A pandemic revealing another
– Colombian indigenous women and the national COVID-19 discourse

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Abstract

During the last years, Colombia has put an effort in formally achieving higher levels of equality in the country which is particularly visible through the National Development Plan (2018-2022). The spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, magnified those inequalities that the Plan is supposed to challenge by showing not only their ubiquity but the mechanisms through which they can be exacerbated in crises situations.

By drawing on feminist postcolonial theory and implementing discourse analysis to engage with policy and public discourse that include concerns for Colombian indigenous women under the pandemic, the purpose of this study is to contribute to discussions on how politics (in this case related to the pandemic) can reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions. In order to develop this qualitative study, empirical material was collected from eleven written and oral sources issued by international organizations, research institutes, national and local indigenous organizations, and indigenous representative bodies.

Three main problematic discourses arise from the analysis: the portraying of indigenous women as passive subjects which contrasts with the description of indigenous peoples as active in the face of the challenges brought by the pandemic; the overwhelming focus on the vulnerability of indigenous women thereby contributing to normalizing their view as powerless and voiceless, even in sources aiming to address gendered power differentials; and finally, a narrative of inclusion in decision-making processes that appears to potentially become double folded: on one hand, it can foster inclusion, on the other, if not coupled with institutional change, it can lead to the reproduction of those oppressions it aimed to challenge.

Keywords: COVID-19, Gender, Ethnicity, Colombia, Discourse Analysis, Feminist Postcolonial Theory

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Abbreviations

ACIN	Association of Indigenous Councils of the North of Cauca[1]
CEPAL	Economic Commission for Latin America[2]
CNTI	Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas [3]
DANE	National Administrative Department of Statistics[4]
ECMIA	Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas[5]
FAPI	Federation for the Self-Determination of Indigenous Peoples[6]
FIMI	International Indigenous Women's Forum[7]
OIA	Indigenous Organization of Antioquia[8]
ONIC	Colombian National Indigenous Organization[9]
SISPI	Indigenous Own System of Intercultural Health[10]

[1] Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca

[2] Comisión Económica para América Latina

[3] Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas

[4] Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística

[5] Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas

[6] Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas

[7] Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas

[8] Organización Indígena de Antioquia

[9] Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia

[10] Sistema Indígena de Salud Propia e Intercultural

1. Introduction

On March 6[th,] 2020, Colombia registered its first COVID-19 case. Since then, different measures have been implemented to counteract its spread and the collapse of the healthcare system. However, the restrictions introduced in the name of the fight against the virus soon started to reveal pre-existing oppressions within the country and disclose different degrees of impact on different groups of the population. Despite the formal effort of the central government to achieve a higher degree of equality, as illustrated by the 2018-2022 National Development Plan, often advertised as "the pact for Colombia, the pact for equity" (Colombian Government 2018g), many international, national, and local organizations have highlighted how some of the targeted population groups in the National Development Plan have been unequally impacted in the aftermath of the adoption of COVID-19 restrictions. While special attention in the National Development Plan has been given to women and ethnic minorities, specifically the indigenous population, these population groups seem to be the most affected by the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic (ACIN et al. 2020; Observatorio de Derechos Territoriales et al. 2020; ONU Mujeres Colombia 2020).

The impacts the pandemic, directly and indirectly, has on women have been already subject to different studies, resulting in numerous calls for the use of gender lenses to analyze the repercussions of the policies implemented in its name on already unequal situations (Amon & Wurth 2020; IFAD 2020; Molina 2020; O'Donnel 2020; Power 2020). Within those reports, women are often portrayed as vulnerable based on several arguments: among them, their higher employment in the informal economy and its subsequent insecurity in times of crisis, their high employment percentage in the health care system, and the increase of their care work responsibilities after the decision of governments to close down schools or other assistance centers (ILO 2020; Quesada 2020).

If to this, however, we also add other potentially disadvantaging factors such as rurality and indigenousness, the marginalizing potential of those effects can become even more drastic since those factors of difference[11], especially the second

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[11] This master thesis starts with the assumption that different factors of difference, such as ethnicity and gender are socially and discursively constructed and therefore incline to change depending on the period and the context within which they are performed. Therefore, the term factor of difference will be used to replace the word "category" in relation to ethnicity and gender in order to avoid contributing to the formation of a discourse in which those are seen as fixed and immutable.

one, are often considered as linked to even higher levels of vulnerability (Fundación WWB Colombia 2020; ONU Mujeres 2020). This is often imbricated in the difficulties to access education and non-traditional healthcare, discrimination, food insecurity, poverty, struggles to access official information and communications but also to the increase in extractive activities in their territories (Navegador Indigena 2020a; Observatorio de Derechos Territoriales et al. 2020). All these situations existed before the spread of the COVID-19 virus, however, they have been exacerbated by policies and measures implemented to halt its effects (Quesada 2020; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2020).

In the introduction sub-sections that follow I will firstly discuss the goals of the National Development Plan to give a context for my discussion on discursive constructions of indigenous women. In particular, I will highlight that the National Development Plan illustrates a context in which there is awareness of the presence of power disbalances and that there exists a formal will to commit to their dismantlement, which is challenged by the pandemic, among other factors. Secondly, I will describe in detail the specific gender, ethnicity-related challenges that the pandemic has exacerbated. Thirdly, I will discuss the problem formulation, the research question, and its sub-questions that guided this research. The final section of this introduction will be focused on the outline of this thesis.

1.1. COVID-19, a challenge for the National Development Plan or a crystallization point for pre-existing oppressions?

The 2018-2022 National Development Plan of the government of Colombia aims at increasing equity in the Colombian society in nine different fields. Special attention is given to women, ethnic groups, and healthcare (Colombian Government 2018e). Within the targeted categories, ethnic groups are included in the *Equal Opportunity Pact for Ethnic Groups.* In the Pact, four different ethnic groups are recognized: indigenous peoples, black communities, Afro-descendants, *palenqueros*[12]*, raizales*[13]*,* and Rom[14]. The main aim of this section is to increase

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[12] The *palanqueros* are the descendants of enslaved people who, through acts of resistance, managed to escape and find refuge in the territories of the northern coast of Colombia, known as *Palenques* (Colombian Government 2015)

[13] The *raizales* are the native population of the islands of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina, located in the Caribbean Sea, in the west of Nicaragua. They are the descendants of the union between Europeans and African slaves. They distinguish by their culture, language (Creole), religious beliefs (Baptist church) and historical past similar to Antillean peoples living in Jamaica and Haiti. Given their cultural specificities, they are a stand-alone group, not included in other black communities in the country (Colombian Government 2015).

[14] According to the 2018 census of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the population size of those groups accounted for 1.905.617 self-recognized indigenous peoples (DANE 2019b), 2.950.072 self-recognized black, mulatto, Afro-descendant, Afro-Colombian (DANE 2019c), 25.515 *raizales* (ibid.), 6.637 *palanqueros* (ibid.), and 2.649 Rom (DANE 2019a).

the implementation and respect of the rights of the above-listed ethnic groups in cooperation with different representative organizations. Specifically, the areas of intervention related to indigenous rights refer to gender equality, territorial rights, cultural integrity, and self-government, among others (Colombian Government 2018f).

Despite the efforts to achieve a higher degree of equality in the country enshrined in the 2018-2022 National Development Plan written by the Colombian government, the pandemic has challenged the implementation and achievement of its goals. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many of the policies and recommendations implemented to counteract its effects have deepened and brought to light preexistent power disbalances between different groups of the population, especially related to gender and ethnicity.

Even before the outbreak of the health crisis represented by COVID-19 indigenous people were already subject to inequalities and power disbalances. Struggles such as food insecurity, malnutrition, access to healthcare and safe water resources, but also exposure to violence due to the armed conflict were not overcome when the pandemic started; rather, they became exacerbated by the isolation measures implemented to stem the rise of contagions (Asociación Tejiendo Amazonas TEJAMA 2020; Mesa Permanente de Concertación Indígena 2020). The implementation of the containment measures has brought to light numerous patterns of discrimination which pushed several indigenous organizations to call for attention to a situation of humanitarian crisis (ACIN et al. 2020; Observatorio de Derechos Territoriales et al. 2020) and ethnocide (Mesa Permanente de Concertación Indígena 2020).

