in their daily lives. This consciousness-raising is not limited to identifying patriarchal structures or fighting discrimination against women, as it also includes becoming aware of cultural or social identities and the contradictions entrenched within those identities.

However, for those Educators engaged with identity politics, theoretical feminist knowledge that explains the systemic violence women endure is tangibly helpful. For example, realising that the repeated acts of violence they experience are not isolated incidents has an impact on perceptions of self-worth as Magnolia describes:

We started talking about the violence we endured; I started to remember my past and all the sexual violence of which I was a victim. I understood it was not my fault. All those experiences and reflections became an opportunity to change the hate [you feel], the sense of impotency. These spaces gave us a chance to start talking about our experiences without fear of being judged, without being blamed. We started to talk and that was important.

Magnolia



In this light, exposure to different discourses (feminist theory, human rights concepts, law) is an important method to shape a temporal and contextual sense of agency. Consciousness-raising methods also imply shining a light not only on emancipatory tools but also on creating awareness of collective experiences of victimhood, discrimination, and abuse, which in turn inspires women to mobilise in response to and not because of oppression (Zulver, 2022).

However, Educators also highlight the ideological complexities behind consciousness-raising methods. Specifically, ideological tensions and clashes that derive from diverse positionings or lack of theoretical knowledge:

[On the ground] there have been severe mistakes [when applying ideological principles]. Many. For me, one of the gravest errors is ignorance about theory. Some movements tried to improvise the concepts on a population they really didn't know [or understand], they never were confident theoretically. And those who did understand theory, they were armchair theorists by which I mean, theory and practice were vastly different. For example, to impose an armed conflict on communities that were not prepared to do or sustain it was a huge mistake. It was wrong, [the movements] did not have a clear ideological path, and that doomed everything.

Alheli



However, 'having a clear ideological path' in the context of Colombia is not straightforward. In the interest of context, in the 1960s-80s in Colombia there were seven left-wing guerrilla movements. Generally, the revolutionary armed struggle against the state was informed by Marxist theory and aimed to redress grievances related to inequality, social exclusion, and concentration of political power in the hands of a few. Essentially, most revolutionary movements proposed to install a socialist regime, and achieve national liberation (Blanco *et al.*, 2022; Guáqueta, 2009). In the late 80s and early 90s, five of the seven guerrilla groups (M-19, MAQL, EPL, PRT and CRS) demobilised after peace negotiations and joined mainstream politics. Simultaneously, other right-wing militant groups emerged in the late 1990s to repel the remaining revolutionary groups influence. As of 2023, there are two active revolutionary groups (FARC and ELN) and several paramilitary groups in Colombia.

Within this context, women's claims for justice and/or equality were prioritised, perceived, and executed differently by different actors. In Rosa's experience, a lack of ideological compromise also represents a major challenge in promoting agency amongst certain communities:

I told her (the woman leader) about the training about reparations (programme to access justice about sexual violence) we were going to give to indigenous women. She looked at me shocked and surprised and told me that my actions were akin to entering those communities like many centuries ago with a sword and a bible. I was furious and told her that I was an anthropologist and did not accept to deny any woman the basic rights I enjoy as a woman. You are a professional woman, don't play that card on me; and I walked away from working with that community.

Rosa

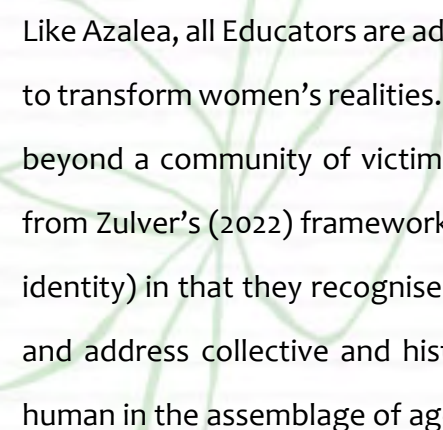


Nonetheless, despite ideological, cultural, educational, political, and social differences, Educators agree that the common denominator informing consciousness-raising is the systemic experience of violence. This foundation informs methods and strategies that foster women's temporal and contextual sense of agency. In Azalea's experience, communal exercises are an effective method to engage women and render them temporarily and contextually agentic:

In the exercises we do with the women we weave humanity, weave their being, and when they see others sharing their experiences, they feel an incentive to learn, to gain the tools we need to transform our reality and achieve goals.

Azalea





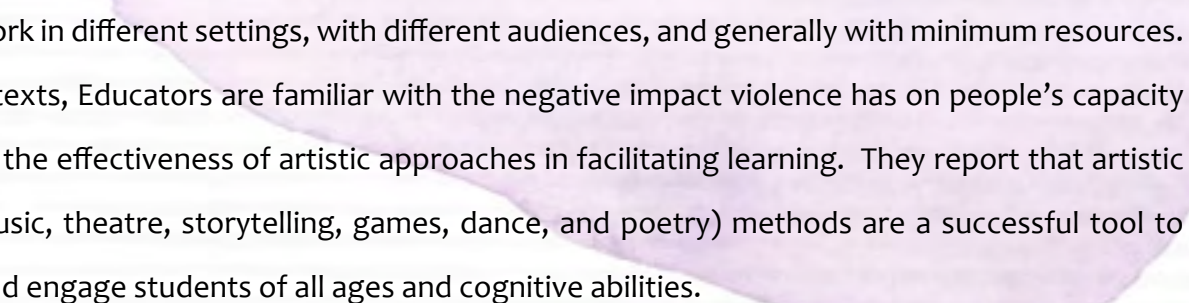
Like Azalea, all Educators are adept at ‘weaving humanity’ into their workshops that spark an incentive to transform women’s realities. Under their tutelage consciousness-raising was a tool to move women beyond a community of victimhood. In this case, Educators’ consciousness-raising approach differs from Zulver’s (2022) framework (where having a common ideology is key in shaping a clear collective identity) in that they recognise the need to raise different types of consciousness that acknowledge and address collective and historical harm. It also differs in that Educators include the-more-than-human in the assemblage of agency.

Educators’ experiences reveal a multi-faceted and entangled consciousness that have feminist, legal, social, cultural, and political layers. An entangled consciousness that allows them to be part of a collective, not of victims or vulnerable women in need of agency, but of women who have a common experience of violence and who seek to revitalise their agency. A notion of consciousness that is grounded on the material conditions of women and transcends singular or/and binary identifiers. In fact, Educators spoke not of empowerment but of revitalisation of agency. From this perspective, agency sits within (as opposed to being bestowed by an external source) and is energised by different types of knowledge and practices.

Theme two: Using arts, music, and ludic approaches

Using music and improvised theatre helps to relax people, and once they relax, the formality of learning or the content gets more accessible.

Alheli



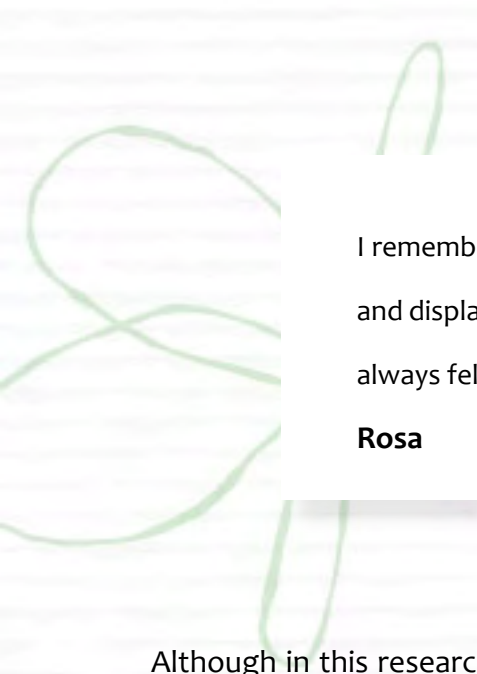
Educators work in different settings, with different audiences, and generally with minimum resources. In those contexts, Educators are familiar with the negative impact violence has on people’s capacity to learn, and the effectiveness of artistic approaches in facilitating learning. They report that artistic (including music, theatre, storytelling, games, dance, and poetry) methods are a successful tool to build trust and engage students of all ages and cognitive abilities.

Two main themes emerged supporting the effectiveness of artistic methods in supporting learning and fostering a sense of agency in the volatile context of Colombia. First, as a pedagogical tool, artistic approaches help people to relax and engage at their own pace. These methods are used as embodied practices of (un)learning. Second, they facilitate access to off-limit areas and engagement with hard-to-reach communities.

Arts, music, and ludic approaches help people relax

Educators report that using ludic elements in their courses have been fundamental in engaging people and sustaining their participation for the long term. The populations with whom they work tend to be recurrent victims of extreme waves of violence and repeated displacement. As a result, their formal schooling and capacity to learn have been impacted negatively. In this fragile context, Educators find that students tend to lack both the physical and cognitive capacity to focus for long periods of time. Educators state that most students (particularly in rural areas) lack formal primary or secondary schooling, and as a result, they lack the socialisation needed to sit still in a classroom for long periods of time, which results in a short-term attention span.

At a cognitive level, Educators report that students, particularly older women who lack formal schooling because of displacement, tend to self-declare as ‘too stupid or ignorant to learn’. Indeed, research has shown that the impact of violence on learning is multi-layered. For example, in their work with migrant women in Toronto who had experienced domestic and war violence, Mojab and MacDonald (2008) found that exposure to violence had affected women’s memory, self-esteem, and capacity to concentrate. Rosa is familiar with their sentiment:



I remember a group of women thanking me after a course explaining how trauma and displacement impacted their capacity to retain information. They said they had always felt stupid.

Rosa



Although in this research Educators are reporting anecdotal experience and have not conducted or engaged in research to measure people's cognitive capacity to learn, research exploring the impact of violence on people's capacity to learn corroborates their anecdotal claims. From a social perspective, Herman's (1992) research shows that:

Violence has a disruptive function calling into question basic human relationships, breaching attachments, shattering the construction of self, and undermining belief systems, the result of which is trauma (Herman, 1992:51).

From a biological perspective, researchers have shown that trauma is 'a stress reaction that tends to overwhelm one's capacity to cope with further experiences of stress' (Terraci & Galarce, 2017:36). Specifically:

A typical reaction to a traumatic experience is hyperarousal (sometimes described as a "fight, flight, freeze" response). Over time, such chronic stress produces neurobiological changes in the brain, which researchers have linked to poor physical health and to poor cognitive performance (Terraci & Galarce, 2017:36).

Therefore, from an educational and social point of view, it is fundamental that in the aftermath (or in the Colombian context, its constant presence) of violence, learners are offered spaces and opportunities to '(re)enter their community, to (re)learn how to trust again and to (re)define their purpose' (Osborne & Mojab; 2011:524). Interestingly, Osborne and Mojab (2011) also point out that much of the literature on this topic 'stops at the importance of people who have experienced violence

receiving personal healing' (2011:524). In the context of Colombia, personal healing is paramount. Indeed, in supporting the use of artistic methods, Educators acknowledge that students are unlikely to seek psycho-social support either because of scarcity of resources, lack of confidence on those approaches, or the omnipresence of violence and trauma.

In this perennial fragile context, arts, music, and ludic approaches are an effective method to allow Educators to start from students' experiences, from what they know and value: to focus on what they have and not on what they lack. Moreover, these methods provide a celebratory space that builds trust and counteracts the belief that displaced people 'are too stupid' to learn. For Alheli, a woman with a long history of community organising, the power of the arts in helping young people to learn is unquestionable. She believes the power of artistic methods resides in their immediate capacity to engage and sustain long-term commitment of students:

I am firm believer that to defeat brutality arts are the best defence. In the workshops, we have activities with the sole objective to make people laugh, to open a space for people to sing, dance, [to do] whatever they feel like.

Alheli



Moreover:

To bring back the capacity to laugh is fundamental [in opening spaces to heal]. [The people we work with] have been suffering since they were children, they carry a lot of baggage from their parents, from their own history that erases their capacity to smile, to laugh at themselves. We bring a different attitude [to the human rights education courses] and that helps people to relax. Once they are relaxed, there is an opening for learning.

Alheli



Iris agrees; she believes artistic methods are crucial in engaging young people in the remote rural areas where she works:

We use dance theatre, music, and all sorts of cultural expressions to teach all sorts of subjects. It works because people relax; we found it is a good pedagogical methodology.

Iris

Once people are relaxed, learners start to trust (themselves and others) and start sharing their experiences of trauma. According to Educators, this step is vital in students' learning journeys as it releases mental (and physical, emotional, spiritual) space for other types of knowledge and experiences. Although Law 1257 (2008) offers a substantial promise of physical and mental health support (once victims are recognised and documented as victims by the legal system), not all victims have the cultural, personal, or financial resources to engage with these processes. Therefore, although Educators are not formally trained to deliver psycho-social support, informal provision of artistic workshops creates spaces that facilitate learning and foster a sense of agency.

Arts, music, and ludic approaches facilitate access to hard-to-reach areas and people

Interestingly, including artistic elements in HRE programmes also facilitates access to out of bounds areas. These off-limit (usually remote rural) areas are generally beyond government control where Educators often face threats of violence because of their work. It is a common experience amongst Educators to be forced to flee their communities because the groups exerting *de facto* power found their HRE programmes dangerous. In that context, Educators believe that using music, games, and creative activities make their training courses less threatening which allow them to engage more people for longer periods of time. Iris explains:

We use music and games in our HRE courses, and I think that is why they left us alone. They thought we were nuns or people just playing games to entertain the children.

Iris

Once again, this approach not only evidences Educators' commitment to their work, but also how artistic methods help advance the HRE agenda by creating community cohesion and fomenting the conditions to support agents of change, particularly in areas unprotected by government support.

Overall, Educators agree that using artistic approaches as a pedagogical tool is effective in engaging people with poor literacy levels, which was often the case for those who suffer protracted displacement. Importantly, by linking artistic methods with contextual knowledge of music, dance, embroidery, and other relevant cultural practices, HRE programmes facilitate (beyond pathologized spaces) the flow of difficult conversations, which in turn creates the conditions to build trust. This rapport is vital in creating appropriate conditions for learning.

Theme three: Tailored strategies for different audiences

Educators agree that any movement seeking to promote the agency women ought to engage with different audiences, not only women. Although some Educators find working with mixed-groups problematic as participants tend to have different agendas, cultural, and social expectations; they all agree that it is crucial to design and deliver tailored training programmes for different audiences.

Tailored approaches allow Educators to pinpoint people's prerogatives and needs and design relevant content accordingly:

For example [when we are working with men], we produce a leaflet that focuses on the main points of the law, we make the law relevant to their everyday lives... We also include music and theatre to work with embodied ways of knowing: what do I feel with my hands? what can I do with my feet? We work with people's capabilities and vulnerabilities. We mix it all up with legal texts so people can understand the law.

Margarita



It is important that men understand that they are also the product of a patriarchal reality.

Alheli



Reluctance to work with mixed audiences (particularly with men) derived from early experiences where Educators' voices were silenced by men's overpowering opinions. Based on those experiences, Educators acknowledged the advantages of women-only spaces, particularly at the beginning of their feminist education. Nonetheless, as they grew in confidence, they also saw the importance of including men and other gender identities in conversations addressing women's agency:

In our organisation, we are convinced - unlike other organisations - that we need to work with men as they are the ones who tend to violate women's rights. They need to be aware of rights and laws, much more than us. Intrinsically we [women] know what is fair and not; it is men who need to understand this. Men also need to understand that we women are capable of managing and leading organisations; that they can work with us as equals.

Margarita



Importantly, including men and other gender identities in conversations of agency is believed to be a crucial step in relational notions of agency. Educators feel that access to healing processes is vital to all those affected by violence and displacement and a fundamental layer in shaping notions of agency:

In these spaces, we guide reflections in a subtle way so both men and women can reflect on their actions. Men need to recognise that they are abusing women and women need to reject mistreatment. We need to know our rights so we can seek to exercise them, if we don't know they exist we cannot claim them and keep believing that mistreatment is normal.