In March 2021, the ONIC (Colombian National Indigenous Organization) denounced how many indigenous rights have not been respected throughout the implementation of the measures to counteract the pandemic and how the national government is not implementing the actions planned to achieve the goals of the National Development Plan. Special attention has been given to the violation of the right of indigenous people to prior consultation before the implementation of any measure that can have consequences on their territories, cultures, and identities, in contrast to the objective F73[15] of the National Development Plan, and the promise of providing economic support (Pushaina 2021).

The ONIC however is not the only organization that has denounced violations. Others have underlined how other restrictions, such as the decision to close schools in favor of an online teaching method, have excluded many indigenous children from their right to education due to the difficulties in accessing a stable internet connection and proper devices to follow their classes (Navegador Indigena 2020a),

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[15] "The Ministry of the Interior will guarantee and promote spaces for dialogue and consultation between the authorities of the Indigenous Peoples and the Institutions, at the regional level and in national participation." (Colombian Government 2018b)

not considering that the privilege of accessing the internet in the country is reserved to only the 6,4% of the total national indigenous population (DANE 2019b). Moreover, despite the formal commitment to a more inclusive healthcare system established by sections F18 – F26[16] of the National Development Plan, the increase in the necessity of medical assistance have brought to light the absence of a culturally inclusive healthcare system (ibid.) that takes into account the different needs of the diverse indigenous communities present in the country, their necessity of accessing information translated in indigenous languages concerning the virus and the actions to take to halt its spread (ONIC 2020). Furthermore, a deterioration in the respect of indigenous rights to access land and natural resources has been registered as a consequence of the increase of extractive activities in indigenous territories that arose as a response to the economic recession caused by the pandemic (Observatorio de Derechos Territoriales et al. 2020). This consequence is also contradicting some of the objectives listed in the National Development Plan, specifically number G1-G6, belonging to the category of "Indigenous Territoriality: Legal Security of the Ancestral Territory" (Colombian Government 2018d).

Moreover, despite the presence of a gendered focus and special attention given to indigenous women in the *Equal Opportunity Pact for Ethnic Groups* and the aim to "Design and implement, in coordination with indigenous peoples, strategies for the prevention of and attention to all forms of violence against women and generations of indigenous peoples" (Colombian Government 2018c) described in objectives number A11-A13, the increase of gender violence (domestic and non) has been one of the most mentioned consequences of the isolation measures adopted to halt the spread of the virus (FIMI 2020; Navegador Indigena 2020b; ONU Mujeres Colombia 2020). Violence in the life of indigenous women has always been present and naturalized as part of a broader pattern of patriarchal power relations, not only in the households but also in institutions and the healthcare system (Navegador Indigena 2020b). However, the isolation measures have forced those who were already victims of abuse to remain locked in with their aggressor without an escape route. They have also increased the difficulty of accessing support systems in case of violence and abuse during the isolation (ONU Mujeres Colombia 2020).

An additional consequence of the pandemic on indigenous women is represented by their economic participation (Navegador Indigena 2020b; ONU Mujeres Colombia 2020). The National Development Plan includes measures aiming at increasing employment opportunities in the formal market for women and

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[16] "Safeguard and protect life and health in all its forms for indigenous peoples in their different territories according to their specificities and guaranteeing the financial, technical and institutional conditions for the effective implementation of the components of the Indigenous Own System of Intercultural Health SISPI (Sistema Indígena de Salud Propia e Intercultural) according to their uses and customs." (Colombian Government 2018a)

their access to financial support. The achievement of those goals has been postponed by the pandemic, and the economic insecurity of indigenous women have been exacerbated by different factors: the difficulty in accessing governmental financial support as a consequence of their higher degrees of involvement in the informal economy which make them invisible and not recognized as workers because lacking formal employment contracts, the limits imposed on their informal economic activities (sale of agricultural products or traditional handcrafts) caused by mobility restrictions and the stop of public transportation, but also by the higher risk of losing their employment as they often have precarious or no contracts (FIMI 2020; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2020).

1.2. Problem formulation

In the Colombian context in which there seems to be a political will and there is a governmental narrative through the National Development Plan that aims at achieving higher degrees of equality for indigenous groups and indigenous women, as discussed above, the pandemic and its related policies to challenge its effects, seem to have contributed to deepening pre-existing inequalities. Yet, beyond information about the impacts of the pandemic depending on gender, age and ethnicity, there is an insufficient discussion on *how* pandemic politics (in particular through its discourses and policy measures) can reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions.

The main research question that will guide my endeavor is: how can pandemic politics (in particular through its discourses and policy measures) reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions in Colombia?

This main research question can be divided into three sub-research questions that will guide my analyses:

1. How are discourses concerning gender and ethnicity constructed in recommendations, official documents, and publications on the pandemic in Colombia?
2. What are the possible consequences of such gendered and ethnicized discursive framings in Colombian pandemic-related documents, policies, and recommendations?
3. How can the reconstruction and reproduction of gendered and ethnic exclusions in pandemic management be challenged?

1.3. Thesis outline

The thesis is organized as follows: the second chapter is dedicated to a detailed description of the theoretical and methodological frameworks used to answer the research questions that guided this study. Specifically, the first subsection outlines

the transformative philosophical worldview adopted in this master thesis and the rationale that determined this choice. Second, I describe the theoretical outlook, postcolonial feminism, used as lenses to analyze the collected empirical material. Third, the methodology used to analyze the collected material, discourse analysis is outlined and justified. The fourth subsection outlines the rationales behind the choice of the collected empirical material, and it is followed by the description of the coding methods. Finally, this chapter will be concluded with a short discussion on the limitations of this research referring to the method implemented, the validity of the study, and the issue of subjectivity and positionality.

Chapter three is focused on the description of the empirical material. Special attention is first given to the description outlined by the sources of indigenous peoples and women as "discriminated" and "excluded" but also as "resilient" and "key actors". The discussion is then focused on the description of the measures described as needed and suggested in order to counteract the effects of the pandemic but also on those measures that have been independently implemented by indigenous peoples to cope with the virus and the lack of the adoption of suitable measures by the central government to manage the effects of the pandemic and its spread.

Chapter four is dedicated to the critical discussion of the analysis of the previously described empirical material. In this section, the findings are analyzed in light of postcolonial feminism with the aim of discussing the presence or absence of dominant discourses and their impacts, but most importantly with the aim of answering the research question and its sub-questions. In its first subsection, I examine the difference in the portrait of indigenous peoples as active actors in contrast with the one provided of indigenous women who are instead overwhelmingly described as "vulnerable". Subsection two is focused on the discussion of the extensive use of terms such as "invisible" and "vulnerable" in relation to indigenous women and the resulting problematic normalization of those features. The third and last subsection of chapter four examines the different and general illustrations given of the necessity of developing ethnic and gendered inclusive decision-making processes and the subsequent need of proposing context-sensitive representation measures which underline the necessity of challenging exclusions within those processes. The discussion is then summed up in subsection number 4.4 in order to present the answers to the inquiries that guided this research. The final subsections in this chapter provide some points of reflection around possible future research agendas and conclude this master thesis.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

In the following chapter, I describe the theoretical and methodological frameworks used to address the research questions in the present master thesis. The chapter starts by describing and justifying the choice behind the adopted philosophical worldview. Second, I outline the main features of the theory used to guide the analysis of the collected material, postcolonial feminism. Third, the research design and methodology used are discussed. The chapter then moves to the discussion of the selection of the sources of the empirical material collected for this study. Subsequently, a brief description of the coding strategy is provided. Finally, I explain the limitations of the present research.

2.1. Philosophical Worldview: the transformative approach

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research builds on three main components: the worldview, the research design, and the practical methods. The first one, the worldview, represents the philosophical underpinnings of the research and is often not explicitly stated in the text. Among the four types that Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify (the postpositivist, the constructivist, the transformative, and the pragmatic), the transformative approach is the one that guided this research. This approach focuses on highlighting the presence of inequalities, and the processes that permit their existence and reproduction (ibid.). Besides denouncing those power imbalances, it also aims to find and propose counteractions, behaviors, or discourses to obstacle and find alternatives to those unequal power relations. This worldview puts those labeled as vulnerable and their needs at the center of its focus and, in doing so, it treats them not only as subjects of the research but also as active agents within the research process itself (ibid.).

This worldview goes well with the feminist approach I use since my research seeks to not only understand the world but also imagine something better (Laliberté & Schurr 2016): it is in that sense that it thrives to be transformative.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Postcolonial Theory

The feminist postcolonial approach, with its focus on the fight of gender-related oppressions and on the critical analysis of the oppressive contexts within which women are embedded, is particularly suitable to answer my research question and its sub-questions and to fully implement the philosophical worldview that guided this research.

This approach was born as a critique to Western Feminism and its tendency to underestimate the intersections between different oppressive structures of societies (e.g., race, class, and historical backgrounds), discuss gender as a homogeneous category of analysis, and adopt a simplistic and binary definition of oppression which sees a general contraposition between men and women (Mohanty 1995). It aims to challenge the representation used by Western theorists of women in the Global South and underlines the existence of numerous experiences, knowledges, and perspectives that differ from those lived by western women (Manning 2016).

Postcolonial feminist scholars, therefore, argue for the necessity of avoiding processes of generalization and homogenization which have the problematic consequence of contributing to the formation of what Mohanty (2003b) describes as "Third World Woman", a stereotypical image that portrays women in the Global South as usually poor, uneducated, family-oriented and victimized, among other characteristics. This representation, as I will further develop in the discussion of the empirical material of this thesis (Chapter 4), not only provides a simplistic description of complex experiences but it also risks enhancing a process of interiorization of such subject positions (Nightingale 2011). In other words, Global South Women can adopt the dominant subject position used to portrait them, therefore internalizing such discourses and limit their self-expression.

The issues of representation and reflexivity are therefore pivotal in feminist postcolonial research in order to avoid the reproduction and reinforcement of dominant discourses around Global South women (Manning 2016). Recognizing the challenges that speaking for others entail, feminist scholars should continuously question their research practices and their positionality, acknowledging their limits, privileges, and authority in order not to reproduce colonial discourses and focus on the mechanisms that allow the reproduction of different forms of dominance (Spivak 1988), challenging the "oppressive grammars of power" (Vázquez 2011). In this way, postcolonial feminist scholars try to shed light on different and interacting oppressions without simplifying women experiences and fall into a "discursive trap" in which the existence and reproduction of different struggles is exposed but simultaneously simplified and homogenized following patriarchal and colonial discourses (MacGregor 2010). As I will illustrate in Chapter 4, this is a complex exercise that sometimes even documents and reports developed following a feminist perspective fail to carry out without falling into simplifications and

generalizations, in this way risking strengthening oppressions. This is the case when descriptions do not follow the feminist principle that aims to challenge inequalities and oppressions (Mohanty & Miraglia 2012), and when such representations are not preceded by a reflexive exercise that aims to understand such processes of subjugation and interiorization.

Feminist postcolonial theory is based on the belief that women living in previous colonies face what Petersen & Rutherford (1986) define as a "double colonization", a dual oppression by the patriarchy and colonialism which still shapes discourses and obstacles self-expression and an equalitarian vision of all cultures and genders. However, colonization and the patriarchy are not the only two forms of oppression analyzed by feminist post-colonial scholars. By drawing on the concept of postcolonial intersectionality, which in turn refers to the concept of intersectionality[17] introduced by Crenshaw (1989), these scholars want to highlight and study the interdependency not only between gender, race, and colonialism but also include sexuality, class, age, political affiliation and ethnicity (Mollet 2017) among other possible factors of oppressions, with the final aim of analyzing how different oppressions interact and become interdependent (Cumes 2012). Therefore, it highlights how oppressions must be fought as intersecting processes considering that they mutually support each other (Valencia, 2014). In doing so, they try to shed light to the multidimensionality and biases of power and analyse how those different layers interact, and how the power within them is reproduced and strengthened (Nightingale 2011).

My analysis and my discussion in this thesis are underpinned by this theory, with an aspiration that this research can be considered as part of feminist studies. More specifically, feminist postcolonial theory has been used to critically analyze the systematic and problematic use of terms and the lack of contextualization which contribute to the reproductions of inequalities, as I will further elaborate in chapter 4.

2.3. Research design and methods: qualitative analysis

This research is qualitative. With this thesis, I do not intend to uncover an ultimate truth or study objectivity, but rather focus on the possible impacts of discursive constructions on a specific group of people. In addition, this has been described as the most suitable research design when needing to analyze different viewpoints, when it is impossible to talk about one reality but there is rather a need of studying different understandings and descriptions of the same issue (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

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[17] The term intersectionality was developed as a critique to the unidirectional description of exclusions and dominant discussions of discrimination in relation to black women and therefore the need of taking into account multiple and interacting layers of discrimination and gendered oppressions which are not only limited to gender but must be extended to race, ethnicity, sex, and class (Crenshaw 1989)

To investigate my research problem and find answers to my research questions, I use discourse analysis on nine reports issued by a variety of official organizations and local and national governments referring to indigenous people, indigenous women, and their relation with the COVID-19 pandemic, one podcast, and one online semi-structured interview. Discourse analysis has been crucial to study to what extent, how, and if, the underlying understandings of those official documents and policies can reproduce specific gendered and ethnicized exclusions.

I use discourse analysis in a similar way to how Dombos et al. (2012) have done in their study on the qualitative assessment and comparison of Gender Equality Policies in the European Union. Their discourse analytical process has been divided into three main steps: *issue frames, document frames,* and *metaframes.* The first step aims to identify which are the practical solutions presented to address a specific issue, in my case, the special issue is the pandemic. My analysis has however been implemented mainly focusing on the last two steps. For engaging with *document frames,* I focus on the construction and portrait of the issue, i.e., the identification of underlying discourses on the portrait of indigenous women in the face of the pandemic. The last step consists in focusing on *metaframes*, on the identification of commonalities in the underlying discourses around indigenous women and indigenous peoples in relation to the pandemic found in different documents and publications that I use in my study.

To guide this process, different *sensitizing questions* have been developed (Verloo and Lombardo, 2007), these are guideline questions that help to structure the discourse analysis itself. These questions both emerge from and allow a deep engagement with the material through the development of different codes to categorize and analyze the information found in the sources. The six sensitizing questions that emerged from reading the documents in light of helping to answer my research questions are:

1. Who is mentioned in the sources (women, indigenous peoples, or/and indigenous women)?
2. How are they described?
3. How is the relation between the mentioned factors of difference and COVID-19 described?
4. Are there any solutions described and what are they?
5. Who is described as active in the adoption of the solutions proposed and implemented?
6. Are both gender and ethnic dimensions considered in the mentioned solutions or does one prevail?

2.4. Selection and collection of the empirical material

The selection of the sources for the analysis was guided by the will to include contemporary and relevant material that could uncover ongoing dominant discourses around the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on indigenous women in Colombia. All written and oral documents analyzed were published in 2020 (from January 2020 to December 2020).

My research for relevant documents and publications for the analysis thrived for finding an adequate number of sources that could be divided into two main groups: those written with the sole and direct participation of indigenous peoples and those developed completely by or in collaboration with external organizations and governmental bodies. This choice was adopted with the double intention of following a transformative worldview and being open to possible different or opposite portrayings of issues related to COVID-19, gender, and ethnicity.

As already stated in section 2.1, this research was conducted adopting a transformative worldview which, among its many features, implies the need to involve, as extensively as possible, the subjects being analyzed in the study. Due to the impossibility and difficulty to directly involve indigenous women and indigenous peoples in the research process, the analysis of documents issued by indigenous organizations constituted my strategy to overcome to a certain extent this limitation. For this same reason, the number of selected documents belonging to the group of sources developed with the active involvement of local indigenous people, organizations, and representative bodies is higher than the sources belonging to the second category, i.e., not developed in collaboration with indigenous organizations, peoples, or representatives. While due to travel restrictions, I could not interview and observe directly Colombian indigenous women, which would have constituted more pertinent methods for this research, this was my way to give more voice to their views than to that of the central government of Colombia for example.