Lily



It is important to include men in the spiritual healing process as well. Lack of access to rights generates vulnerability [for everyone].

Daisy



However, those opposing mixed audiences believe a segregated space for learning or activism prevents the hijacking of women's voices or the support of an inadvertent tokenistic voice:

Many of us who came from mixed organisations really didn't have a voice. I was invited to meetings, but only to show off that there were women involved (with the expectation that we remained quiet); but I have always been a transgressor, I broke the protocol; I raised my hands and ended up giving my opinion.

Magnolia



Beyond this positioning, Educators did believe that collective action is necessary to foster conditions that render women agentic. Therefore, tailored design and delivery are found to be the most appropriate method to generate and foster collective notions of agency. Collective action implies an understanding of the impact of patriarchy on all people (children, young people, trans people, men) and an acknowledgement that all victims of protracted displacement and violence ought to have opportunities to heal historical trauma. Educators believe this acknowledgement is a critical step in supporting a contextual, temporal, and tangible sense of agency.

Theme four: Inclusion of healing practices in HRE programmes

Interestingly, Educators highlight the importance of including healing and protection practices as methodological tools to promote a sense of agency and to facilitate learning. Although Educators did not provide details as to what the healing practices entail, from Educators' interviews I inferred that these practices include the provision of a safe space to name and sit with the damage women have endured, a space to reclaim their bodies and revitalise their knowledge.

By creating and facilitating healing spaces and practices, Educators acknowledge the multiple meanings of experiences of socio-political violence (Pinilla-Gomez, 2023). From their perspective, women would

not be ready to learn until they have addressed the cumulative trauma they carry because of violence or displacement:

We need to conduct a strong healing work [and that's why] we have healing workshops. We realised that all the dead, all the missing people ... all the violations that people carry for years... [those things] start damaging you.

Alheli



For us what worked was to lead workshops starting with whom we are, with our spirituality from what we have in our territory, from what people feel... As part of HRE training, it is important to provide a healing space so their minds can be open to learn, so the damage/injury can be assessed and addressed.

Lily



Although these rituals and practices (learned from and shared by indigenous and Afro-Colombian women) are mentioned as fundamental in shaping Educators' sense of agency, this allusion was revealed with caution and concern of contradicting 'rational' discourses of empowerment. In my view, Educators are protective of this knowledge for two main reasons. First, these ancestral practices lie beyond Western understandings of wellbeing and as such tend to be dismissed by funders and other stakeholders. Second, as a source of agency and protection, these traditional practices also fall outside human rights and legal discourses and therefore lie beyond normative notions of agency. However, these hidden layers of agency, some voiced, others left unsaid, are still visible in between the lines of Educators' narratives.

These ancestral indigenous practices convey a notion of agency that is temporal, multiple, relational, spatial, and contextual. According to Educators, these ancestral practices revitalise knowledge and agency as opposed to bestowing them. This is a fundamental conceptual shift from normative notions of agency where external discourses or sources bestow agency on those who seek it. Notably, ancestral healing practices also acknowledge the role the more-than-human plays in shaping notions of agency and wellness.

By including ancestral practices of healing and protection in their HRE programmes, Educators are not only using an effective pedagogical tool to facilitate learning, but also simultaneously using a decolonising tool to challenge entrenched cultural positions that conceptualise indigenous and African practices as inferior. Further, these ancestral practices offer the support they need and render them temporarily and contextually agentic, and as such, they need to be acknowledged and respected.

Diffraction Analysis

Diffraction analysis Quote 1 (Q1)

Many women feared the sea. They didn't want to leave their territory (deep in the forest). They had never seen the sea even though they lived only two hours away. But after they went to the trip, they realised that they have the right to enjoy those spaces as well, the territory meant obligations and roots, and the sea meant their right to be something else.

Lily



In her article about water management and relationality, Querejazu (2022) talks about three aspects of relationality that promote alternative thinking: 'the problem of ontological difference, the pluralisation

of ways of thinking and being, and the engagement with the more-than-human' (Querejazu, 2022:1). In her work in international relations, Querejazu's field of expertise, she notes that water is often referred to as a resource. In contrast, in Bolivia (where she is from) indigenous' perceptions of water see it as an entity that needs to be taken care of and nurtured. In fact, Querejazu (2022) explains that in Aymara (a Bolivian indigenous language) there is really no word for water; different words are used depending on what is happening or what water is doing.

Fascinatingly, a word for water also sometimes means woman, which makes Aymara a relational language where 'words and meanings constantly change depending on their relationship with the context' (Querejazu, 2022:2). She offers three conclusions that I find pertinent for my work: first, that 'relationality blurs boundaries and binaries and constitute a powerful way to address difference without exclusion' (Querejazu, 2022:7). Second, and resonating with a posthuman epistemology, that it is not about providing answers but about accounting for the happenings. And third, she concludes that 'relationality is a powerful decolonising tool' (Shilliam, 2015 cited in Querejazu, 2022:11).

Q1 implies that women considered themselves the daughters of the jungle, where different conceptions of identity may not have been possible or desirable. Querejazu's analysis of human-centred notions of identity (in her case as a Bolivian woman) is also relevant to this research; she elaborates:

It is not possible to become fully Andean, fully Western, not fully syncretic: our identities are in constant flow, we are fractal beings. Like water we could be contained but that contention (*sic*) does not last, for like water we and our identities flow (Querejazu, 2022:6).

Her analysis has echoes of Bennett's (2020) influx and efflux work and Neimanis' hydrofeminism (2012). Neimanis conceives our bodies as bodies of water, and as such, 'we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation' (2017:2). Moreover, moving away from anthropocentric notions of identity, Neimanis sees 'discrete individualism as a rather dry, if convenient, myth' and goes further to assert that we have never been only human' (Braidotti, 2013 Haraway, 1985, 2008; cited in Neimanis, 2017:2). Relevant to this research, Neimanis (2017) also argues that:

Watery embodiment presents a challenge to three related humanist understandings of corporeality: discrete individualism, anthropocentrism, and phallogocentrism (3).

In the interviews, bodies of water and other landscapes feature prominently in Educators' accounts of identities and notions of agency. For instance, Azalea talks about the importance of rivers linking isolated groups of people living deep in the jungle with main towns. Beyond this geographical importance, Azalea recounts the impressive knowledge rural people have about currents, the lives of the river, the navigation skills:

[Urban] people don't know, for example, how difficult it is to reach communities living deep in the jungle. When you take a canoe up the river, you must know how to navigate the water. I wasn't aware before, but now I understand a bit more. We went to [name of town] and had to navigate through several rivers... people knew when to stop and when to continue, knew the currents, stop, wait, and continue... it is very complex. This world does not exist for urban people; they cannot even begin to imagine that these territories exist. Urban people look down on these people [with this knowledge] although they are the ones who are protecting the rivers, the water, everything that makes our life possible.

Azalea



Azalea's and Lily's accounts exemplify how anthropocentric and binary understandings of identity (you are either from the city or from the countryside, you either have masculine or feminine knowledge) trap people's notions of identity within certain locations and embodiments. Thinking with bodies of water is helpful here to challenge humanist notions of corporeality and identity that are individual, human, and andro-centric.

Educators reported that forcibly displaced people carried a strong attachment to and knowledge of their place of origin and although this knowledge was never forgotten, new uprooting experiences did affect it. Q1 exemplified a different and subtle type of forced movement, as women were reluctant to venture outside their homeland. In this case, Q1 shone light on how people who had experienced forced displacement and placement⁴¹ might learn to reconfigure the notion of territory (or space) where:

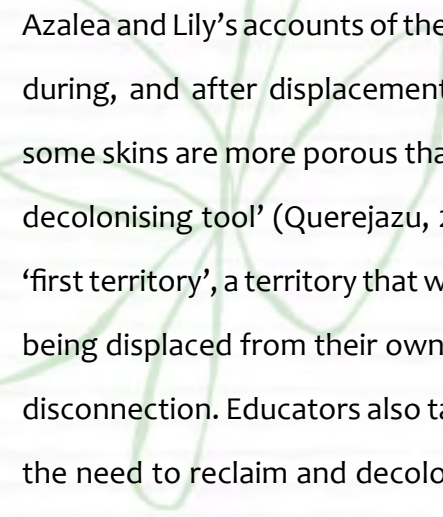
[T]he notion of territory as a physical space widens, facilitating the visibility of different actors, identities, ways of inhabiting, of exercising power to access not only geostrategic spaces but also decisions on autonomy, family obligations, bodies, emotions (Montoya, 2007 cited in Pinilla-Gomez, 2023:47).

This observation mattered in terms of reconceptualising notions of displacement and what valuable knowledge is. IDPs' dislocation may not come only from geographical uprootedness and the consequent lack of access to rights and justice, but also from failing to adopt identit(ies) (as episodes of displacement can be numerous) that dismiss and fail to understand relationality, attachment to place and different understandings of embodiment.

Through a diffractive lens, the nuances of dislocation came to the fore and provided a vantage point to see the unanticipated impacts and conceptions of displacement. The differences that emerged were eloquent in the message that displacement, in Colombia, was not an isolated event but a regular occurrence and that relationality mattered in re-signifying notions of victimhood, displacement, vulnerability, and what pursuing a sedentary way of being did. In this light, paying attention to the politics of location and embodiment (Braidotti, 2013; Neimanis, 2017) is fundamental in understanding alternative notions of agency that recognises its temporal and shifting nature. For example, Neimanis believed that a posthuman politics of location ought to begin:

[W]ith our bodies' mostly watery constitution, [to provide] an understanding of embodiment as both a politics of location, where one's specific situatedness is acknowledged, and a simultaneously partaking in a hydrocommons of wet relations (2017:3-4).

41 Here, placement indicates permanent or temporary resettlement spaces IDPs are offered as part of protection mechanisms.



Azalea and Lily's accounts of the role watery environments played in shaping notions of identity before, during, and after displacement reminded me that 'when it comes to intercorporeal vulnerabilities some skins are more porous than others (Neimanis, 2017:8) and that relationality is indeed 'a powerful decolonising tool' (Querejazu, 2022:11). In the interviews, Educators talked about their bodies as the 'first territory', a territory that was taken, vandalised, violated, colonised repeatedly. They talked about being displaced from their own territories (homes) and their own bodies through violence, rape, and disconnection. Educators also talked about lines of flight, about possibilities of being otherwise, about the need to reclaim and decolonise their bodies from shame, guilt, and pain. Educators' perceptions of embodiment were grounded on their material reality as figurations that were 'living maps that acknowledged concretely situated historical positions' (Braidotti, 2011:90 cited in Neimanis, 2017:5).

In Q1, accepting Neimanis' invitation, I reimagined bodies as:

Marshland, estuary, ecosystem, that [are] riven through with tributaries of companion species, nestling in [our] gut, extending through [our] fingers, pooling at [our] feet (2012:107).

Conceiving the body as watery embodiment shed light on notions of temporal and contextual notions of agency. In Q1, women's lives were intrinsically and inextricably linked to rivers but they were fearful of the sea, where all rivers end. Focusing on what that encounter with the sea did, I speculated that it was a relational encounter, a recognition of our watery embodiment, of our permeability, an understanding that our experiences are both singular and shared, individual, and communal (Neimanis, 2012). In this light, this permeability became 'a right to be something else' in different places and spaces. It was an acknowledgement that forced displacement uproots and roots people, animals, and the more-than-human many times and in diverse settings. By extension, it told us that notions of agency are temporal and contextual in response to people's positioning in the world, and that we are 'not hermetically sealed in our diver suits of human skin' (Neimanis, 2012:107).

Beyond superficial and speculative explorations of the temporal positive (or negative) impact a visit to the sea might have had on the women in Q1, a realisation that you could be something else, not that you had to be is important. In a context of recurrent, forced, and violent displacement, identities like knowledge morph, shift, and flow. A right to be something/someone else in displacement, in a sea where all rivers end, is an invitation to reconceptualise notions of displacement that see uprooting as

exceptional and exclusively damaging. Bodies of water are not sedentary, nor are we, and there is agency in that recognition.

Diffraction analysis Quote 2 (Q2)

Yes, I was that woman who was sexually abused, but I have also been a successful businesswoman. It is like I was born with some qualities that had potency. I was a businesswoman, I raised my voice, but displacement became a family tragedy. For me it was a tragedy because I was no longer able to enjoy the same privileges; I no longer had financial autonomy. At the same time however, it [being forcibly displaced] became an opportunity to help others. The path has found me, because I have been able to travel to other countries, to take with me women's voices, to take hope, to break the silence, to seek justice, to make suggestions for change, and to stop so much pain and tragedy.

Magnolia

The 'path has found me' was a difference that emerged in Q2. It moved the agency away from the human, a 'path' or paths found many of the Educators I interviewed, not the other way around. Educators often talked about the entanglement of tragedy and opportunity in their lives. For them, getting engaged with human rights and legal discourses, by appropriating legal and feminist knowledge, highlighted opportunities. They grieved the heart-breaking unspeakable losses but also celebrated the hard-won expected and unexpected victories and gains.

In parallel stories of migration and displacement in Europe, Maria Tamboukou (2020A) recognised women's agency and lines of flight as they navigated forced displacement. Tamboukou's work focused on women's lines of flight (finding a sense of agency) and on who they were (unique human beings) not on what they were (labelled as vulnerable refugees) (Tamboukou, 2020A). Tamboukou's work



demonstrated the importance of moving away from conceptualising notions of agency as absolute or binary, in other words, seeing displaced women either as vulnerable or empowered.

In fact, Magnolia's experience in Q2 was not unique, most Educators shared redemptive stories that acknowledged the devastating impact of being uprooted but also the cracks that shed light on qualities and skills that lay dormant and uprooting revitalised. All Educators acknowledged the latent and intertwined nature of vulnerability and empowerment.

It is undeniable that ruptures caused by dislocation cracks people's being and sense of agency. However, in the context of Colombia, these fractures also broke centuries old capsules and patterns that kept women subjugated and isolated. The seismic shock of forced and multiple waves of displacement and violence also had the capacity to shake women off and out of entrenched cultural expectations. In fact, Educators' stories of displacement showed how normal expectations were suspended and survival took priority by finding lines of flight, literally and figuratively.

Q2 exemplified both the entanglements of tragedies and lines of flight in displacement. Before experiencing forced displacement, Magnolia was a businesswoman with financial privileges yet still endured repeated trauma and misogyny. My intention is not to romanticise experiences of displacement as catalysts for change, in fact, in her interview Magnolia was clear that her pain ran deep, and her risks and losses had increased exponentially as a human rights defender; every healed wound lends fresh blood to a new one. Yet, she celebrated her work, the small and big victories she had achieved as a person and as part of a collective. She spoke poetically about how meaningful her work was despite all the tragedy and unspeakable loss.

What emerges from Q2 is a hint of Educators' shift from seeing the cracks of their armour as a loss to start seeing the armour for what it is: not as something that protects but as something that restrains and that contains. I contend that Educators' approach to use healing practices, as part of their courses was one of the tools that facilitated this shift in perception. I explored this in Q3 below.