Second, as I elaborate further in chapter 4 dedicated to the findings of this research, discourse analysis often provides an opportunity of uncovering contrasting discourses around a same topic. Therefore, attention was given to selecting documents that could give an idea of the emic views of indigenous organizations and indigenous peoples but also provide an etic perspective[18]: that of the portraying of the discourses provided by national or international organizations.

A further rationale for the selected sources for this research was their relevance in the fields of women's or indigenous peoples' rights within the country of focus

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[18] The terms *emic* and *etic* were both introduced by Pike (1967) in order to label two different but interconnected behavioral standpoints. The first one, *emic*, refers to the use of an "insider perspective" and represents the viewpoints of the subjects of the research. On the other hand, the term *etic* reflects an "outsider view".

or at an international or regional level, but also for their commitment to the fight against COVID-19.

Nine written publications, one podcast, and one semi-structured interview have been used as empirical material for this study. All of the sources, except one (Document 7) have the impacts of the pandemic on women, indigenous people, or indigenous women as their main subject of focus. The exception represented by Document 7 finds its rationale in the fact that it is a report on the situation of indigenous women in 2020, a period in which the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting daily lives. Therefore, in the content of this document, it was possible to find many comparisons between a pre-COVID-19 situation and a conjuncture in which the pandemic and the policies implemented in its name were already in place. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that while some of the selected documents include a comparative analysis of the situations of different countries, they always include discussions by/on Colombia in terms of involvement of local indigenous organizations, local representative bodies, regional or national representative institutions.

Out of the ten sources (nine publications and one podcast), six can be characterized by the direct and active participation of indigenous people, indigenous representatives, or indigenous organizations in their elaboration. The documents that were produced based on the sole collection of data in indigenous communities were not considered as an example of active participation and/or produced in collaboration with indigenous people and institutions. Those documents and their further characteristics can be found in Table 1 at the end of this section (2.4) and have been marked with an asterisk (*) next to the document number which can be found in the first column of the table.

A what I call an intermediary position between those two groups can be found in Documents 5 and 7, marked with a hashtag (#) next to the document number. Both were produced by an organization that aims to develop different frameworks and tools by and for indigenous peoples to monitor the status of the respect of their rights (Navegador Indigena 2021). Even though the data for these reports was collected in close collaboration with local indigenous organizations and left a degree of independence to them in this process, it was further elaborated by a non-indigenous organization.

Within the first group of sources developed in collaboration with indigenous peoples is possible to find a variety of issuing organizations which are listed in Table 1 under the column "Issuing organization (or author)". As already mentioned, the cooperation for the production of the source with indigenous peoples was of different natures: while some were based on the collaboration with local indigenous organizations (Document 5, 6, 7, and 10), other directly involved indigenous peoples and their leaders (Document 4) or were developed together with national indigenous representative bodies (Document 3). The two remaining documents

were issued by non-indigenous organizations: international organizations (Document 1, 8, and 9) and a research institute (Document 2).

The interview included in the empirical material of the thesis was a forty-minute semi-structured online interview conducted with the secretary of the National Commission of Indigenous Territories (CNTI). This interview aimed to further discuss some topics included in Document 3 which was issued in collaboration with the CNTI.

Table 1 Main features of the selected documents

Document	Title	Issuing organization (or author)	Type of issuing organization	Main focus on the impact of the pandemic on women or indigenous people	Regional coverage	Primary focus on		
						women	indigenous people	indigenous women
1	Gender Dimensions of the COVID-19 Crisis in Colombia: Impacts and Implications are Different for Women and Men[19]	UN Women Colombia	International Organization	X	International	X		
2	Gender and territorial inequalities vis-à-vis COVID-19[20]	Rimisp[21]	Research Institute	X	Continental		X	
3*	Impacts of COVID-19 on the territorial rights of indigenous	Territorial Rights Observatory, Indigenous Technical	Representative National Indigenous Institutions	X	National		X	

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[19] Dimensiones de Género en la crisis del COVID-19 en Colombia: Impactos e implicaciones son diferentes para mujeres y hombres

[20] Desigualdades de género y territoriales frente al COVID-19

[21] Rimisp: Latin American Center for Rural Development

	peoples in Colombia[22]	Secretariat of the CNTI[23]					
4*	Impact of COVID-19 on indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Equal Rights - Reflections of Afro and Indigenous LGBTI people.[24]	UN: United Voices Colombia	International Organization	X	National	X	X
5 #	Effects of COVID-19 on Indigenous Communities: A View from the Navegador Indígena [25]	Navegador Indígena	Research Institute	X	International	X	
6*	Impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples and indigenous human rights defenders in Colombia and Paraguay [26]	Cxhab Wala Kiwe – ACIN [27], FAPI [28], OIA[29], Almáciga	Representative National Indigenous Institutions and National Indigenous Organizations	X	Continental	X	
7 #	Realities of Indigenous Women: A View from the	Navegador Indígena	Research Institute	-	International		X

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[22] Impactos del COVID-19 en los derechos territoriales de los pueblos indígenas en Colombia

[23] National Commission of Indigenous Territories (Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas)

[24] Impacto de la COVID-19 en los pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes. Igualdad de derechos – Reflexiones de personas LGBTI afros e indígenas

[25] Efectos de la COVID-19 en las comunidades indígenas: Una mirada desde el Navegador Indigena

[26] Impacto de la COVID-19 en los pueblos indígenas y los defensores y defensoras indígenas de derechos humanos de Colombia y Paraguay

[27] Association of Indigenous Councils of the North of Cauca (Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca)

[28] Federation for the Self-Determination of Indigenous Peoples (Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas)

[29] Indigenous Organization of Antioquia (Organización Indígena de Antioquia)

	Navegador Indígena[30]							
8	The impact of Covid-19 on the lives of indigenous women and their strategies for coping with the pandemic [31]	FIMI [32]	International Organization	X	International			X
9*	Indigenous Women of the Americas facing the COVID-19 pandemic[33]	ECMIA[34]	International Organization	X	Continental			X
10	The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples in Latin America-Abya Yala. Between invisibilization and collective resistance[35]	CEPAL[36]	International Organization	X	Continental		X	

2.5. Coding

The coding of the empirical material was based on the use of both structured coding, also called *a priori* coding, and emergent coding. Some of the codes have been established from the beginning of the coding process and they resulted in the *sensitizing questions* that were underpinned by a constant focus on finding answers to the research questions. Hence, structured coding was applied (Blair 2015). The second coding method, emergent coding, can be defined as an approach that aims to be open to the data, to start the process without having preconceptions on what

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[30] Realidades de las mujeres indígenas: Una mirada desde el Navegador Indígena

[31] El impacto del Covid-19 en la vida de las mujeres indígenas y sus estrategias para enfrentar la pandemia

[32] International Indigenous Women's Forum (Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas)

[33] Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas frente a la pandemia del COVID-19

[34] Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas)

[35] El impacto del COVID-19 en los pueblos indígenas de América Latina-Abya Yala. Entre la invisibilización y la resistencia colectiva

[36] Economic Commission for Latin America (Comisión Económica para América Latina)

can be found in the material (ibid.). This second approach has been mainly used for the identification of themes, i.e. sub-codes, which have been developed following the descriptions found in the documents with the rationale of ensuring a degree of flexibility in the categorization of the material which is fundamental in discourse analysis in order to be able to be attentive to emerging frames and discourses, rather than imposing our own on the material.

This labeling process has been conducted with the use of sixteen different codes (See Annex 1). The majority of the codes have been divided into subcodes. This was done following two necessities: (1) representing several possibilities of different answers given to the same main code, i.e., different terms used to describe indigenous women and indigenous peoples, and (2) dividing the information based on the group of reference (women, indigenous peoples, indigenous women).

Each answer was cited following the technique of color-coding, i.e., using different colors depending on the document of reference. Moreover, all the material has been collected in the official language of the publications, the language spoken during the podcast, and the interview, Spanish. The answers, in the coding process, have been copied and pasted to the document without being directly translated to ensure a correct understanding of the passages registered during the analyzing process.

2.6. Limitations

This thesis has faced some obstacles throughout its development therefore, in the following paragraphs, I outline some of its limitations.