Diffractive analysis Quote 3 (Q3)

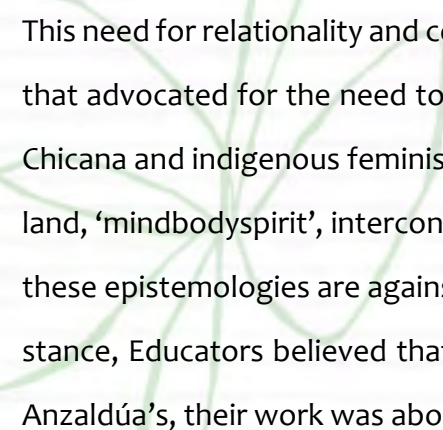
Getting together is fundamental to increasing the potential of ancestral knowledge for protection. From our indigenous and Afro-Colombian sisters, we learnt that there were forms of protection. So, we realised that [empowerment] is not only about appropriation or dissemination [of human rights and legal knowledge] that we also needed to prioritise our own protection. We needed to strengthen those forms of solidarity and self-protection. We needed to position those ancestral practices of protection in a main place.

Magnolia and Azalea



Three significant aspects of agency emerged from Q3: that a) agency was conceived as relational (getting together and learning from others was important); that b) there were sources of agency that laid outside normative discourses; and c) that a sense of agency was strongly linked to notions of protection.

A notion of agency as relational was in sharp contrast with 'masculine' and individualistic notions of protection and agency (bullet-proof vehicles, vests, bodyguards) which Educators had also experienced. In their context, a relational conception of agency called for the adoption of collective and ancestral forms of protection that moved beyond individualistic and anthropocentric notions of agency that fragmented and triggered further distress. From their perspective, holistic and secret ancestral practices not only protected but also healed physical, psychological, and spiritual collective and individual trauma. These collective practices supported a sense of agency that did not deter from their high-risk work but propelled them forward.



This need for relationality and collective healing recalled the work of Chicana and indigenous feminists that advocated for the need to heal ancestral pain by healing mind, body, and spirit (Carvajal, 2018). Chicana and indigenous feminists' core values include the value of processes (rather than outcomes), land, 'mindbodyspirit', interconnectedness, healing, and communities (Carvajal, 2018:63). In essence, these epistemologies are against values and practices of fragmentation. Echoing this epistemological stance, Educators believed that relationality expanded notions of self, care, and protection and like Anzaldúa's, their work was about fostering connections as a fundamental aspect of agency:

When you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She's no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to... put us back together again. To connect the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit (Anzaldúa, 2000:11 cited in Carvajal, 2018:65).

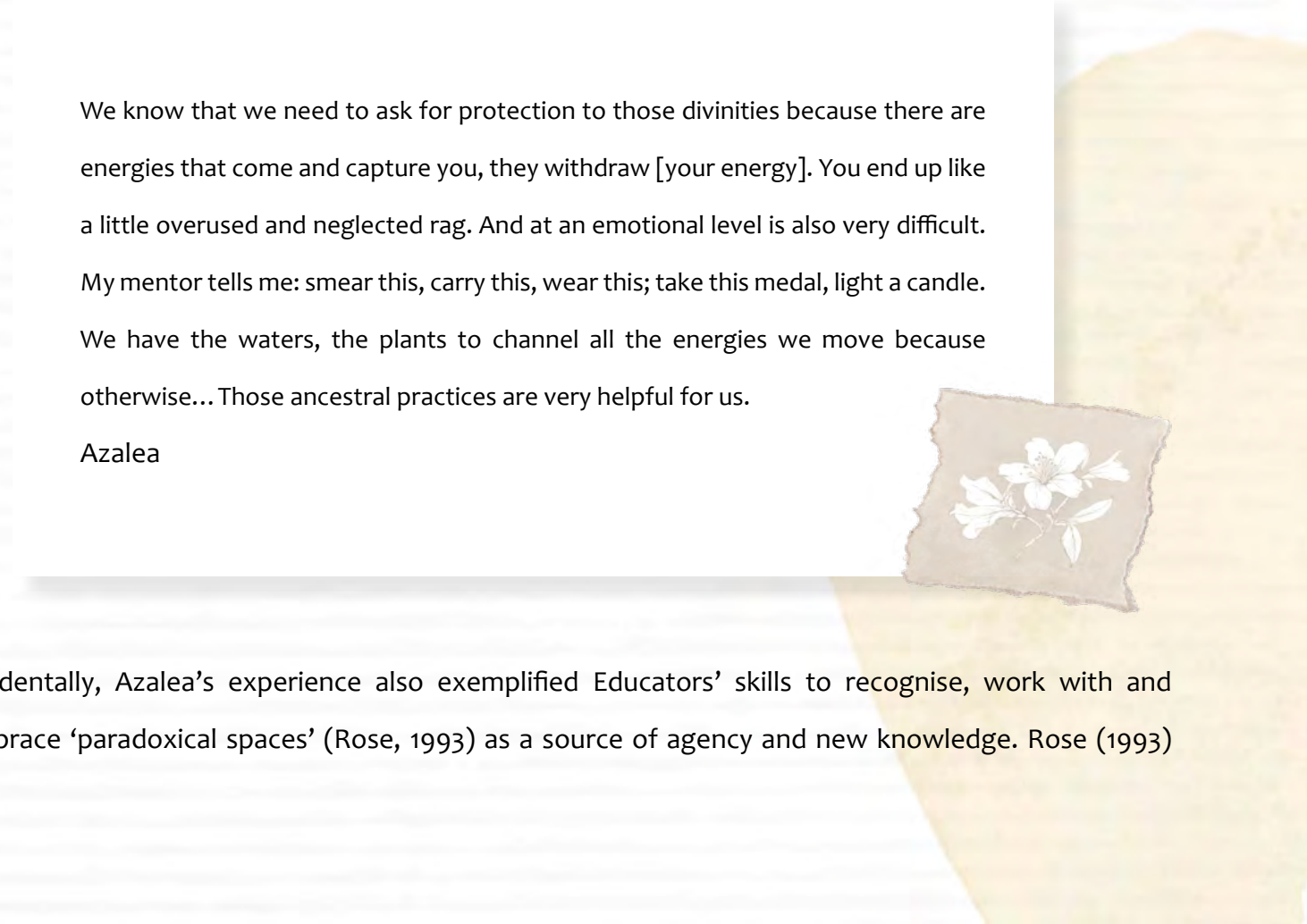
Although Educators were eloquent about the many ways in which forced displacement and violence broke and dislocated them, they also showed an understanding that vulnerability did not exist in isolation, that it was indeed an integral part of agency. This stance was fundamental in acknowledging the inherent nature of forced movement and violence they had experienced throughout their lives. A notion of tangible agency had to reflect uncertainty and transitoriness.

In that light, valuing alternative notions and sources of agency aligned with Educators' material conditions. A recognition that a significant aspect of their sense of agency laid beyond legal and human rights discourses was significant. An important difference that emerged from Q3 was the valorisation and adoption of ancestral practices of healing and protection in addition to and, perhaps, in preference to Western notions of therapeutic care practices. This is important because all Educators recognised that addressing damage and trauma holistically was a crucial step of any informal or formal learning activity addressing HRE. From their perspective, trauma and pain must be addressed not only to facilitate learning but most importantly as a fundamental layer of any notion of agency.

An important tool to access healthcare was the appropriation of human rights and legal knowledge. For example, Law 1257 (2008) outlined a comprehensive and holistic plan for health care for victims of violence and their children. Art. 19 specifically provided for medical, psychological, and psychiatric assistance. Although, overall, Law 1257 (2008) described the medical care and entitlements women registered as victims were eligible to receive, this medical care was contingent to being recognised

as an 'official victim' and to availability of funds and other government resources. For Educators and the women with whom they worked, sources of wellbeing implied a notion of revitalisation through connection to others. It implied recognising yourself as part of a whole, not as a single individual. In this sense, notions of agency suggested a position that transcended biomedical ideas of health that focused on individual bodies and minds and valued the role the more-than-human played in people's sense of wellbeing.

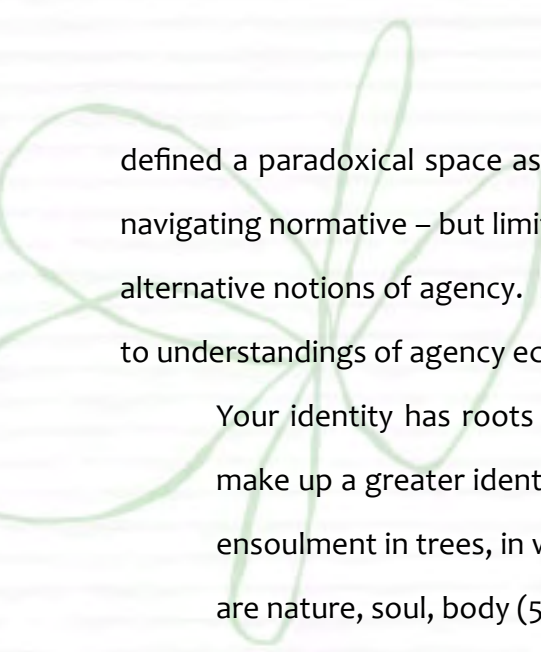
A final important difference that emerged in Q3 was the connection between a sense of agency and notions of protection. This is an important observation for this research as the principle of protection is fundamental to policies and procedures informed by forced migration and refugee studies. Although Educators did not detail the ancestral practices in which they engaged, they alluded, however, to the important role plants, bodies of water, and landscapes played in facilitating healing and protection. I thus speculate that using ancestral healing and protective practices not only contributed to spatial and temporal notions of agency but also triggered an important conceptual shift amongst Educators. A shift that moved notions of protection away from anthropocentric understandings of agency and acknowledged the role the more-than-human played in shaping notions of agency and wellbeing:



We know that we need to ask for protection to those divinities because there are energies that come and capture you, they withdraw [your energy]. You end up like a little overused and neglected rag. And at an emotional level is also very difficult. My mentor tells me: smear this, carry this, wear this; take this medal, light a candle. We have the waters, the plants to channel all the energies we move because otherwise... Those ancestral practices are very helpful for us.

Azalea

Incidentally, Azalea's experience also exemplified Educators' skills to recognise, work with and embrace 'paradoxical spaces' (Rose, 1993) as a source of agency and new knowledge. Rose (1993)



defined a paradoxical space as a site that both enables and hinders change. In the Educators case, navigating normative – but limited and limiting - discourses of agency while leaning on and validating alternative notions of agency. Inclusion of the more-than-human in addition to a relational approach to understandings of agency echoed Anzaldúa and Keating's (2002) belief that:

Your identity has roots you share with all people and other beings-spirit, feeling, and body make up a greater identity category. The body is rooted in the earth, *la tierra* itself. You meet ensoulment in trees, in woods, in streams. The roots *del árbol de la vida* of all planetary beings are nature, soul, body (560).

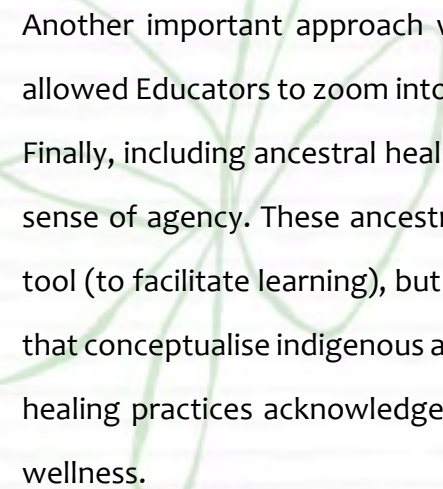
The differences that emerged from Q3 illuminated vital avenues to agency on the ground. Educators' experiences moving in and through paradoxical spaces provided insights as to how it is possible to navigate seemingly contradictory discourses. Beyond highlighting the different epistemological and ontological sources of agency, engaging diffractively with Q3 was also helpful in visualising an assemblage of agency where the human rights discourse, laws, and ancestral practices played a crucial part in rendering women temporarily and contextually agentic.

Conclusion

In addressing the question 'empowerment how?', this chapter focused on effective methods and tools to foster conditions to render people agentic on the ground. Thematic analysis of the interviews showed that Educators found four methods effective in facilitating temporal and contextual notions of agency: a) using consciousness raising and relational (feminist) approaches; b) using arts, music and ludic approaches, c) using tailored dissemination approaches for different audiences; and d) including healing approaches that were contextually relevant (adoption of ancestral practices of cleansing and protection) as part of the learning.

Consciousness raising and feminist approaches worked well in helping women find spaces to create their own (ideological or otherwise) priorities. A common priority included the need to recuperate ancestral practices that supported personal and collective notions of agency. Educators believed that to generate any meaningful notion of agency, it was crucial to raise consciousness about the need to heal the systemic and epistemic violence and harm women had historically endured. Educators believed that consciousness-raising was a crucial step in forming a collective identity that implied commitment and participation to transform reality. For them, a collective action implied personal and public recognition and acknowledgement of the trauma and harm they had endured and the impact on their lives, for example on their capacity to learn.

A second important tool was the use of arts, music, and ludic elements in delivering HRE programmes. Educators found these approaches useful for two main reasons: first it helped with initial and sustained engagement; and second, they helped people to relax, which in turn facilitated learning. Educators found that because of displacement, trauma, and lack of continuous schooling, most students tended to have poor literacy levels and lacked the capacity to focus. As a result, these students tended to consider themselves as too 'stupid' or 'ignorant' to learn. Artistic approaches helped to circumvent this perception by creating favourable conditions where students' experiences and knowledge counteracted the belief that displaced people cannot learn. Importantly, using artistic approaches was also helpful in facilitating access to areas of protracted conflict that remained generally out of bounds for most people. In this context, artistic approaches were perceived as less threatening in delivering HRE programmes.



Another important approach was to deliver tailored interventions to different audiences as they allowed Educators to zoom into people's lives and make the content relevant to everyday experience. Finally, including ancestral healing practices was a fundamental method to encourage learning and a sense of agency. These ancestral practices of protection were revitalised not only as a pedagogical tool (to facilitate learning), but also as a decolonising tool to challenge entrenched cultural positions that conceptualise indigenous and African practices as inferior. Importantly for this research, ancestral healing practices acknowledge the role of the more-than-human in shaping notions of agency and wellness.

A diffractive reading of three interview quotes highlighted the relational and contextual aspects of agency. I speculated with alternative notions of borders, selfhood, protection, and sources of agency that lie beyond normative discourses. Agency as relational, contextual and temporal was an important emerging point. Moreover, these speculations were helpful in reconsidering notions of mobility and sedentarism under a different light. For example, in considering the implications for the human rights regime were displacement to be considered a more universal experience (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003, Tamboukou, 2020; Braidotti, 2013).

Educators were apt at developing methods and tools that connected with diverse audiences, that revitalised students' skills and existing valuable knowledge, and that considered students' material conditions. With this foundation in place, Educators embraced the paradoxes that emerged and created conditions to render students agentic within their contexts.

Consequently, in the context of Colombia, grounded on people's knowledge and material conditions, and the role the non-human played in shaping people's sense of agency, Educators found an additional coordinate for the cartography of posthuman agency. This coordinate focused on identifying strategies and tools that facilitate the navigation of new and old knowledge (the how). Considering agency and notions of being as relational and porous, this coordinate allowed Educators and students to make their own tools of their trade. Tools that were effective because of their contextual, temporal and fluid nature.

Chapter nine: Empowerment when?

Preamble

*O Marinho: 'Unwinding the sea'*⁴²

Many years ago, I watched the play *O Marinheiro* (The Sailor) in my hometown in Colombia. I cannot remember if I have seen it several times or if I watched it only once. No matter, the play stayed with me, or rather the feelings of solitude and timelessness that it evokes. The image of the characters and stage have also survived vividly in my memory: the women wear macabre white face paint and black cloaks; the stage is remarkable in its sparsity.

The play was originally published in 1915 by Portuguese playwright and poet Fernando Pessoa. In a nutshell, the story takes place in a castle, where three women (who I assume to be nuns because of their attire and confinement) talk to each other while they watch a fourth deceased woman who is lying (on a casket) in the centre of the stage. The women start to talk about life, imagination, memories, and reality while looking at the distant sea through a small window at the top of the room. The small window allows them to get a glimpse of the sea and to measure time by the intensity of the light. One of the women starts recounting a dream she had about a shipwrecked sailor living on a desert island. In her dream, the sailor begins to dream an imaginary past until he becomes unable to distinguish reality from fiction.