The chosen methodology for the development of this master thesis, discourse analysis, is subjective and influenced by positionality, something I totally acknowledge following feminist stances about reflexivity and positionality in research. As Grosfoguel (2007) and England (1994) highlight, it is impossible to escape positionality but one should not purport to be able to do so; what is pivotal to underline is how, my subjectivity as a white European woman coming from a privileged background have influenced my standing point within the analyzed discourse and the development of the findings, which from a postcolonial perspective, can be problematic. There are two ways to address this limitation: first, conduct the research with a strong awareness of the researcher's moral and ethical values and limits and do not try to hide the fact that my own assumptions may have influenced my findings, therefore conducting this research as an "ongoing, intersubjective (or more broadly, a dialogic) activity" (England 1994, 4). Second, I believe that cross-cultural scholarships are useful to understand differences, promote solidarity and avoid generalizations, therefore avoiding the formation of universal and fixed categories (Mohanty 2003a; Lugones 2010), which is something I tried to avoid. In addition, following Faria & Mollett (2020) in their

discussion around the importance of postcolonial feminist geographies, I conducted this research reflecting on the privileges and vulnerabilities that many people carry and reflected about them not only as differences but also as possibilities for cross border solidarity where borders and margins are flexibly and constantly produced and reproduced in relation to a dynamic center and other multiple margins.

Moreover, it is important to underline that because of the nature of the method applied, the findings described in the upcoming sections are context and time-specific, applicable only to the sources selected for this research and dependent on the time frame within which they were issued. As Inglis (2018, 165) underlines "discourses are not means of representing the world, for they can only ever signify themselves": this is another reason why a generalization of the following findings would be impossible.

Lastly, being aware of the amplitude of the geographical area of focus, it is worth underscoring that the aim of this thesis is not establishing an essentializing description of indigenous communities and denying their differences. Yet, despite this intention, due to the restrictions on mobility and the reliance on sources by organizations and their representatives, there remains a risk that my conclusions reflect the view of these organizations about specific indigenous people's situations, rather than indigenous people's own views about their situation.

3. Empirical findings: description of indigenous peoples and indigenous women as discriminated, resilient and agents of change

In order to answer my research question (how can pandemic politics, in particular through its discourses and policy measure, reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions in Colombia?), the results I describe in this section are based on the observations made on the analysis of two main categories of codes in the discourse analysis I carried out: (1) I first focus on the description of indigenous peoples and indigenous women (Code 5, 6, and their subcodes), within this group of analysis I mainly focus on the presence or absence of certain features: discrimination or exclusion, or the inclusion of positive features, e.g., their degree of resilience or importance for the fight against COVID-19. Second, (2), I discuss the framing of proposed or already existing solutions that aim to counteract the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic or to cope with the consequences of the policies implemented to overcome its effects (Codes 10,11,13,14,15,16, and their subcodes).

For each of the following sections referring to the above-mentioned two categories, some examples from the empirical material will be cited to illustrate the findings. All the citations that will be found in the following sections have been personally translated from Spanish to English only at the stage of writing these passages in order not to lose their meaning throughout the analysis and writing processes. The non-translated quotes used as examples are included in footnotes.

3.1. Description of indigenous peoples and indigenous women in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic

3.1.1. Discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization

The aspect of discrimination, exclusion, or stigmatization is discussed in seven documents in relation to indigenous peoples (Documents 4,5,6,7,8,9,10) and six of them specifically mention a higher degree of discrimination suffered by indigenous women (Documents 5,6,7,8,9,10). This aspect is linked with several areas of discrimination and exclusion in the documents, among them, historical

discrimination and exclusion, lack of access to social protection and healthcare, but also education, and finally to political representation and participation. Those aspects, even though they have been historically part of indigenous lives in the country, have been exacerbated by the implementation of different policies to counteract the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

It is worth noticing that five out of the eight sources that used terms such as: "discriminated," "stigmatized" or "excluded", belong to the category of documents issued in collaboration with indigenous institutions, indigenous peoples, or their representatives whereas the resting three were developed without active collaboration with indigenous participants.

Examples of different forms of discrimination and historical exclusions were mentioned in Document 5:

> "…these peoples (indigenous peoples) continue to be among the groups with limited access to social protection, in part due to broader patterns of marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion."[37] (Document 5, Research Institute, Page 21)

They are further illustrated in Document 6:

> "The spread of the disease and the crisis it has caused worldwide have exacerbated the situations of vulnerability, impoverishment, inequality, exclusion, and discrimination suffered by indigenous peoples [...] During these months of pandemic, they have had difficulty in accessing relevant information about the virus in their own languages or through accessible means, as well as protective equipment or screening tests. Access to clean water and soap to ensure basic infection prevention measures, such as hand washing, is complicated in the remote areas where many of them live."[38] (Document 6, National Indigenous Organization, Page 6 and 7)

This increment in discrimination and exclusion, however, have unevenly affected a specific group of the indigenous population, women, as the following citations show:

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[37] "…estos pueblos siguen figurando entre los grupos que tienen acceso limitado a la protección social, en parte debido a los patrones más amplios de marginación, discriminación y exclusión."

[38] "La propagación de la enfermedad y la crisis que ha provocado a nivel mundial han exacerbado las situaciones de vulnerabilidad, empobrecimiento, desigualdad, exclusión y discriminación que padecen los pueblos indígenas [...] Durante estos meses de pandemia, han tenido dificultades para disponer de información pertinente acerca del virus en sus propios idiomas o a través de medios accesibles, así como de equipos de protección o pruebas de detección. El acceso a agua potable y jabón para garantizar medidas básicas de prevención del contagio, como el lavado de manos, es complicado en las zonas remotas donde muchos de ellos viven."

"... indigenous women experience compounded gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination, which have placed them in a particularly vulnerable situation during the global pandemic."[39] (Document 7, Research Institute, Page 44)

And again:

"The pandemic has exacerbated the multiple inequalities already affecting Indigenous women, such as impoverishment, limited access to health services and clean water, forced displacement from territories, degradation of natural resources due to extractive industries, energy projects, and climate change"[40] (Document 8, International Organization, Page 6)

But also:

"Indigenous women are also a population group facing particularly difficult situations due to the crisis generated by the pandemic. COVID-19 has aggravated the multiple inequalities they previously suffered from: impoverishment, discrimination, or limited access to health care services, education, justice, social protection, or employment. In addition, in many cases, their workload has increased due to family care and other tasks, their vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition due to the disruption of food systems, and their exposure to gender-based violence due to confinement measures."[41] (Document 6, National Indigenous Organization, Page 8)

3.1.2. Indigenous peoples and indigenous women as "resilient" and "key actors" in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic

In all documents, it is possible to find a variety of terms to describe indigenous people in relation to the pandemic and the challenges they face. Most of those words linger on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on indigenous people's lives. Terms such as "risk group" (Code 5.1 and Code 6.2), "invisibility" (Code 5.3), "discriminated" and "stigmatized" (Code 5.5 and Code 6.1), "vulnerable" (Code 5.6 and Code 6.3), and "disproportionally affected" (Code 5.8 and 6.4), were largely used to describe indigenous peoples and indigenous women to highlight the higher

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[39] "[...] las mujeres indígenas experimentan desigualdades de género agravadas y formas de discriminación cruzadas, que las han colocado en una situación especialmente vulnerable durante la pandemia mundial."

[40] "La pandemia ha agravado las múltiples desigualdades que ya afectaban a las Mujeres Indígenas, tales como el empobrecimiento, el limitado acceso a servicios de salud y agua limpia, el desplazamiento forzado de los territorios, la degradación de los recursos naturales debido a las industrias extractivas, proyectos de energía y el cambio climático."

[41] "Las mujeres indígenas son asimismo un grupo de población que afronta situaciones especialmente difíciles debido a la crisis generada por la pandemia. La COVID-19 ha agravado las múltiples desigualdades que padecían previamente: el empobrecimiento, la discriminación, o el acceso limitado a los servicios de atención de la salud, a la educación, la justicia, la protección social o el empleo. Además, en muchos casos ha aumentado su carga de trabajo por el cuidado familiar y otras tareas, su vulnerabilidad al hambre y la malnutrición a causa de la perturbación de los sistemas alimentarios y su exposición a la violencia de género debido a las medidas de confinamiento."

degree of difficulty experienced in relation to the pandemic and the policies implemented in its name.

The sources that included terms such as "resilient" or "key actors", in relation to indigenous peoples were equally used in documents issued in collaboration with indigenous peoples and those issued independently from etic organizations, in those sources.

Similarly, the inclusion of analogous terms in relation to indigenous women ("resilient", "important", "strong") was included in two sources that were not developed in strong collaboration with indigenous peoples (Document 1 and 8) with the exceptions of Document 7 and 9. However, all of these sources have their main focus on indigenous women or women in general.

Those terms were used in relation to agency power, resilience, and to their importance for the fight against the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, on one hand, the discussion around the reasons behind the use of these connotations in relation to indigenous peoples was cited in different passages of the sources and extensively motivated with examples, on the other, the use of same or similar terms in relations to indigenous women was limited, and more space was given to the description of the impacts of the pandemic and their levels of vulnerability. An exception is represented by Document 8 and 9, which might be explained by the fact that they were written from a feminist perspective.

Examples of the use of those terms can be found in Document 5 where it is possible to read:

"... community leaders were key players in ensuring the adoption by the community of preventive measures aimed at stopping the pandemic..."[42] (Document 5, Research Institute, Page 40)

And in Document 6:

"Such measures and actions (actions adopted by indigenous communities to counteract the spread of the pandemic and the side effects of the policies implemented in its name) have been an example of resistance and resilience in the context of a health emergency such as the one we are currently experiencing."[43] (Document 6, National Indigenous Organization Page 20)

But also, in relation to indigenous women:

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[42] "... los líderes comunitarios eran actores clave para garantizar la adopción por parte de la comunidad de medidas preventivas dirigidas a detener la pandemia..."

[43] "Tales medidas y acciones han sido un ejemplo de resistencia y resiliencia en un contexto de emergencia sanitaria como el que estamos viviendo."

"Indigenous women have proven to be resilient in the face of the pandemic, adopting innovative, creative measures based on ancestral knowledge and practices of the people."[44] (Document 8, International Organization Page 23)

3.2. Proposed solutions and implemented measures, from the need for inclusive statistical data to the use of independent security protocols

All the reviewed sources but Document 2, dedicated a specific section to the description of the measures taken by different actors to cope with the effects of the pandemic, of the policies implemented in its name, or to outline suggestions on how to develop new effective measures to counteract the virus and implement policies that focus on the needs of different groups of the population. Five main types of solutions proposed or independently implemented by indigenous communities have been identified: the necessity of collecting culturally sensitive statistical information about the spread of the virus, the need of developing an inclusive healthcare and communication system that takes into account cultural differences, the necessity of including indigenous people and indigenous women in the decision-making processes, the adoption of security protocols, and the use of independent monitoring systems.

3.2.1. Suggested measures: the importance of the collection of quantitative data, culturally sensitive measures, and the development of inclusive decision-making processes

Within the category of possible measures to implement, one concerned the need of collecting data about the spread of the virus both for indigenous people and indigenous women. The adoption of this measure was proposed by eight out of the total eleven sources to cease the invisibility of those two population groups.

Source 4, for example, highlights how:

"There is a lack of recognition and visibility for millions of people."[45] (Document 4, International Organization, Minute 04:02)

And how:

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[44] "Las Mujeres Indígenas han demostrado ser resilientes ante la pandemia, adoptando medidas innovadoras, creativas, asentadas en los conocimientos y prácticas ancestrales de los pueblos."

[45] "Existe una falta de reconocimiento y visibilidad de millones de personas."

"The lack of information on the ethnic variable in the hospitalization systems and this invisibility makes it impossible to really know the exact magnitude of the impact of the pandemic."[46] (Document 4, International Organization, Minute 04:24)

A second popular solution mentioned by eight out of eleven sources was the need to adjust all the adopted measures to local beliefs and practices. The lack of culturally sensitive measures in many cases condemned indigenous peoples to be excluded from the access to information regarding the virus and the protection measures to adopt in their languages, inclusive healthcare procedures, or the exclusion from decision-making processes.

As underlined in Document 6:

"During these months of the pandemic, (indigenous communities) have had difficulty in accessing relevant information about the virus in their own languages or through accessible means, as well as protective equipment or screening tests."[47] (Document 6, National Indigenous Organization, Page 7)

Finally, within the suggested actions to adopt, the necessity of involving indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes was a suggestion outlined in eight of the eleven sources whereas, the explicit inclusion of indigenous women in this process was outlined in five of them. The rationales behind the necessity of including women in the participation in the decision-making process are uneven and described using different terminologies such as "involvement", "direct participation" (used in Document 1), "gain access", "leverage their roles of leadership", or "receive assistance to enhance their skills to participate in the decision-making forums" (used in Document 7). The importance of recognizing their leadership and the actions taken to counteract the pandemic is also signaled (Document 8).

"Involve women in all phases of the response and in national and local decision making; Ensure the gender dimension in the response with the direct participation of women's organizations, women leaders and defenders;"[48] (Document 1, International Organization, Page 5)

"Ensure that indigenous women can obtain official documentation to exercise their political rights, gain access to political spheres and leverage their leadership through the design of policy interventions aimed at enhancing their skills and capacities to participate in decision-making

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[46] "Por la falta de información de la variable étnica en los sistemas de internación y esta invisibilidad hace imposible realmente conocer con exactitud la magnitud del impacto de la pandemia."
[47] "Durante estos meses de pandemia, (las comunidades indígenas) han tenido dificultades para disponer de información pertinente acerca del virus en sus propios idiomas o a través de medios accesibles, así como de equipos de protección o pruebas de detección."
[48] "Implicar a las mujeres en todas las fases de la respuesta y en la toma de decisiones nacionales y locales; Asegurar la dimensión de género en la respuesta con la participación directa de las organizaciones de mujeres, lideresas y defensoras;"

forums that affect them, and by supporting and assisting indigenous women's organizations."[49] (Document 7, Research Institute, Page 51)

"It is important to recognize and include in the proposals the leadership of Indigenous Women and the actions they have been taking to confront the pandemic and to include them in the institutional proposals of the States."[50] (Document 8, International Organization, Page 32)

3.2.2. Independent initiatives: indigenous security protocols and independent monitoring systems

In the discussion of solutions regarding the containment of the virus or assistance to the effects caused by the policies adopted to counteract its spread, eight out of eleven sources outlined some solutions, independently adopted by indigenous peoples, that were already in place.

Within this group, two were the solutions described by all the sources: the adoption of security protocols and the use of independent monitoring systems.

Security protocols were described as means to achieve a high degree of self-protection. Within this category, the practice of self-isolation was cited together with a monitoring system of the entries and exits from indigenous territories (Document 4, 6, 9, 10, and Interview 1). An example of these practices was implemented in the Amazon Department and included the following actions:

"… to go to the jungle and protect their elders in small islands and meanwhile begin a process of rescuing their ancestral practices on the use of medicinal plants"[51] (Document 4, International Organization, Minute 10:47)

But also by the Arhuaco community in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in the northern region of the country:

"We implemented a process of territorial monitoring of the exits and entrances to our territories; we limit the entrance of people from outside the communities and also to people who are not indigenous. Tourism has been prohibited, it has been complex because some local governors did not understand the dynamics, so it seemed that we were restricting the mayor's access. And he put it against us." (Interview 1, Minute 31:09)

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[49] "Velar por que las mujeres indígenas puedan obtener documentación oficial para ejercer sus derechos políticos, tener acceso a las esferas políticas y aprovechar su liderazgo mediante el diseño de intervenciones normativas orientadas a potenciar sus competencias y capacidades para participar en los foros de adopción de decisiones que les afecten, y mediante el apoyo y la asistencia a las organizaciones de mujeres indígenas."

[50] "Es importante que se reconozca e incluya en las propuestas el liderazgo de las Mujeres Indígenas y las acciones que han venido realizando para hacer frente a la pandemia y que sean incluidos en las propuestas institucionales de los Estados."