In addition to the women's narrative, the simplicity of the stage also plays an important part in the story: the stage is round, enclosing the characters within a perfect circle. This spatial set, Barbosa-López (2015) argues, leaves the audience in 'a spatial limbo: either non-existent -outside the walls of the castle- or somehow meant to be inside of the circle' (Barbosa-López, 2015:93).

Perhaps the combination of the story and the sparse stage with its temporal and spatial dislocation are why the play has haunted me for years. It turns out that Pessoa was introducing a 'new'⁴³ form of theatre or static drama that 'was devoid of action, movement, or conflicts' (Barbosa-López, 2015:93).

In my view, the play has a different type of movement and conflict. Now, years later and thinking with an FVM hat on, I identify a few lingering conflicts in my mind: the juxtaposition between seclusion and the freedom to dream, between the desire to measure time and living timelessly, and the presence of a vivid, vast yet limited and unreachable sea only visible through a small window.

Perhaps the sense of seclusion, the lack of light, and the lives of nuns 'being trapped' struck home. I had an auntie who died of a broken heart. She never married and worked like a mule as a cleaner in a local hospital. She looked after everyone in the family generously and compassionately. I always knew she wanted to be a nun but was rejected by convents because she did not have the required 'dowry' needed to be accepted. For a long time, I did not understand the appeal of a life in seclusion, a life of invisibility, away from the world. It took me many years to understand that for some women, in some contexts, this seclusion may provide different shades of agency or power.

Thinking with the play *O Marinheiro* through an FVM lens showed me that seclusion might not necessarily equate to being static or inert despite appearances. The play is full of movement. Although women are madly still, sombre in a secluded dark room with limited light, and are seemingly passive in comparison with the active imaginary sailor (who dreams a whole new life for himself), they are also actively dreaming, remembering, and concluding that thinking about the past is meaningless.

Thus, armed with the feminist knowledge that women are often associated with passivity and men with activity (Bianchi, 2012), and with an FVM view that urge us to trouble binaries and linear, masculine notions of temporality; in this chapter I explore temporality as an important component of agency. In the play, I find the following exchange powerful in its subtlety to disrupt conceptions of passivity and time. In this succinct exchange, women focus on their material conditions, on what matters to them in

42 Title borrowed from Barbosa-López's article on the English translation of the original Portuguese text of Fernando Pessoa's play *O Marinheiro*.

43 I am suspicious of the word new here, as this static form of theatre echoes the slowness and sparsity of the Japanese Noh theatre, a form of theatre practiced uninterrupted since the Middle Ages.

their spatial and temporal context:

First watcher – We haven't heard the time yet.

Second watcher – We wouldn't be able to hear it. There is no clock near here. Before long it should be light (Barbosa-López, 2015:100).

Here the women are advocating to move from hearing (from a clock) to seeing (judging the light) the time, a move from abstract time to embodied time. In this sense, this exchange is a vibrant materialist attempt to seek an ontoepistemological change that 'emphasizes the situational, relational, and the pragmatic nature of ethical thinking and action' (Rousell, 2018:1393). And here the image of the vast distant sea becomes relevant.

Introduction: A sea of knowledge

In the play, imagery of the sea is evoked both by the stage and the narrative. The materiality of the stage and the words conjure a spatial, temporal, and experiential (through women's memories of living by the sea) depiction of the sea. As the night progresses, the women ebb and flow across time, they unwind the sea inside, they move with the flow, with the tides. Virginia Woolf once said that 'there are tides in the body' (Woolf, 2000 cited in Neimanis, 2012:87) and tides are attached to notions of temporality. In the context of this research, Educators, through their work and approaches, are indeed challenging linear and masculine forms of temporality. Their (and their students') inner tidal temporalities determine the ways in which they learn and engage with human rights, legal, and other discourses.

Awareness of different conceptualisations of temporality is not new. Feminist and queer thinkers note that:

A linear, progressive conception of lifetime and history is modern and rooted in patriarchal kinship, in male/masculine styles of embodied experience and in a philosophical tradition that understands itself as transcendental freedom - incorporeal and absolute (Bianchi, 2012:35).

From a feminist perspective, de Beauvoir (1973) and Kristeva (2002) provide vocabulary for thinking temporality in sexed and gendered terms. For example, in *the Second Sex*, de Beauvoir analyses women's time as 'cyclical and static and having little access to the linear projects of transcendent subjectivity so dear to existentialism' (Bianchi, 2012: 35). In her view, if women wished to follow linear projects and participate in public life, they must shake off their 'experiential, affective ties and associations with the cyclical and enter into the time of masculinity' (Bianchi, 2012:36). This tension is present in the lives of Educators in this research. Educators recount the conflict between their work as human rights defenders and educators and their family life as Azalea explains here:

We have to finance our own activities... human rights defenders don't have a salary, have very limited resources. I often cover my own costs to go to meetings, but that also means that I am using money that my family needs. We volunteer a lot of our time and resources, and that's fine because we believe in what we do, but at the end of the day, as the years go by, you need to survive and look after your family too.

Azalea

Interestingly, within this high-risk context, most Educators are heads of single-parent households either by choice or loss, making notions of protection crucial and urgent. Through their work, Educators enter a linear space and masculine time; notions of space and time that inform policies of protection that are not always effective and often detrimental.

Consequently, this chapter focuses on identifying examples of different temporalities in Educators' narratives that trouble linear progression of time and causality. It focuses on tracing processes rather than cause-and-effect to reconceptualise absolute ideas of agency and vulnerability. I continue to suggest that human-centred, dualistic, and absolute notions of agency need to be reconceptualised in terms of processual activity that responds to changing conditions, situations, and qualities of life.

This premise suggests that understanding alternative notions of temporality elucidates conditions that render people agentic. To do so, I explore the following questions: how might alternative conceptualisations of time/temporality influence notions of agency? Moreover, considering collective and intergenerational trauma, how might alternative conceptualisations of temporality aid in handling trauma and learning?

It is in response to these questions and to the urgency to think and make the world differently, that I follow Barad's (2017) invitation to:

[T]rouble time, to shake it to its core, and to produce collective imaginaries that undo pervasive conceptions of temporality that take progress as inevitable and the past as something that has passed and is no longer with us...' to produce collective imaginaries that see the past as 'something so tangible, so visceral, that it can be felt in our individual and collective bodies (57).

A focus on women's encounters with the impossible, the unspeakable, and the ordinary have corroborated the need to produce new kinds of knowledge and conceptualisations of time and agency. Like the women in *O Marinheiro*, Educators know that stillness does not always mean passivity, that there are minor gestures that trigger 'quasi-invisible signals that provoke a waiting, a stilling, a listening, as sympathy-with' (Manning, 2016:62). Educators understand and live the entangled nature of vulnerability and empowerment, of passivity and activity, and the danger and appeal of dominant discourses of empowerment.

Therefore, through thematic and diffractive analysis, I argue that temporality plays a fundamental part in shaping conceptualisations of agency, and as such, it has an impact on people's capacity to learn, create, and transform knowledge. In a posthuman cartography of agency, a temporal coordinate focuses on processes and traces their flow to illuminate temporal dimensions where the old and the new, the masculine and the feminine can coexist 'in the positive expressions of their respective differences' (Braidotti, 2012:x). This temporal coordinate is one in a multi-dimensional cartography, where notions of agency and vulnerability are multiple (horizontal/terrestrial, vertical/celestial, diagonal, circular, spiral), contextual, spatial, and relational.

Thematic Analysis

This research is guided by three different epistemologies: FMS, HRE, and FVM that carry distinct conceptualisations of temporality. While feminist theory disrupts linear conceptions of time, in FMS and HRE linearity is important as protection and education policies are designed to respond to linear phases of displacement (before, during and after) and to different needs across the life span. Therefore, taking these temporal conceptualisations into consideration, thematic analysis in this chapter is grounded on a linear understanding of time. Thus, three themes emerged. First, the importance of intergenerational learning (relational learning) in shaping notions of agency; second, at an individual level, the importance of lifelong learning; and third, the intergenerational conflicts that impact people's learning and sense of agency.

Theme one: Intergenerational learning

Intergenerational learning refers to informal transfer of knowledge, skills, competences, norms, and values across generations in diverse contexts (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). Educators believe this type of knowledge provides younger generations with a link to the past, while also providing older generations a link to present and future knowledge (for example, the potential of technology for learning). They believe that this knowledge flow across generations is fundamental in shaping notions of both personal and communal agency. Therefore, within this theme, three main strands emerge: the importance of supporting intergenerational knowledge within families, within communities, and within and across cultures.

Intergenerational learning within families

Intergenerational learning emerges as a priority for Educators. They stress the significant influence their role models (parents, grandparents) had on their lives and desire to serve and transform their communities. For Educators, the value they place on serving and transforming their communities derive from their families' deep political or religious beliefs and from the solidarity that emanates from experiencing displacement, violence, poverty, and discrimination in their own flesh.

Regardless of their motivations, Educators believe that family values play a fundamental role in shaping their sense of agency by committing to help others:

‘My leadership role emerged early in my life. From my father and my mother, I inherited the need to serve others. My father was a doctor and my mother a teacher. They were always ready to serve. But I must confess, my father had a definite influence in my entire process [of being a community organiser]. Ever since I was a little girl, he was my main role model that shaped my character. He used to take me to First of May demonstrations (Labour Day) every year since I was very little; he always told me not to let anyone oppress me.

Alheli



Like Alheli, Educators strongly believe that fomenting values of community commitment within families generates a sense of individual and collective agency. Educators spoke about inheriting a desire and a sense of obligation to engage in community education and initiatives that sought justice, particularly for women. This sense of obligation carries informal knowledge and skills that play a vital part in shaping Educators’ sense of agency inside and outside their families as their engagement and visibility in private and public spaces evolve.

In fact, an important aspect of this intergenerational learning within families is the experiential and invisible knowledge (Quinn, 2023) gained through the highs and lows, the victories, and the serious risks of working as human rights educators and defenders. This invisible knowledge (Quinn, 2023) contributes to a type of cultural capital that is crucial in fragile contexts:

My daughter also has a very tough story... I will tell you another time. But now, she is an artist, she is a dance teacher... She is also very involved in social causes; she

feels that dance helped her to get rid of the anger she used to feel. She told me once that she hated my job [as a human rights defender] because who likes that her mother does a job where she could get killed anytime?

Magnolia



This intrafamilial intergenerational learning generates conditions that shape charismatic leaders living in contexts of high risk to engage communities in transformative work (Zulver, 2022). In this light, intergenerational learning within families creates conditions which favour the adoption of human rights, legal and other types of knowledge to support notions of temporary and contextual agency.

Intergenerational learning within communities

Generally, Educators emphasize the important role informal community schools have in supporting transformative action across generations:

I think it is of great importance that we invest in informal and community education because we need to inform to empower, to empower to serve, to serve to transform, transform to generate change, deep changes in our communities.

Daisy



Educators' impetus to support relational knowledge is based on the awareness that personal notions of agency are also shaped and supported by communal components. They believe that agency is relational, that an individual sense of agency does not exist without an equivalent sense of agency for the community, and vice versa. In that sense, Educators think it was vital to focus and raise awareness about communities' specific needs to generate an intergenerational response of support. For example, although a focus on men's education is rare, some Educators acknowledge the need to engage men in HRE programmes, not only for individual but also for communal benefits:

We include men in our trainings [with women] because it [issues of violence against women] concerns them. They [men] participate actively and sometimes challenge us, but it is lovely to see how they reconcile with each other [speaking about couples], we open those spaces for healing and reconciliation that they may not have at home. We use the same exercises with women-only training, but it is lovely to see and hear the conversations between them, and I feel very proud to be part of that path of empowerment for women, but also for men, because we can shape a new masculinity, even in older men, because that's one [notions of masculinity] of the most difficult things to change.

Lily



Moreover, Educators believe that a fundamental aspect of fostering notions of agency depends on integrating experiential and intergenerational learning into formal education. From Magnolia's perspective, shaping notions of agency requires a programme that engage people in the community at different ages and stages of formal education:

I would like to design accessible methodologies to disseminate the message about sexual violence. I have a dream, because I am a victim of sexual and other types of violence, and because I know of so many other stories of violence. I would love to design a preventative model addressing violence against women, that we develop ourselves and we can deliver in formal education. Get the ministry of education involved so the model can be taught to teachers, students, parents. The idea will be to disseminate it in universities, schools, nurseries. We need to have these conversations within these educational settings.

Magnolia



In this vein, intergenerational and experiential knowledge of human rights and legal constructs, either formally or informally delivered, is a vehicle to combat stigmatisation. In this case, Lily highlights the importance of relationality in shaping notions of agency:

This is a very complex issue because there are people who know their rights very well and yet they are being abused and mistreated at home. I think to know your rights is fundamental because this knowledge opens doors, paths, otherwise there is no point in studying. But we have to make the decision whether or not we want to apply in my life what we learn...but there is also social pressure that influence whether or not a woman wants to claim and exercise her rights, they can end up being stigmatised.

Lily



Lily's observation highlights the question whether rights and legal constructs exist if they are impossible to claim. In alignment with legal anthropologists' work on the vernacularisation of human rights (Levitt & Merry, 2009) this study's initial assumption was that the existence of a universal

language of human rights was not enough to guarantee people's access and/or exercise of rights. It contended that in addition to personal agency, supportive legal and cultural infrastructures were also fundamental elements in providing favourable conditions for the adoption and execution of human rights by individuals and communities. Educators' experiences corroborate this position and show how their intergenerational work creates the necessary conditions to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Their work weaves human rights and legal knowledge simultaneously within individuals and communities paving the way to build both the cultural and legal infrastructures needed to make these discourses alive and relevant on the ground. Educators' work within communities show that individual and collective knowledge is intertwined, and so are notions of agency. Individual knowledge (or agency) is not enough, collective knowledge and acceptance is required if women and other groups are to experience any sense of agency.

Intergenerational learning within and across cultures

The role of older wise women: *Sabedoras*⁴⁴ and *Mayoras*⁴⁵ emerges as an important intergenerational aspect shaping notions of agency. Traditionally, these women tend to be midwives and/or healers and, as such, knowledgeable about rituals of protection. Amongst communities of women engaged with human rights and legal work both in rural and urban areas, *Sabedoras* and *Mayoras* also play a fundamental mentoring function that keeps these communities of women engaged, motivated, and protected:

I have a mentor that I consult all the time. I go to her with questions like: what do I do? How do I do it? But we also have our own ancestral practices ... My mentor gives me political advice but also how to look after myself using ancestral practices.

Azalea



Although in the 'empowerment how?' section I discuss the adoption of healing spaces and ancestral therapeutic and protective practices as an effective method that facilitates learning, here the emphasis is on the intergenerational transmission, acceptance, and adoption of this type of knowledge. Specifically, I focus here on the decolonisation aspect of ancient notions of agency by subalterns.

Valuing and revitalising ancestral knowledge and the role these women have played for centuries within communities constitute an important step in fostering conditions of agency at a communal level. Reclaiming and adopting knowledge that has been historically dismissed is a powerful act of defiance to colonial practices that still subjugate individuals and communities. Interestingly, for Educators, many times displaced, threatened, and targeted, ancestral practices of protection are not in opposition to their religious faith or political stances, but are tangible and powerful tools:

When we started working with indigenous and Afro-Colombian women we learnt that they had ways of protecting themselves [to do their human rights work] ... We learnt how to use certain plants to protect ourselves, to help us find a balance and heal. These are ancestral and spiritual practices of protection that have become part of our political exercises... [plants] have the power to protect us; if I am honest, that's why I think we are still alive.

Magnolia



In our network, we have our ancestral practices of protection, we know we need to ask the divinities for protection, because if we don't protect ourselves, our energy is taken away. Of course, we talk about political (tangible protections), but also the advice that comes from our ancestors, plants, rocks, objects that protect, that channel everything that flows...

Azalea



44 Those who know/ The Knowledgeable.

45 The Elders

Beyond cultural and religious clashes, Educators shed light on the revitalisation of knowledge that has been flowing, like a subterranean river, across generations and cultures. In this sense, ‘ancestral knowledge’ does not belong to the past, as it is firmly situated in Educators’ present realities.

Theme two: Lifelong learning

Educators understand lifelong learning as education processes that take place across the lifespan. It includes basic literacy skills, and participation in formal and informal education (including human rights education and legal knowledge). They also believe that lifelong learning is ‘intertwined with ongoing popular struggles for the creation, safeguarding, and enhancing of democratic spaces in which men and women live as social actors’ (English & Mayo, 2021:28). Thus, in terms of notions of agency, Educators’ work focuses on two main areas of learning across the lifespan: financial literacy and supporting access to formal and informal education.

Educators strongly believe that financial independence is a fundamental element in shaping women’s sense of agency, and as such, lifelong learning also implies acquiring skills and knowledge to enhance women’s employability. In that vein, Educators involved in employability initiatives focused on collective enterprises that aimed to benefit women and local communities. In this context, the emphasis of lifelong learning is both on personal and social responsibility and building individual and communal resilience:

In Colombia, we have an intergenerational load that we all carry, we [women] need to start thinking about love and money differently, we need to become not only emotionally but also financially intelligent if we want to achieve a better quality of life.

Sol

It is very important to understand that empowerment does not come from having money or education alone, you need gender solidarity. Yes, it is important for women to have their own [financial] resources and the freedom to use them as they please, but we also need to build community support as well.

Alheli

Thus, in addition to financial literacy, fostering opportunities for (formal and informal) education that target both individual and communal agency is an essential aspect of Educators’ work. In that light, lifelong learning becomes an essential tool to foster a tangible sense of agency that is informed by different types of learning and nourished across people’s lifespan.

Considering Colombia’s context of displacement, its impact on people’s capacity to learn (both at cognitive and logistical levels), and Educators’ strong belief in education as a vital tool to foster agency, valuing formal knowledge and lifelong learning is a pragmatic approach to fostering agency. In that sense, their approach does not privilege formal over informal knowledge but values both equally:

It is important for women to get an education because [education] lessens the gap in terms of getting employment or the opportunity to generate your own income. This knowledge also gives me confidence so I can claim rights and avoid being abused.

Having said all that, at university they don’t really talk much about your rights, what it means in real life, it is all very theoretical, specially thinking of women’s rights. For me formal education is supremely important, but so is informal education. A woman that educates herself culturally, that reads the newspapers, that learns how the system works, how the laws work; it’s important. Formal education gives you criticality, informal education gives you the practice, how that knowledge materialises in life.

Azalea

Funding organisations have much to learn from this approach as they tend to value technical and formal knowledge and language. Educators' experiences evidence the dismissal of their informal knowledge by key stakeholders (government, NGOs) seeking the empowerment of women:

There are challenges that teach us a lot. Indigenous women and us [Afro-Colombian women] started to gather information and write about intergenerational perceptions of gender and family relations in our communities. We wrote it all up with our own words, for example we use the word revitalise instead of educating, it is not about giving education, it is about revitalising the knowledge we carry with us, we revitalise our and their knowledge together.

But [funders] asked us to conceptualise, to write a concept, and we have the words we use, and it is completely clear to us but not to them. That document is valid for us, but we had to ask an expert to translate it into technical language they understand.... we want [funders] to understand that what we do is valid, makes sense and is important, that in fact it can inform and drive their work so it can improve things.

Azalea



Importantly, this indigenous knowledge - acquired through informal means of learning - informs important positionings in Educators' projects and worldviews. Through informal learning, Educators have started the process of challenging foreign conceptions of agency, as Azalea points out. In this case, Educators are driving forward important conceptual shifts regarding notions of agency. These epistemological clashes represent a fertile ground to explore further the relationality of knowledge, or to put it differently, the assemblage of different knowledges that shape notions of agency.

Theme three: Intergenerational conflicts in learning

Alongside positive aspects of intergenerational learning and interactions sit negative aspects as well. Older generations (particularly in isolated rural areas) tend to be reticent about adopting 'new' knowledge (for instance laws or women's rights). Interestingly, younger generations (particularly in urban settings) tend to be openly hostile to Educators and 'old-fashioned' approaches they consider anachronistic. Paradoxically, some Educators perceive challenges from younger generations as a negative aspect of agency:

Younger women (20–22-year-olds) come to work with us, but they don't recognise us as leaders. According to them, technology reigns supreme, but they forget that when they arrived, we had worked a lot for the conditions they now enjoy. They call us old-fashioned and challenge our ways... it is our fault though, we empowered them to question, to claim their rights, and now is backfiring.

Jasmin



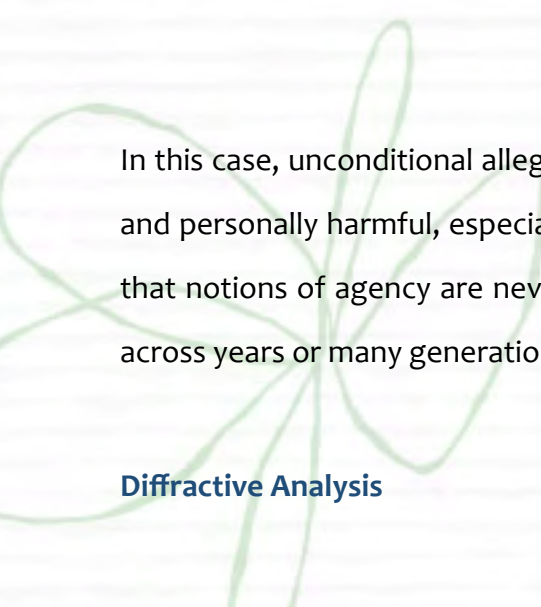
This epistemological clash worries older Educators as it threatens to halt the progress they feel they set in motion. Although these intergenerational conflicts are not new or unique to the Colombian context, they highlight how waves of knowledge flow and are understood, adopted, and applied through time, and how they matter in shaping notions of temporal and contextual agency.

Amongst Educators, young Educators also challenge older Educators' approaches, which they consider to be paternalistic and unrealistic methods of empowerment:

We are trying to do things differently, because we have been critical of paternalistic solutions: those approaches that try to solve everyone's problems by giving them a grain of rice to quell a hunger of millennia. No, that's not the right way to work.

Alheli





In this case, unconditional allegiance to equality and solidarity is seen as problematic, unsustainable, and personally harmful, especially as women work with very limited resources. These tensions show that notions of agency are never absolute and are shaped by temporal and conceptual fluctuations across years or many generations.

Diffractive Analysis

A Sea of knowledge

From very early times, the sea has been seen as a feminine force that ebbs and flux; its cyclical tides both predictable and unpredictable (Helmreich, 2017). Metaphors of the sea and waves are often present in feminism. For example, in her essay about women's time, Julia Kristeva (2002) says that, historically

[F]emale subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known throughout the history of civilisations (63).

Kristeva points out that conceptions of time, from women's point of view, tend to be cyclical in nature as evidenced in biological cycles (gestation, menstruation), but 'there are also notions of eternity, of monumental temporality that is all encompassing and infinite' (Kristeva, 2002:64). Time is cyclical, predictable but also eternal and infinite, just like the sea represents both the predictable and the unknowable.

Linear time is made up of minutes, just like the sea is made up of waves. Oceanographers define a wave as the transfer of 'a disturbance from one part of material to another' (Brown *et al.*, 1989:8). More specifically, a wave in motion is 'a process whereby energy is transported across or through a material without any significant overall transport of the material itself' (Brown *et al.*, 1989:8). Tides are the breath of the sea as they rhythmically rise and fall over a period of hours. We have known from ancient times that tides are affected by the sun, the moon, meteorological conditions, and the wind. The wind, for instance, can hold back the tide or push it along thus making the height of the tide

impossible to predict (Brown *et al.*, 1989).

Thinking with the rhythms of tides, waves, and winds has been helpful in exploring notions of temporality and how alternative perceptions of temporality might impact people's learning and sense of agency. This diffractive analysis focuses on temporal aspects of learning and speculates as to how alternative perceptions of temporality might shape notions of agency differently.

You can drown in a sea of knowledge if you are not prepared to swim, or float, or flow

The interviews for this research were conducted at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when time seemed to be suspended, frozen. When retelling their experiences, Educators weaved their present through their past and future learning and aspirations. The interviews have a tidal rhythm in that, at different times of their narratives, Educators' knowledge erupted from the height of their present chaotic experiences when keeping a linear account of time was essential for their work. Other times, however, keeping track of time no longer mattered when their experiences of loss, learning, and adapting seemed to be both recurrent and unpredictable.

Thematical analysis of Educators' experiences of learning and how it renders them capable of 'finite flourishing' (what I call temporal agency) – 'now and yet to come' – (Haraway, 2016:16), does not account for the multiplicity of temporalities that affect people and knowledge. Nor does it account for the 'myriad of unfinished configurations of times and meanings' in which Educators in Colombia are/were/will be entwined (Haraway, 2016:1).

Thus arises the need to explore further temporal aspects of learning through diffractive analysis. Here, I pay closer attention to temporal aspects of learning and the role the more-than-human plays in informing alternative notions of temporality and agency. Through a diffractive lens, I consider temporality an important aspect of people's material conditions and focus on how Educators inhabit different temporalities in their quotidian lives, and how these temporalities shape their sense of agency.

I ask: are there temporal boundaries that preclude Educators' sense of agency? Why is it important to pay attention to temporal specificity in contexts of displacement? What happens if knowledge

and people inhabit different temporalities? Could knowledge be temporally and spatially displaced (for example, in the case of ancient or human rights knowledge)? How might understanding the intersection of different temporalities impact on learning? If so, what might the implications be for promoting human rights and legal knowledge?

With these questions in mind, I speculate on nonlinear, multifaceted notions of temporality. Inspired by Barad, the aim is to engage diffractively with the data to:

[C]ontribute to different understandings of temporality where ‘the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ might coexist, where one does not triumph by replacing and overcoming the other...to understand how ‘the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ -indeed multiple temporalities – are diffractively threaded through and are inseparable from one another (Barad, 2017:69).

Therefore, this section develops a series of speculative propositions to reconceptualise notions of agency that are attentive to temporal aspects of being and knowing. It evidences the need of a temporal coordinate (in addition to how, who, what coordinates) in a post-human conception of agency.

Diffractive analysis Quote 1 (Q1)

Claudia: You use the verb weave often...

Azalea: When we are working, and we learnt that from the indigenous women we work with, we understand that they bring their wool and needles, they are constantly making things. They say to us, we are paying attention, but we are also making at the same time, we weave with and in words, we engage with knowledge but also with doing; we are always work in progress, we never sit still, we are always doing something. [That understanding] has been very enriching for us, we come together not only to create new things but to revitalise our being so we can heal and move forward with our work.



During the interview, I was moved and intrigued by the number of times, Azalea weaved the verb to weave through the conversation. The unexpected use of the word evoked the interconnectedness that permeated her interview, her story, her work. From Q1, the sentence ‘we are paying attention, but we are also making at the same time, we weave with and in words’ intrigued me. The indigenous women’s behaviour is a disruption of the binary default position of classroom etiquette that I am used to: either you pay full attention to the speaker or engage fully with a task.

In Q1, women are able to do both actions at the same time; it is a multitemporal and multi-spatial way of learning. Their knitting is not confined to their homes, nor their learning confined to a classroom, they ‘weave in and with words... they are always work in progress, they never sit still’. This action exemplifies how language and matter affect each other.

Here I suggest these women’s weaving in an educational setting account to a minor gesture by minoritarians as they challenge the perception that indigenous women are passive, unresponsive to classroom etiquette, and to engagement and participation. The women’s weaving challenges the idea of passivity. In Q1, stillness does not mean inaction; their silent, quiet weaving is, in fact, an eruption that disrupts linear conceptions of the idea that there is a time and a space for everything. Instead, these women are privileging doing at the same time as knowing: ‘we engage with knowledge but also with doing... we never sit still’.

Donna Haraway speaks of response-ability as the capacity to have reciprocal relationships that recognise the inequality of power, but also enable responsibility and some level of response from both directions. Response-ability, however, is also about both absence and presence, about killing and nurturing, about being both passive and active (Haraway, 2016). In Azalea’s experience, the learning, the knowledge generated from the exchange of cosmologies and temporalities help shape both women’s and Educators’ temporal sense of agency.

The women and Educator embrace both passivity and activity, doing and knowing, materiality and discourse. It is a response-able space that fosters the conditions of temporal and spatial agency. I envision a Harawayian temporal and contextual notion of agency that considers situations, temporalities, and beings that render humans and the-more-than-human ‘capable of finite flourishing’ and are response-able to each other. I speculate that the women’s weaving gives a glimpse of a notion

of agency that is shaped by – and comfortable with - existing in a spectrum of passivity and activity, of darkness and lightness, of creation and destruction, of fragility and agency.

I speculate that their ‘stillness’ rejects the idea of passivity or absent-mindedness. By privileging both doing and knowing, they are shining light on an alternative onto-epistemological stance of agency. This is an alternate view that is ‘steeped in new materialist notions of the performative, the collective, the processual, and the minor’ (Rousell, 2020:1392).

This encounter between the material and the discursive, between linear and alternative notions of temporality, and the epistemological and ontological highlights a temporal and contextual sense of agency akin to Rousell’s concept of ‘little justice’ and Manning’s (2016) little gesture. Rousell defines a little justice as ‘a minoritarian proposition situated in the interstices between majoritarian political structures and discursive social agendas of justice’ (Rousell, 2020:1392). In this light, Azalea’s linear sense of temporality (as a human rights educator) is part of a majoritarian temporal structure, whereas indigenous women’s multi-temporal notion is a minoritarian proposition of understanding of time.

Thus, I speculate that people inhabit different temporalities that affect how, what, and why we learn. Consider, for example, the HRE agenda to empower learners to adopt, claim and exercise human rights as a linear majoritarian temporal structure (meaning a position conceived within and as result of a specific temporal context). In contrast, consider the indigenous women attending Azalea’s workshops as inhabiting minoritarian temporalities, meaning notions of temporality that deviate from linearity and cause and effect. My contention is that notions of temporality matter for knowledge production, and as such living in different temporalities -which implies different perspectives and prerogatives – is an obstacle to reaching a universal sense of agency.

Q1 exemplifies a response-able encounter that allows for a collective, temporally synchronised meeting within a place and time of ‘mutual immanence’. Mutual immanence:

[Is] attributed to the contemporaneous relations between two or more occasions within a given time system (:197) ... Mutual immanence refers to the relations between two or more occasions of experience which are contemporaneous within the present (Whitehead, 1967 cited in Rousell, 2020: 1392).

In other words, an encounter of different notions of temporality brings care and attention to the entanglements of agency, temporality, and knowledge. In this case, paying attention to what weaving did for the women, made Azalea – and her team of Educators:

[B]ecome attuned to a situation of mutual immanence, to acknowledge in some small way its entangled route of inheritance as well as its real potentiality, and to act in a way that creatively anticipate[d] the necessity of a future that only becomes possible through mutual co-existence... (Rousell, 2020:1396).