[51] …irse a la selva y proteger a sus ancianos en pequeñas islas y mientras tanto comenzar un proceso de rescate de sus prácticas ancestrales sobre el uso de plantas medicinales"

The use of an independent monitoring system as a way to collect data about the magnitude of the spread of the virus in indigenous territories was often cited in relation to the actions taken by the ONIC:

> "The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), which already had a territorial monitoring system, is using it to gather information on the population, humanitarian, territorial and environmental situation of the pandemic among Colombia's indigenous peoples. Periodic bulletins are issued that include the cases of indigenous people who have died or been infected, as well as the requirements of the communities in the midst of the health emergency. It is worth mentioning that the reports do not include specific data differentiated by gender."[52] (Document 9, International Organization, Page 5)

The ability of indigenous peoples to develop solutions and actions to cope with the virus and the lack of appropriate services to monitor it however was not discussed in relation to indigenous women. The presence of active solutions put in place by Colombian indigenous women can be found only in two written sources, Document 8 and 9 that underline how:

> "Indigenous women have contributed a great deal in this health crisis. They have managed to take care of the neediest families. They have drawn on ancestral customs, knowledge, practices, and values as faithful guardians of memory and traditions."[53] (Document 8, International Organization, Page 31)

And how

> "Indigenous women in different countries of the region put into practice ancestral medicine and our ethnobotanical knowledge to strengthen the immunological system and prevent respiratory diseases"[54] (Document 9, International Organization, Page 5)

This chapter provided a discussion on the description given of indigenous peoples and indigenous women and of the measures illustrated as necessary and those already in place to counteract the pandemic. The first feature that was stressed is the presence of patterns of discrimination which are historically part of indigenous peoples' lives and especially of indigenous women's that sharpened throughout the pandemic. As highlighted in Interview 1: "The pandemic was the straw that broke

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[52] "La Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC), que ya contaba con un sistema de monitoreo territorial, está haciendo uso del mismo para recopilar información sobre la situación poblacional, humanitaria, territorial y ambiental sobre la pandemia entre los pueblos indígenas. Se emiten boletines periódicos que recogen los casos de personas indígenas fallecidas e infectadas, así como los requerimientos de las comunidades en medio de la emergencia sanitaria. Cabe mencionar, que los reportes no incluyen datos específicos diferenciados por género."

[53] "Las Mujeres Indígenas han contribuido mucho en esta crisis de salud. Han logrado cuidar de las familias más necesitadas. Han recurrido a las costumbres, conocimientos, prácticas y valores ancestrales como fieles guardianas de la memoria y las tradiciones."

[54] "Las mujeres indígenas en diferentes países de la región ponemos en práctica la medicina ancestral y nuestros conocimientos etnobotánicos para fortalecer el sistema inmunológico y prevenir enfermedades respiratorias."

the camel's back. Because it turns out what it did was to show another pandemic that the indigenous territories are experiencing." (Min. 08:55). The description of indigenous peoples as "excluded" and "stigmatized" however, left some space for the discussion around their agency and their portrait as "key" and "resilient" actors in the fight against the virus and in the implementation of alternative measures to challenge the effects of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the same amount of space was not reserved for the description of indigenous women. In the discussion of their relation with the virus, the focus was set on their higher degrees of "vulnerability" and portrait as a "risk group". This difference is mirrored in the description of the measures autonomously implemented by local indigenous communities and national indigenous organizations: independent security protocols and monitoring systems. In this illustration, rare examples of indigenous women's agency were illustrated whereas the focus was centered on the general action of indigenous communities.

4. Discussion: agency, problematic vulnerabilities, and the importance of representation

In this chapter, based on my empirical analysis, I discuss the most outstanding findings of this study related to (1) the presence or absence of the portraying of indigenous women as active actors or/and as subjects having agency power, (2) the discursive struggle over invisibility, discrimination and vulnerability of indigenous peoples and indigenous women, and (3) the framing of indigenous women's leadership and their access to representation roles in the context of the pandemic. In the fourth section of this chapter, the findings are then outlined as answers to my research question and sub-questions. The final section of this chapter presents three complementary research suggestions to further develop the inquiry that guided this study.

4.1. Agency and active actors

Agency and the term active were not explicitly used in any of the sources analyzed. However, through the description of indigenous peoples and indigenous women, it was possible to identify underlying discourses around agency. As discussed in Chapter 3, agency was pictured as limited in relation to indigenous peoples, however, it was possible to find examples of it in several sources where they were portrayed as active actors through the description of the measures that their communities independently adopted to counteract the pandemic.

Nonetheless, a similar discourse about being agentic or active was found in relation to indigenous women only in two written sources, both issued by international organizations, FIMI and ECMIA (Document 8 and 9). Women were not described as change-makers or active agents, rather, as it will be further discussed in the next section (4.2), the focus was set on their description as "vulnerable" and "excluded" to and by the impacts of the pandemic. As underlined by Arora-Jonsson (2011) who discussed women's picturing as vulnerable or saviors in the face of climate change, this excessive focus can divert the attention from the root causes of vulnerability. Further, it can also contribute to the normalization of this discourse which portrays women as "vulnerable". While describing indigenous women as "vulnerable", "passive" and "voiceless", can constitute a strategic move

to raise attention to the fact that they need more support (this could explain why the purportedly gender-sensitive sources were also portraying them as such), there is a risk of internalization of such discourse. Said differently, indigenous women may adopt the subject-position they are given in the discourse which can further undermine their agency, contribute to the resilience of power disbalances, and obstacle the constant change of such discourses (Nightingale 2011). Therefore, a reflexive exercise on how processes of subjugations are interiorized and replicated should precede the support and introduction of emancipatory and inclusive measures (Gonda 2019).

The absence of picturing indigenous women as active agents can be indicative of the fact that while several documents were purportedly written from a feminist perspective, they did not follow the feminist principle of trying to focus on stressing the existence of women's agency, of challenging inequalities and women's oppressions (Mohanty & Miraglia 2012). This is particularly relevant if we recognize that essential changes are often generated bottom-up, from the local level (Harcourt 2003). Indeed, if local oppressions and the actions taken to overcome them at the community level are silenced and the focus is set on other topics, the results can lead to their strengthening rather than to building a discourse in which agency and change are portrayed as possible and already happening, therefore hampering to open pathways for inclusive and transformational social changes (Tschakert et al. 2016).

4.2. Challenging invisibility and vulnerability

The terms "invisible" and "vulnerable" were often used in the sources for portraying indigenous peoples and indigenous women in relation to different impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Invisibility" was mainly linked to the lack of official data on the spread of the virus in indigenous territories and divided by factors of differences. To overcome this exclusion, the ONIC developed an independent monitoring system based on the cooperation with numerous local indigenous organizations to develop and regularly publish reports that include information on the status of the virus in indigenous territories (ONIC 2019). However, no gender-disaggregated data was developed. This effort to make indigenous peoples visible became therefore limited to just a part of the indigenous population, thus contributing to make invisible the less privileged part, despite the recognized importance of accessing and producing disaggregated data. This reinforces Young's (2012) observation that sometimes emancipatory actions tend to exclude from processes of visibility those parts of the population that are subject to different levels of exclusion. In doing so, some layers of invisibility are eliminated, however, others, which are even more rooted, are not challenged. Therefore, indigenous women continue being the *invisible visible*

(ibid.). Their struggles are recognized making them visible, however, the decision of not developing statistics on them and of not recognizing their agency, described in the previous section, make them at the same time invisible. This supports the argument made by Young (2012) of the *politics of invisibility*, which is not based on actual invisibility, but rather on the rejection of those exercising power to see something, or in this case someone, that exists and is there, and turn their faces away.

Despite the illustrated importance of producing inclusive statistical data on the spread of the virus stressed by the sources, the need for statistics (or "hard", "scientific" data) should not let us forget that equally important are the voices of the subjects of those data. This concern, shared by MacGregor (2010) who discussed this question in relation to women in the face of climate change, is based on the lack of the representation of indigenous women and of spaces where their voices are heard. This is especially the case for those indigenous women who might like to give a more complicated, or a different image of themselves in policy documents for example, and who would like to resist the alienating subject-positions that they are often given in the discourse. Therefore, the focus should be extended to personal and contextual experiences and on problematic framings rather than limited to the production of statistics (ibid.).