In this light, weaving in a classroom setting is also an ‘untimely event’, which Grosz describes as a ‘fleeting rupture, [an] unexpected rebellion and [an] unforeseeable encounter that disrupts the present and offers glimpses to radical futures’ (Grosz, 2004 cited in Tamboukou, 2023: 20). In this case, women’s actions demonstrate how an entanglement between matter and discourse, between doing and knowing is an untimely event free of normative causality (Tamboukou, 2023). Azalea’s encounter with the women and the knowledge that emerged from it disrupts majoritarian understandings of linear temporality and gives insights on how multiple temporalities are threaded through and are inseparable from one another (Barad, 2017).

Consequently, a tangible sense of agency is not only spatially but also temporally contextual. In the quest for agency, it is fundamental to recognise individual and minoritarian temporal systems and how they affect the genesis and/or adoption of knowledge. This recognition can inform how to make knowledge synchronous with people’s needs and perceptions of time. It is an important step in entering the sea of knowledge, to make us aware that knowledge and people are propelled by different tides, winds, temporalities. This awareness is important in understanding that notions of temporality play a fundamental part in people’s notions of agency.

Diffraction analysis Quote 2 (Q2)

I live in [city] after several forced displacements. I was displaced in 1987 – I think – I couldn't go back [silence...she becomes emotional] ... I am sorry. I think the next one was in 2000, I don't remember the dates... I am sorry. I think the last one was in 2007 from [city]. And several intra-urban displacements within [current city] because of my work as a human rights defender, it has been very complex.

Magnolia



Although Magnolia's lapse in remembering precise dates could be attributed to different physical/mental conditions, or the shock of bringing back past trauma, I speculate that her hesitation to recall precise dates comes from an altered notion of temporality because of the continuous and multiple experiences of forced and violent displacement. What this lapse in memory does is to highlight the fact that, in Magnolia's experience, movement, specifically forced and violent, has been the norm rather than the exception.

Consider, then, the onto-epistemological shift of contemplating movement, rather than sedentarism as the norm. What would it mean 'to live with transitions and processes' (Braidotti, 2012: xvii), rather than with ideas of reparations for any disruption to cause-effect processes? In other words, FMS and the human rights regime operate on the basis of providing remedies and protection for the disruptions (effects) caused by the violations that forced displacement generates. Would a mobility norm remove notions of vulnerability and hence the need to protect? How might a mobilities perspective lead us to think differently about legal instruments and the human rights regime?

Although Q2 speaks of the physicality of displacement, it also shows the temporal undercurrent behind the events. From the FMS perspective, durable solutions and refugee protection are premised

on a linear understanding of displacement, which in turn determines how support is delivered across the three phases of displacement: before, during and after. In recounting multiple displacements, Magnolia's emphasis is on the multiplicity of the events and the places rather than a temporal account of the events. In this light, seeing each displacement as an event, where displacement is no longer an exceptional happening, what matters in the process of Magnolia becoming a human rights defender was the 'moment of eruption', the moment when she suddenly felt what was intolerable in her life, but also saw the possibility for something else (Tamboukou, 2023:29). In her archival work, Tamboukou uses Foucault's concept of genealogy that:

[I]nstead of seeing history as a continuous development of an ideal schema, genealogy searches in the maze of dispersed 'events' to trace discontinuities, but also unexpected continuities (2023:4)

'Eventualization' begins with the interrogation of certain evidence in our culture about how things should be:

[M]aking visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness which imposes itself uniformly on all' (Tamboukou, 2023:4).

Magnolia's, and other Educators' experiences and narrations of forced displacement evidence 'the maze of dispersed events' that become part of 'unexpected continuities' in their human rights work. For Educators, experiences of displacement, the survival skills it forces them to develop, the risks, the losses and the victories all become part of an entanglement of agency and vulnerability they recognise as vibrant and circular. Their experiences demonstrate that displacement in Colombia is not linear; it is instead cyclical, multiple, horizontal, terrestrial, vertical, celestial, spiral, and affects humans and the more-than-human alike. In this light, mobility and transition are the norm and exemplify the need for a posthuman cartography of agency (PCA) as a conceptual tool that acknowledges and works with the entangled nature of agency.

However, a PCA is also relevant beyond contexts of forced displacement, as it recognises that notions of agency are temporarily and contextually informed. It further acknowledges that, as we move along different temporal and terrestrial axes, movement (forced or otherwise), events, experiences, encounter different people with different skills and different agentic capacities. Therefore, a focus on tracing processes rather than a linear tracing of cause and effect is more aligned with the unpredictability of movement. It avoids the ‘colonisation of the future’⁴⁶ with prescribed universal formulas of what agency ought to be and feel like.

Diffraction analysis Quote 3 (Q3)

In our work, we are trying to rescue ancestral wisdom and traditions to give them the recognition they deserve. We need to value and bring back those traditions that got lost along the way. We need to bring that wisdom back because thanks to them we are here. Our ancestors had that wisdom that protected them and helped them to become free... I feel this ancestral knowledge [everyday] for example [in the way] I value certain things: the wooden cup, the traditional mill our ancestors used.

Lily



‘We need to bring that wisdom back because thanks to them we are here. Our ancestors had that wisdom that protected them and helped them to become free’. In this sentence, Lily is referencing the power of ancestral practices her enslaved ancestors used and the role these rituals played in setting them free. Lily is an Afro-Colombian woman living in a remote isolated rural area by the sea who is aware of the tragic history of slavery in her family line. In her assertion that ‘we need to bring this knowledge back’ there is an element of temporality to this knowledge: that it is ancestral, that it got

lost along the way, and that it needed to be rescued and brought back to the present and future. This ancestral knowledge is history that has no presence in the present.

In troubling notions of linear temporality and cause and effect, I argue that ancestral knowledge did not disappear, per se, but has run across history like an underground river that is now resurfacing. Thus, I ask: when and why does knowledge become ancient, ancestral, dangerous, in need to be hidden or invisible? When, why, and how does ancient knowledge become visible or revitalised?

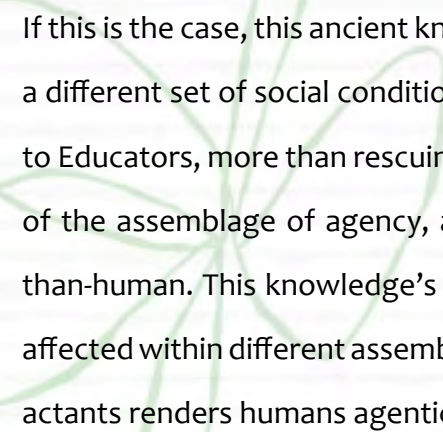
Lily’s reference to ancestral knowledge triggers a desire to explore the temporal nature of knowledge. The adoption of ancestral practices of healing and protection is an important theme that emerged from this research. This finding is significant in terms of informing current refugee and IDP protection policies and HRE programmes seeking to promote agency. Thus, through a diffractive reading of Q3, I speculate about the entanglements of ‘ancient’ and dangerous knowledge and venture further into the future to speculate about whether human rights knowledge might become problematic subterranean knowledge and the implications of this tidal flow for notions of agency. I ground these speculations on an FVM assertion that everything has the capacity to affect and be affected, including knowledge.

Deleuze & Guattari’s materialism regards:

[H]uman bodies and all other material (social and abstract entities included) as relational. These entities ha[ve] no ontological status until they [are] drawn into assemblages with other ephemeral bodies and ideas through their capacity to affect and be affected (Fox & Alldred, 2018:4).

In this research, Educators tap into, value, fight for (and at times against) ancestral knowledge and practices as part of their notion of agency. Thinking of knowledge as an ontological entity means that this knowledge has been continuously drawn into assemblages across generations and has affected and been affected, it has not remained dormant, invisible. I contend that the flourishing of this ancient knowledge is due to it being drawn into assemblages that include current discourses of dignity and freedom as captured by human rights and legal discourses.

46 I am grateful to Sharon Louise Smith for sharing this quote from her upcoming doctoral thesis research.



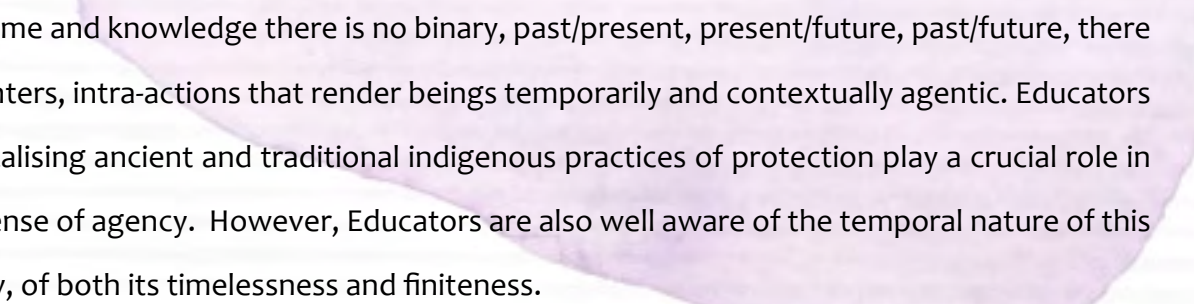
If this is the case, this ancient knowledge as an ontological entity is encountering and ‘entangling’ with a different set of social conditions and human beings in need of a different type of agency. According to Educators, more than rescuing practices from colonial invisibility, these practices have become part of the assemblage of agency, along with laws, the human rights discourse, objects, and the more-than-human. This knowledge’s ontological status has flowed across generations affecting and being affected within different assemblages of agency. This knowledge’s flow and intra-actions with different actants renders humans agentic.

For instance, the role ancestral practices play in contributing to women’s wellbeing (and sense of temporal and contextual agency) cannot be underestimated here. In this case, an FVM approach that recognises how the more-than-human could be social ‘agents’ and make things happen (Fox & Alldred, 2018) is crucial. Lily’s experience of the affective capacities of the more-than-human (traditional knowledge and practices, plants, objects) informs her sense of agency and vulnerability. In that light, the adoption of ancestral practices becomes a vital actant in fortifying Educators’ and others sense of agency. In, with and through their workshops, Educators open possibilities for:

An embodied practice of remembering and reviving the past, against the colonialist practices of erasure and avoidance and the related desire to set time aright, calls for thinking a certain undoing of time, a work of mourning and doing justice to past, present and future victims of racist, colonialist violence, human and otherwise, those victims who are no longer here and those yet to come (Barad, 2017:56).

Engaging with ancestral knowledge as a minoritarian response to practices of erasure and avoidance also highlights the importance of staying with the trouble of dangerous knowledge. Lily’s ancestors guarded knowledge they perceived as effective and sacred but also knew it to be dangerous, vilified, ridiculed, demonised. Ancestors, both human and the more-than-human that engaged and flowed with this knowledge stayed with the trouble, stayed truly present:

[N]ot as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic past and apocalyptic or salvific future, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings (Haraway, 2016:1).



In this flow of time and knowledge there is no binary, past/present, present/future, past/future, there are only encounters, intra-actions that render beings temporarily and contextually agentic. Educators agree that revitalising ancient and traditional indigenous practices of protection play a crucial role in shaping their sense of agency. However, Educators are also well aware of the temporal nature of this sense of agency, of both its timelessness and finiteness.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that temporality is an essential aspect of agency. In exploring the question ‘empowerment when?’, thematic analysis of the interviews, through a linear conceptualisation of time, highlights three main themes. First, the importance of intergenerational learning (relational learning) in shaping notions of agency; second, at an individual level, the importance of lifelong learning; and third the intergenerational conflicts that impact people’s learning and sense of agency.

Educators’ experiences evidence the important role HRE programmes play in providing opportunities for diverse types of informal education that nourish both individuals’ and communities’ sense of agency. Through the HRE programmes they deliver, Educators are skilled at recognising the latent skills and/or ‘invisible knowledge’ (Quinn, 2023) that exist within communities.

Within this strand, Educators’ efforts focus on supporting intergenerational knowledge within families, within communities, and within and across cultures. Those who emphasize the importance of learning across the lifespan believe that financial literacy and supporting access to formal and informal education are fundamental in shaping temporal and contextual notions of agency.

The theme of learning within and across cultures highlights how older wise women (*Sabedoras*, *Mayoras*) play a crucial part in supporting agency as role models and disseminators of traditional indigenous knowledge. However, Educators find that clashes about the effectiveness of some methods to support agency represent a major challenge of intergenerational work.

For the purposes of reconceptualising human-centred notions of agency, the lessons learnt from this thematic analysis are three-fold. First, that different types of knowledge and education (formal, informal, indigenous, technical) place women at odds with a singular and universal notion of agency. Second, that positionalities in relation to notions of agency have spatial and temporal components that vary and re(merge) across different contexts and generations. Third, that different knowledges are vectors to -and at times conflicting–diverse notions of agency.

In contrast, a diffractive engagement with the data troubles linear understandings of time, explores temporal elements of knowledge and ancestral practices and the materiality of learning. Diffractive analysis explores Educators’ positionalities within different temporalities and the impact of this multi-temporality for learning. Consequently, I argue that notions of agency are momentary and unfold in

multiple temporalities. This is important in understanding the temporal boundaries of learning and the temporal waves of knowledge and learning.

In that light, the implications of this temporal aspect of agency for FMS are threefold. First, that in the Colombian context, experiences of displacement are not linear (before, during, after) but cyclical. Second, that this repeated nature has implications for IDP protection in that supportive measures ought to consider that people might experience all three phases simultaneously. Third, considering the important role ancestral practices of protection play in shaping Educators’ sense of agency, organisations involved in providing IDP protection ought to acknowledge, value and respect these epistemologies. These practices are a vital tool in supporting people’s notion of agency even if they differ temporally, spatially, and conceptually from western ideas of protection and wellbeing.

In terms of HRE, and education studies in general, an FVM approach that troubles linear time and human-centred notions of agency is helpful in re-assessing concepts of education and knowledge. It is helpful insofar as it pushes these notions ‘to the limits of what they might include and become, with the visionary aim of opening up spaces for new modes of ethical thinking and practice to emerge’ (Rousell, 2020:1394).

Finally, through an FVM lens, knowledge (in this case, ancestral, human rights, and legal knowledge) is part of an assemblage that generates an ephemeral but tangible sense of agency. Thus, in a context of continuous displacement, thinking of knowledge as a tent is helpful. Knowledge that is malleable, that serves a transitory and temporal purpose, that adapts, travels, and transforms with experience and landscapes constitutes a fundamental and valid source of agency. Awareness of the temporal dimensions of the relational knowledge that flows through and sustains communities and individuals through constant transitions and processes is another vital coordinate in a posthuman cartography of agency.



Chapter ten: Conclusion

‘Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere. Nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something’

(Haraway, 2016:31)

This thesis has been a long love and gratitude letter to those who taught me to engage and ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016), to question evangelical claims of empowerment, agency, vulnerability, protection, and displacement. This research project has given me the space and time to nurture the seeds that women in Colombia, Niger, Tindouf, England -and other places in between- planted in my life. This study has been fuelled, not only by the need to critique normative sources of agency, but also, importantly, by the desire to explore alternative conceptualisations of what renders women agentic in contexts of protracted displacement and violence.

The foundational goal of this thesis was to investigate, from the ground up, human rights Educators’ perceptions of agency. Therefore, the overarching research question explored the ways in which human rights education, legal instruments, and material conditions contribute to Educators’ notions of agency. Sub-questions interrogated the type of discourses embedded in designing and delivering HRE programmes; explored the ways in which Educators engage with human rights, legal and other discourses in their quest for agency; delved into what constituted effective pedagogical practices; and examined Educators’ perceptions and experiences of agency and vulnerability.

Colombia as a case study is an opportune research setting because of its long history of internal displacement, strong legislative response to protect IDPs, and diverse programmes and legal instruments designed to ‘empower’ women. This research does not seek to generalise, but rather, highlight the patterns in the Colombian context to provide insights into how local patterns reverberate at global scales. It illuminates those ‘somewheres’ and ‘somethings’ (Haraway, 2016) people inhabit in displacement, and the role these ‘somewheres’ and ‘somethings’ play in shaping Educators’ sense of contextual, multiple, relational, spatial and temporal agency.

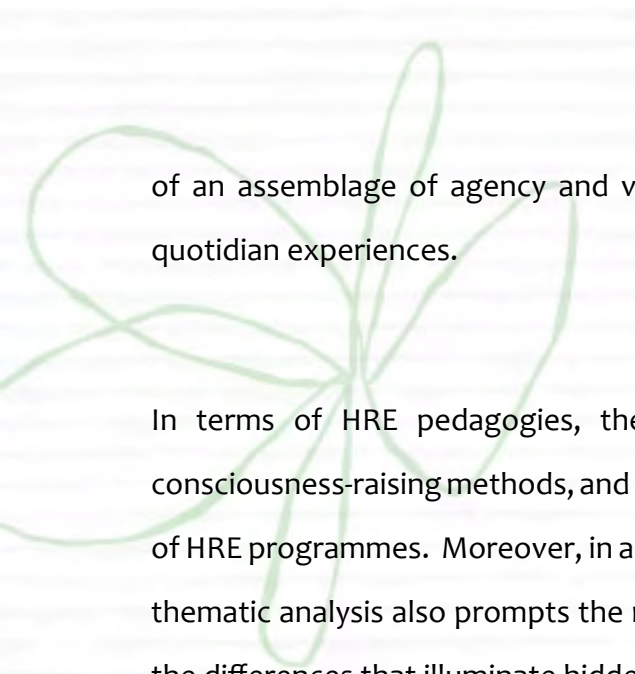
Methodological Approach

This study is innovative in bringing three disciplines together to explore notions of agency. Inspired by the work of Audre Lorde, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, and Maria Tamboukou, this research is underpinned by forced migration studies, human rights education, and feminist vibrant materialist epistemologies.

An FMS perspective guides explorations within the current international law regime and protection policies designed to safeguard the forcibly displaced. An FMS focus is important as normative understandings of protection before, during, and after displacement are strongly linked to notions of agency and vulnerability. An HRE lens guides explorations on conceptualisations of human rights knowledge, pedagogical approaches, and the role it plays in shaping a sense of agency. An FVM approach illuminates hidden aspects of agency by troubling binary thinking (individual/group, empowerment/vulnerability, nature/culture, micro/macro, local/global) that informs normative understandings of agency.

Data collection methods include online observation of HRE sessions, analysis of Law 1257 (2008), communications and interviews with twelve human rights Educators in Colombia, and auto-ethnography.

This combined methodological approach is well-fitted to guide experimentation and speculation through thematic and diffractive analysis of data. A thematic analysis of interviews highlights common themes on Educators’ conceptualisations of agency, vulnerability, protection, and displacement. The themes evidence the importance of providing healing spaces for women engaged in HRE and the common use of ancestral practices of protection. Thematic analysis also positions Educators as part



of an assemblage of agency and vulnerability highlighting the importance of relationality in their quotidian experiences.

In terms of HRE pedagogies, thematic analysis shows that artistic and tailored approaches, consciousness-raising methods, and the inclusion of traditional healing practices are essential elements of HRE programmes. Moreover, in addition to providing patterned answers to the research questions, thematic analysis also prompts the need to use diffractive analysis. It suggests the need to focus on the differences that illuminate hidden yet vital aspects of agency.

A diffractive examination of data emphasises the nuanced nature of the ‘what’ (Ellesworth, 1989) (as well as the who, the when, and the how) Educators -and their students- are seeking empowerment towards, and the diverse, temporal, and contextual sources that render women agentic in a fragile context. It accentuates the importance of questioning which differences matter, how, and for whom (Barad, 2007). In doing so, this methodological approach is invaluable in illuminating knowledge that remains obscured by normative discourses and yet plays a crucial role in shaping Educators’ sense of agency.

A diffractive lens is also powerful in highlighting practices of oppression hidden behind discourses of empowerment. Shining light on these invisible practices makes visible the blind spots of normative discourses, and the resulting obstructions they create to fostering conditions of agency. Finally, and importantly, using diffractive and FVM epistemologies brings to the fore the fundamental role the more-than-human plays in shaping notions of agency and protection.

Therefore, the compounded methodological approach used in this project is a potent and novel way to illuminate aspects of agency that remain neglected, invisible, or dismissed through a singular methodological lens. The inclusion of patterns and differences provide nuanced insights into how conditions that render women agentic emerge. In essence, this multidimensional approach to analysis, firmly grounded on Educators’ material conditions, is a potent tool to theorise from the ground up and to dismantle dominant understandings of agency.

Contribution to knowledge

Methodological contributions

A foundational aim of this thesis was to trouble notions of empowerment as solely informed by human rights and legal discourses. Grounded on Educators’ experiences, this research finds that binary and normative conceptualisations of empowerment are problematic. Thus, after exploring alternative understandings of agency, this research proposes a notion of agency that is entangled, contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal. It offers a posthuman cartography of agency (PCA) as a conceptual tool to understand nuanced conceptions and realisations of agency. A PCA is premised on three principles: first, it conceives agency as an entanglement of discourses (including human rights, legal and indigenous discourses) and the more-than-human; second, it advances that notions of agency are not stable or permanent and need to be re-assessed continuously (through what, how, whom, when coordinates); and third, it conceives agency as relational in nature and therefore advocates for the term revitalisation of agency rather than empowerment.

By deconstructing the notion of empowerment into four questions: ‘empowerment for what?, empowerment for whom?, empowerment how?, and empowerment when?’, this conceptual tool offers different coordinates to identify and localise meaningful notions of agency beyond legal and human rights discourses. Recognition that these key questions produce different coordinates of agency has ethical, methodological, and practical consequences across disciplines.

For FMS, the findings of this research are relevant at two levels. First, this study highlights the need to revisit notions and policies related to the safeguarding of IDPs as current protection policies are conceptualised on a linear understanding of displacement (before, during, after phases). In the Colombian context, Educators’ experiences show that forced displacement is cyclical with recurrent episodes of trauma, victimhood, and injustice. In that light, current policies of and procedures for protection are not only inadequate but also, at times, detrimental to IDPs. In this context, a PCA is a useful conceptual tool to revisit notions of protection and vulnerability in forced displacement. Importantly, it shines light on existing protective traditional mechanisms that could complement current international efforts of protection.

Second, this study also highlights the need to trouble understandings of sedentarism as the norm. Educators' multiple experiences of displacement evidence that transitions and movement constitute a more regular pattern than that of being sedentary. Furthermore, alongside stories of immense and unspeakable harm and loss, valuable skills and knowledge also emerge because of displacement. Therefore, a conceptual shift from sedentarism to mobility as a norm disrupts cause-and-effect processes that currently inform policies of reparations, which in turn have important implications for legal jurisdictions and international protocols of protection.

In terms of HRE, considering recurrent waves of violence and displacement, this study highlights the importance of including healing practices as part of HRE pedagogical approaches. As a pedagogical tool, Educators believe that healing historic and multi-layered trauma is a crucial step before any other type of learning can be achieved. In essence, healing practices are psycho-social interventions primarily informed by ancestral practices of protection and cleansing. As part of a pedagogical practice, these healing practices and spaces allow women to name and 'sit' with the pain, where the focus is not on erasing the pain but on developing skills to transform it. This pedagogical practice is also effective in creating intersecting spaces where personal experience, human rights, legal, and other types of knowledge converge to foster a situated notion of agency.

Critically, Educators' engagement with normative and traditional sources of agency illuminates the importance of not privileging one discourse over the other and the multiple entanglements of notions of agency and vulnerability. Grounded on an epistemological view of agency as entangled, contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal, Educators challenge the word empowerment and suggest instead the use of the word revitalise. Revitalisation of existing knowledge implies a flat ontological perception of agency in contrast to a hierarchical positioning that offers a binary distinction between the empowered and the vulnerable. This is important in a context of protracted violence and displacement where vulnerability is often equated with both intellectual and physical dispossession. In this light, revitalisation of existing knowledge implies not only a recognition of people's diverse skills and knowledges, but also the use of meaningful approaches to conjure them to transitional spaces where contextual notions meet western ideas of agency.

In terms of methods, this study experiments with a posthumanist understanding of auto-ethnography. Engaging with the process of 'researcher-in-becoming' triggers and sustains an exploration that

troubles entrenched binaries in auto-ethnography, namely, the insider/outsider and the individual/group binaries. The researcher-in-becoming process involves thinking with two objects in attempt to decentre the human researcher and to trace personal entanglements of agency and vulnerability. This conceptual exercise highlights the role material objects play in shaping temporal and contextual notions of agency and contributes to the development of the posthuman cartography of agency. Through 'travel hopping' (Barad, 2014), I advance that notions of agency and vulnerability are part of an entanglement and also emanate from different sources, including material objects, animals, plants, and landscapes. An FVM epistemological lens is useful in acknowledging that notions of identity ought to account for both the human and the more-than-human in perceptions of selfhood and agency.

Ethical contributions

Ethically, this study encountered a myriad of challenges that can inform research in other fragile contexts. Driven by a desire to 'practice otherwise' (Manning, 2016; Oyinloye, 2021), this project highlights the importance of a processual approach to ethics (rather than a discrete event), and of being alert to 'ethically important moments' (EIM) (Gillemin & Gillam, 2004) throughout the research process. Alertness to EIM is an effective tool to 'inhabit uncertainty together with participants' (Massumi, 2015:11) and to remain cautious about the nuanced nature of harm.

Furthermore, in line with an FVM approach, this processual ethical approach focuses on materiality and engages participants in discussing notions of vulnerability, transparency, and harm. This approach to ethics gives insights into nuanced understandings of agency and vulnerability that challenge linear conceptions of those terms and have theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study's ethical approach highlights the transitional spaces where principles and values underpinning Western ethical procedures meet other contextual understandings of respect and agency.

In this light, ethical challenges ought not to deter researchers from conducting research with populations deemed vulnerable in fragile contexts, but encourage them to engage with the challenges cautiously, respectfully, and patiently to identify those transitional spaces and develop meaningful ethical partnerships. In the context of this study, these transitional spaces emerge primarily from communications with Educators while fieldwork was suspended because of the Covid-19 pandemic and a political crisis. This forced hiatus, although distressing at the time, fostered the right conditions

to engage with this ethical approach and observe its benefits.

In practice, this project's ethical approach illuminates and problematises the binary victim/perpetrator and the impact of this binary positioning for conceptualisations of protection and agency. Because of the cyclical nature of displacement in Colombia, categorisations of victims and perpetrators are not static or absolute. Recurrent conflict places people within different parts of the victim/perpetrator spectrum in different waves of displacement. Educators' experiences show that policies of protection and programmes aiming to support and 'empower' women ought to consider this reality. In this instance, a processual ethical approach implies the adoption of measures, policies, and procedures that foster constant dialogue with those the programmes and policies are purporting to render agentic.

Limitations and future research

This project faced two main challenges as a result of a global pandemic and a severe and violent national crisis. First, these obstacles prevented in-person data collection and impacted the sample of participants, which prompted a different research design. To overcome the travel restriction challenge, online observation and interviews were conducted instead. However, this virtual participation excluded women who did not own a smart phone, who were not technologically savvy or did not have the financial means to pay for data/internet connection. Participants' financial difficulties because of the compounded crisis represented another significant challenge. To address this situation, Educators were paid for the interviews in recognition of their knowledge and expertise. This payment was possible because of funding I secured early in the research.

Interestingly, an important and positive impact of these challenges implied the inclusion of women living in diverse rural and urban areas of Colombia. The snow-ball sample of participants (Educators) include women who work and live in locations that I would not have had access to had I conducted the research in person as they remain isolated and beyond government control.

Despite overcoming these challenges, a gap remains with under-researched groups of women (Afro-Colombian and indigenous women), which will make a relevant and urgent focus for future research. Specifically, research on their practices of protection and understandings of agency will contribute to

empirical work on posthuman understandings of agency.

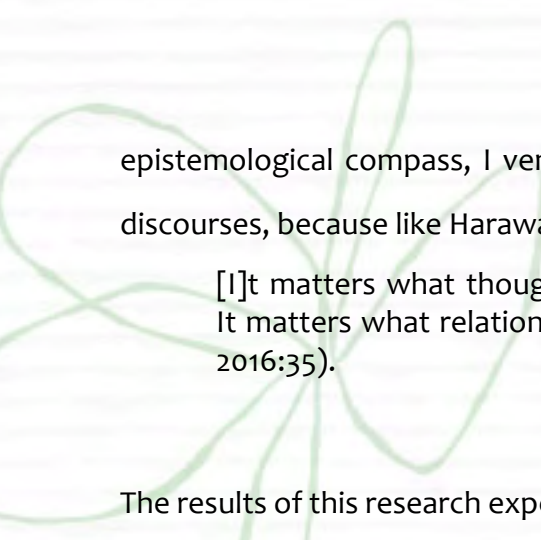
Furthermore, the sample could have benefited from including more participants of a younger demographic across the ethnic spectrum. In line with the Fourth Phase of the World Programme for HRE, this study's findings agree that a focus on the young is vital in fostering conditions that render women agentic. Considering the waves of migration from the global south to the north, an exploration of young people's sources of agency can inform HRE programmes aimed at supporting localised notions of agency.

A second limitation of this study is its reduced capacity to involve participatory methods. The initial research design envisioned a scoping exercise and the inclusion of collaborative workshops and knowledge-exchange events with Educators at different stages of the research. Because of the obstacles mentioned above, only two collaborative dissemination events were delivered on the third year of the research. The events were collaborative and inter-active workshops with an Educator in Colombia. The first event was an interactive dissemination exercise and workshop on gender theory. The second event was a symposium in collaboration with local academics, activists, community organisers, and community members. These events were hosted at a higher education institution and engaged academic and non-academic audiences.

Final thoughts

This work illuminates the interim: the time, context, and space in between binary understandings of vulnerability and agency. It traces the entanglements that shape momentary notions of agency; it acknowledges what lies quietly hidden in the quotidian of women's lives away from formal discourses and expectations of absolute agency, and yet play a vital role in rendering women agentic. The interim in this research is what is left unsaid, hidden in between the lines of vulnerability and agency as conceived by human rights and legal discourses.

By illuminating the blind spots of agency, this work hopes to move conversations of empowerment and agency that go beyond entrenched human-centred notions of these concepts. It hopes to dispose of the word empowerment and suggest revitalisation of agency instead. To do so, guided by a triple-



epistemological compass, I ventured beyond the safe realms of human rights education and legal discourses, because like Haraway, I also believe that:


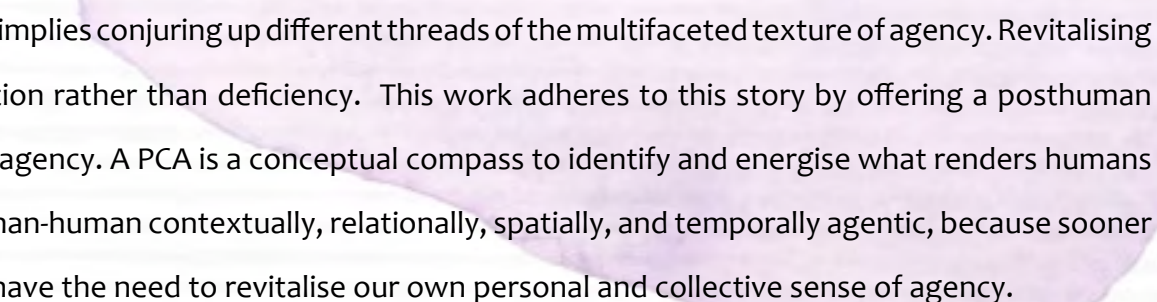
[I]t matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate to relations. It matters what worlds world worlds (Haraway, 2016:35).