One of those problematic descriptions is illustrated by the extensive use of the terms "vulnerable", "discriminated", "risk group", in relation to various consequences caused by the pandemic and the exacerbation of pre-existing struggles (access to social security, food insecurity, poverty, higher exposure to diseases, higher levels of discrimination, access to information and education) concerning both indigenous peoples and indigenous women. However, the description provided in relation to indigenous women was amplified and described as less agentic.

The emphasis put on such terms, similarly to the previous case of the importance given to solving invisibility through the collection of statistical data, can be problematic. Firstly, as already discussed in relation to the topic of invisibility, the focal point is deflected from the discussion of power inequalities to the framing of indigenous peoples, and more specifically indigenous women, following a negative stereotype that pictures them as voiceless and powerless (MacGregor 2010; Arora-Jonsson 2011). This stereotype finds further reinforcement if it is coupled with the illustration of indigenous women as passive subjects, discussed in the previous section (4.2).

As underlined by MacGregor (2010), and illustrated by the importance given to the involvement of external actors to challenge the impacts of COVID-19, even those sources focused on the rights of indigenous peoples and the interests of indigenous women, often fall into a *discursive trap*, hinting to the presence of a process of naturalization of the use of those terms in relation to indigenous peoples

and particularly to indigenous women. Even in the sources that specifically aimed to shed light on gendered power imbalances, with the exception of Documents 8 and 9, the overall portrait found of indigenous women was not one of active subjects. Within those sources more space was dedicated to the description of their vulnerability and the impacts of the pandemic, relegating the critical discussion around inequalities and power disbalances to a few passages.

4.3. The role of leadership and representation

Throughout the implementation of measures to counteract the spread of the pandemic and its economic consequences, the involvement in the decision-making processes of indigenous peoples and indigenous leaders has decreased. This was underlined in Document 3 and Interview 1 concerning the inaccessibility to prior consultation. This is a fundamental right of Colombian ethnic minorities to decide their priorities for the process of development of administrative, legislative, or any measure that can affect their lives, beliefs, institutions, and spiritual well-being, the lands they occupy, and to control, as far as possible, their own economic, social and cultural development (Vergara Herrera et al. 1997; Organización Internacional del Trabajo et al. 2011).

In reaction to this, eight sources, in their development of the suggested measures to adopt, mention the need of involving indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes. However, the inclusion of indigenous women was mentioned in only four of them that explicitly focused on this group. The invisibility imposed upon them in the other sources is critical to address because, as underlined by Agarwal (2001), the decision of not explicitly include them in the list of actors to involve, can lead to even wider power disbalances and have disempowering effects. This is the case if the interaction of the historical, cultural, and social background of the community leads to privileging men's leadership and political participation. Therefore, when suggesting inclusive solutions, the interaction and interdependency of multiple levels of oppression linked to both gender and ethnicity should always be considered because, as (Nightingale 2011) underlines, power is multidimensional, and therefore, it can have multiple and sometimes unexpected consequences. Moreover, and as Gonda (2019, 88) in her reflection on the necessity of re-politicizing climate change debates acknowledges, "power is a difficult concept to grasp", however, studies on socio-political processes that might strengthen inequalities and exclusions should be conducted prior to the implementation of practical solutions, in order to address both inequalities and practical challenges.

The description of the degree of participation to achieve was framed in various ways: from arguing for the need of including and involving indigenous women in decision-making processes illustrated in Document 1, to the call for recognizing

their leadership roles highlighted in Document 8. The different wording decisions hint at different levels of involvement and participation. Terms such as inclusion and involvement allude to a wide range of options and allow various interpretations, ranging from *passive participation* to *active and interactive participation* (ibid.), but also leadership recognition. Depending on how this aspect is framed, different interpretations on how to include indigenous women can arise, some of them because too broad could be used to reinforce exclusion as in the case of including indigenous women passively. Others instead could help underline the importance of indigenous women as active and pivotal agents in the decision-making processes. Following a feminist perspective, participation should not be limited to the creation of new sits at the bargaining table, but it rather should focus on the importance of women's agency in challenging inequalities and in their fight for social and economic justice (Mohanty & Miraglia 2012).

Furthermore, when discussing participation in broad terms, another important aspect was considered, namely the necessity of highlighting that inclusion should not be given but "guaranteed" as stated in Documents 5, 8, 9, and 10. The inclusion of this term indicates an understanding of the existence of possible resistance by other actors when challenging hierarchies or an oppressive status quo grounded in patriarchal traditions and cultures. Therefore it illustrates the necessity of specifying that access to participation should be included in a broader strategy that considers possible forms of resistance. As discussed by Arora-Jonsson (2011), the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, and especially of women, can be double-edged. On one hand, it fosters involvement, on the other, it can lead to a strengthening of unequal power relations, and limit participation and inclusion. The second scenario can happen in the cases when inclusion is not coupled with the capacity of creatively working with unequal power relations, taking into account specific contexts, institutional mechanisms, and how oppression is exercised and replicated within decision-making processes. As Tschakert et al. (2016) underlined, the inclusion of those groups labeled as marginalized in decision-making processes does not have to be interpreted as a transformative outcome, but it should rather be accompanied by a critical reflection on the interplay between knowledges, authorities, and subjectivities that shape power relations within those processes. This is particularly important because those power relations are never neutral and are reinforced through practice (Nightingale 2011). There is also a need for understanding why sometimes those who are already sitting at the bargaining table are not participating or not defending their own cause, and challenge the identified obstacles through measures such as positive discrimination or working in gender-disaggregated groups.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that in none of the sources it was clearly illustrated if inclusion in managerial decisions was suggested to be achieved in all levels of decision-making processes, from political leadership roles to household

decisions, an absence that can contribute to limiting the focus on those limited levels that are perceived as more relevant or important.

4.4. How can pandemic politics (in particular through discourses and policy measures) reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions in Colombia?

Drawing on discourse analysis and feminist postcolonial theory, this master thesis aimed at contributing to research focused on studying how politics can reinforce ethnicized and gendered exclusions and oppressions. The research inquiry that guided this research, stated in the title of this section, has been divided into three sub-questions.

The first one focuses on inquiring how national discourses on the pandemic referring to gender and ethnicity are constructed in recommendations, official documents, and publications in Colombia. To answer this question, I have discussed three discursive constructions illustrated in the empirical material focusing on the limits of agency, invisibility and vulnerability, and the importance given to inclusive decision-making processes. These overlapping discourses, while giving a certain level of agency to indigenous peoples in general, they overwhelmingly picture indigenous women as "vulnerable" and "agentless", which contributes to reinforcing colonial and patriarchal relations. The politics of pandemic management are deeply embedded in these relations, leaving little space to build a discourse around agency and therefore hindering the opening of pathways for a discourse that portrays indigenous women as important agents of change in the pandemic context.

The answer to sub-research question 2 "What are the possible consequences of such gendered and ethnicized discursive framings in Colombian pandemic-related documents, policies, and recommendations?" explores the re-production of gendered and ethnicized stereotypes of indigenous women, a discursive trap that has very real consequences on women's lives. In section 4.3 I have discussed how the extensive focus on the portray of indigenous women's vulnerability and discrimination can have a double consequence. On one hand, it can acknowledge the different needs of specific groups, on the other, however, it can lead to a discursive trap that contributes to the reinforcement, normalization, and interiorization of those characteristics, instead favoring a more complex portrait. Moreover, the discussion of the promotion of inclusive decision-making processes without a focus on contexts, subjectivities, knowledges, and authorities that interplay within those practices, can lead to partial and only numerical inclusions, reinforcing ethnicized and gendered exclusions.

The third and final sub-question aimed at discussing possible ways to challenge the reproduction of problematic discourses concerning ethnicity and gender in the Colombian COVID-19 pandemic context. Given the focus on discussing the vulnerability, invisibility, and exclusion of indigenous women and the limited amount of space reserved to their agency, a first step to challenge the normalization and interiorization of this picturing could be reserving an equal amount of space for the discussion of measures independently implemented by indigenous women and the importance of their role in the fight against the pandemic. Furthermore, in their description