The results of this research expedition are not mine alone. In investigating what worlds world notions of agency, I have much to thank to the Educators who shared their stories of agency and vulnerability with me (See Appendix one). I have much to be grateful to Dr Beatriz Arias and Dr Nancy Carvajal for sharing their commitment to, passion for and expertise of collective mental health, creative methodologies and indigenous epistemologies with populations deemed vulnerable. Their work has planted seeds for future research to explore practices of protection amongst human rights defenders using embroidery and textiles as research methods. Building on the findings of this research, a future project with an emphasis on health, wellbeing, and traditional practices of protection is enticing as many human rights educators resist traditional (Western) approaches to mental health.

‘It matters what thoughts think thoughts,’ and what stories birth stories. Conceiving agency as contextual, multiple, relational, spatial, and temporal is a crucial step in changing the narrative of human-centred notions of empowerment, displacement, and protection. In this case, changing the narrative of agency is akin to acquiring the right tools to dismantle discourses that perpetuate notions of agency that are irrelevant and even harmful to people on the ground. An alternative notion of agency gives the tools to voice, decide on, and exercise the knowledge(s) that are needed (or not) to render oneself -and others- agentic. Alternative definitions of agency are fundamental in challenging a singular story defined by others for their use and the detriment of women (Lorde, 1984). In telling their experiences of agency and vulnerability, Educators show that stories of agency and loss resonate with a larger and ancient body of knowledge that knows and values the interconnectedness of all things, which recognises that the local informs the global, and that the old gives birth to the new.

A story of agency as revitalisation is a hopeful tool. Revitalising agency instead of bestowing

empowerment implies conjuring up different threads of the multifaceted texture of agency. Revitalising implies affirmation rather than deficiency. This work adheres to this story by offering a posthuman cartography of agency. A PCA is a conceptual compass to identify and energise what renders humans and the more-than-human contextually, relationally, spatially, and temporally agentic, because sooner or later, we all have the need to revitalise our own personal and collective sense of agency.



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Date:

Dear [Educator's name]

The time has finally arrived! I am very happy to let you know that I have submitted my thesis and am now awaiting the oral defence. Below is a summary of the research, I will be happy to hear any comments you may have.

The main research question explored the role human rights education and legal instruments played in shaping women's notions of empowerment and vulnerability. The context of Colombia was important because of its long history of violence, forced displacement and judicial response to protect internally displaced people. I was especially interested in your perception of empowerment and vulnerability and your work with human rights education.

To explore the research questions, I used three lenses: feminist theory, forced migration studies and education; and analysed the interviews thematically and diffractively.

I used five methods of data collection: document analysis of law 1257 (2008); observation of online training sessions, personal communications, 12 interviews with human rights educators and defenders, and auto-ethnography.

What emerged from this exploration was a posthuman cartography of agency. With this concept, I am suggesting that notions of agency are spatial, contextual, and temporal. From your experiences I inferred that a binary perception of vulnerability/agency is problematic. In fact, notions of agency are entangled and shaped by different discourses and types of knowledge. It surfaced that in addition to human rights and legal discourses, ancestral practices of protection and healing, and the more-than-human played a fundamental part in shaping notions of agency. Furthermore, the notion of 'revitalisation' of knowledge was preferred to that of empowerment.

Therefore, grounded on the assumptions that a sense of agency is revitalised and not bestowed, and that it is continuously shaped by different discourses, a posthuman cartography of agency explores four coordinates guided by the following questions:

Empowerment for what?

Empowerment for whom?

Empowerment how? &

Empowerment when?

Once the thesis is uploaded to the university system, I will send you a link. In future, I will also share with you any articles I may publish. In the meantime, I would like to reiterate my profound respect and gratitude because without you, without your input, this research would not have been possible, especially during a global pandemic and a political crisis.

Once again, it has been an absolute pleasure to have met you, and one of the greatest privileges of my life. **Muchísimas gracias!**

Wishing you all the best,

Claudia

Fecha:

Estimada [nombre de la Educadora]

Al fin se llegó el momento! Me siento muy feliz de compartir la noticia que ya he entregado la tesis y estoy esperando la defensa oral. Abajo incluyo un resumen corto de lo que encontré y la propuesta teórica que surgió. Si tienes algún comentario, me gustaria mucho conversarlos.

La pregunta principal de la investigación exploró la función que desempeña el conocimiento de derechos humanos, leyes y otros tipos de saberes en las nociones de empoderamiento y vulnerabilidad entre las mujeres que trabajan con derechos humanos. El contexto colombiano fué muy importante para esta investigación por la historia de violencia, desplazamiento forzado, y la respuesta judicial del estado para proteger las personas desplazadas. A mi me interesaba especialmente tu opinion y experiencia de lo que significa sentirse empoderada o vulnerable, y tu trabajo con derechos humanos.

Para explorar las preguntas usé tres lentes ideológicos: teoría feminista, estudios de migración forzada y educación. Con la información usé análisis temático y difractivo.

Usé 5 métodos de recopilación de datos: análisis de la ley 1257(2008); observaciones de talleres de derechos humanos virtuales; comunicaciones personales, 12 entrevistas con educadoras y defensoras de derechos humanos; y auto-etnografía.

En síntesis, lo que surgió de esta exploración fue un concepto teórico que llamé una cartografía posthumana de la noción de agencia. Con este concepto, sugiero que la noción de agencia es espacial, contextual y temporal. Basado en sus experiencias, deduje que una percepción binaria de agencia/vulnerabilidad es problemática. De hecho, nociones de agencia están entrelazadas con discursos legales, de derechos humanos, y prácticas ancestrales de protección y sanación. Es más, nociones de agencia también fueron configuradas por actores y discursos que trascienden lo humano.

Además, se prefirió la noción de revitalización de conocimiento yacente a la de empoderamiento. Por lo tanto, partiendo del supuesto que un sentido de agencia se revitaliza y no se otorga y que es continuamente moldeado por diferentes discursos, una cartografía posthumana de la agencia explora cuatro coordenadas guiadas por las siguientes preguntas:

Empoderamiento para qué?

Empoderamiento para quién?

Empoderamiento cómo? &

Empoderamiento cuándo?

Apenas la tesis este disponible a través del sistema de la universidad, te comparto el enlace. Más adelante, si publico artículos, también los compartiré. Por lo pronto, te repito mi profunda admiración, respeto, y gratitud, porque sin tu colaboración, esta investigación no hubiese sido posible, especialmente en tiempos de pandemia y crisis profunda.

Una y mil veces, ha sido un placer absoluto haberte conocido, y uno de los privilegios mas lindos en mi vida. Muchísimas gracias!

Te deseo siempre lo mejor,

Claudia

Information Sheet for Participants



Research Study: Exploring the impact of human rights education (HRE) programmes on women who have experienced displacement in Colombia

Thank you for your interest in this study. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, I would like to tell you more details about the research. Please feel free to ask me any questions as you read or listen to the information. If you still have questions or concerns after this session, please feel free to get in touch: claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk or phone/text [Local mobile number].

What is the aim of this study?

I am conducting this study as part of my PhD. I am interested in listening and understanding what it means for women, in real life, to learn about human rights.

Why do we need this research?

There is an assumption that Human Rights Education programmes have positive impacts on women. I would like to find out if that's the case in Colombia, if that's the case for you. There is not much research capturing women's experience of learning about human rights and the impact on their lives during or after displacement.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part, this decision will not affect, in any way, your relationship with [name of organisation] or any services you receive through them.

What do I need to do if I decide to take part?

If you would like to take part, we will need to schedule an interview at your convenience and a location of your choice or over the phone/Zoom. In the interview, we will talk about what you are learning in the courses delivered by [name of the organisation], your motivations to join, and the impact of this knowledge on your day-to-day life. The interview would take up to one hour of your time. **Your views are really important** for this research, there is no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear your honest opinion. However, you don't have to answer all the questions of the interview if you do not wish to, you can also end the interview at any time. With your permission, I would like to record the interview just so I can focus on what you say and listen and transcribe the interview later.

I would also like to invite you to a workshop and a final debriefing event towards the end of the project to share the results of the research and hear your feedback about being part of this research.

What are the benefits of taking part?

It is an opportunity to share your experience to potentially inform future improvements in how human rights education programmes are designed and delivered. You will be invited to take part in a workshop and a debriefing session at the end of the research.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Talking about your experiences might be uncomfortable at times as it might bring up distressing memories. Should you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can take a break, stop the interview, reschedule the interview, or if you would prefer, you can withdraw from the study altogether. If you feel you would like additional support you can contact [name of local person/organisation who can provide free psychological and practical support]; they would be able to listen to you and provide further assistance.

Also, if you reveal something in the interview which gives cause for concern either for your or others' safety, I would follow [organisation's name]'s duty of care protocol.

Data Protection

All information you give me is confidential, unless something you tell me puts you or others in danger, in which case, for your safety, I will follow [organisation's name]'s duty of care protocol. I will not use your name anywhere, you will be given a made-up name. All the information will be stored in password-protected and locked devices for a period of 10 years, after which it will be securely destroyed. Your information will not be shared with other researchers after I complete my doctoral work. During my doctoral work, only my two supervisors and I will have access to your information.

What will happen to the information I give?

Your interview will be analysed to identify common themes and findings will be written up as part of my thesis. The results of the research will be disseminated through future publications and the final report will be available through the Plymouth University. The report will also be shared with [local organisation/s] and other local stakeholders [name of local academics or stakeholders].

I want to take part - what do I do?

If you wish to take part, please contact me at claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk, text or phone me at [Local mobile number].

Can I change my mind?

Yes, absolutely. If you change your mind after the interview, please contact me by email only (claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk) to let me know you wish to withdraw from the study. This decision will not affect in any way your relationship with [name of organisation] or any services

Appendix three: Information sheet and consent form (English)

you receive. However, you need to let me know before 30 October 2021, after this date, I will be already writing the report and cannot remove your information.

What if something goes wrong?

If you are unhappy with the interview process in anyway, please send an email to my supervisor: jocey.quinn@plymouth.ac.uk. Use the subject line: Queja sobre la investigación en Colombia, and she will follow this up with you.

Consent

<input type="checkbox"/>	I have read/understood the information I was provided.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I had the opportunity to ask questions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end the interview at any time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand I can withdraw from this research up until 30 October 2021.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to take part in the interview.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree for the interview to be recorded (specify audio only/Zoom recording).
<input type="checkbox"/>	I consent to take part.

Your Name:

Your Signature:

Date:

Información sobre un Proyecto de Investigación que explora el impacto de la educación de derechos humanos

Investigadora: Claudia Blandón, Universidad de Plymouth, Instituto de Educación
(claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk)

Título del proyecto: Explorando el impacto de la educación de derechos humanos en el empoderamiento de las mujeres

Cuál es el objetivo de este estudio?

Este estudio es parte de un doctorado en educación. El objetivo principal es explorar el impacto (positivo o negativo) de aprender sobre derechos humanos y cuestiones de género, y cómo este conocimiento se manifiesta en la vida diaria. La investigación se enfoca en el papel que juega el conocimiento de género y derechos humanos en empoderar a las mujeres.

Por qué se necesitan este tipo de proyectos?

A un nivel internacional, tiende a haber una concepción que programas de derechos humanos y de género tienen únicamente un efecto positivo en las mujeres, especialmente en aquellas que han sufrido desplazamiento forzado. Este estudio quiere explorar la opinión de las mujeres Colombianas en este sentido. Además, estudios hechos en áreas similares han encontrado que la opinión de las mujeres sobre cómo ellas aprenden y transforman este conocimiento es escasa en este ámbito. Esencialmente, éste estudio quiere explorar, escuchar y compilar el impacto real de aprender sobre derechos humanos y cuestiones de género en la vida diaria de las mujeres.

Tengo que participar?

No, no hay ninguna obligación de participar. Si usted decide no participar, esa decisión no va a tener ninguna consecuencia negativa con la organización con la que usted esta vinculada.

Que tendria que hacer si decido participar?

La investigadora la contactará para una entrevista, en un día y a una hora que le sea conveniente para usted. En esa entrevista se hablará sobre su experiencia en cursos de derechos humanos y de género, su conocimiento sus motivaciones y retos del trabajo. La entrevista se tomará aproximadamente dos horas. Habrá una pequeña compensación por su tiempo (£40 por la entrevista).

Hay algún beneficio si participo en el Proyecto?

El beneficio principal es la oportunidad de expresar sus opiniones sobre el impacto de la educación de derechos humanos y de género que usted recibe, diseña, implementa o dirige. Este tipo de estudios tiene el potencial de informar cómo este tipo de programas se diseñan y enseñan a nivel global. Su opinión podría informar la pedagogía de estos cursos, no solamente en Colombia sino también a nivel internacional.

Appendix four: Information sheet and consent form (Spanish)

Hay alguna desventaja si participo en el Proyecto?

Es posible que hablar sobre ciertas experiencias le traigan malos recuerdos. Si esto sucede en la entrevista, no se preocupe, la entrevista se puede parar inmediatamente, o puede parar el tiempo que sea necesario. También puede cambiar de opinión y no participar en el proyecto. No hay ningún problema.

Y cómo se protege la información dada?

Este estudio está diseñado siguiendo las reglas éticas de la Universidad de Plymouth, en el Reino Unido. Esas reglas estipulan que toda la información dada por las participantes es estrictamente confidencial. Toda la información es anónima, el nombre de las participantes no se usará en ningún documento o reporte. Toda la información se almacenará por 10 años en computadores protegidos por claves secretas. Toda la información será destruida después de 10 años y también si la participante decide retirarse del estudio.

Qué uso se le dará a la información dada?

Su entrevista será analizada por la investigadora para encontrar temas comunes entre las participantes. Esta información es parte de la tesis doctoral de la investigadora. Esta información también puede ser difundida a través de publicaciones académicas en Colombia y a nivel internacional, y puede ser compartida con organizaciones nacionales e internacionales. La tesis final estará disponible en la biblioteca electrónica de la Universidad de Plymouth.

Qué tengo que hacer si decido participar?

Muchísimas gracias por su interés. Solamente firme y devuélvame la página de consentimiento que le envié.

Puedo cambiar de opinión en el futuro?

Si cambia de opinión después de la entrevista, solamente, envíeme un email antes **del 30 de Octubre del 2021** diciendo que no quiere participar, no hay ningún problema: (claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk) o envíeme un mensaje de texto a +44 774 206 9992. Después de esta fecha retirarse no será posible ya que habré comenzado el análisis de la información

Cuál es el procedimiento de queja?

Si por cualquier razón relevante al estudio usted quiere reportar a la investigadora, por favor contacte directamente a la supervisora de la investigadora: Profesora: Jocey Quinn: jocey.quinn@plymouth.ac.uk. También es posible contactar a la administradora de investigación de la Universidad: artsresearchethics@plymouth.ac.uk. Usted puede escribirles en español directamente.



**Consentimiento para participar
en el Proyecto de Investigación
que explora el impacto de la educación de género**

Investigadora: Claudia Blandon, Universidad de Plymouth, Instituto de Educación
(claudia.blandon@plymouth.ac.uk)

Consentimiento

- ☐ He entendido la información del proyecto.
- ☐ He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.
- ☐ Entiendo que puedo terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento.
- ☐ Entiendo que puedo cambiar de opinion y retirar mi contribución antes del **30 de octubre del 2021.**
- ☐ Acepto ser entrevistadx.
- ☐ Acepto que la entrevista sea grabada (en audio).
- ☐ Acepto tomar parte en ésta investigación.

Su nombre:

Su firma:

Fecha: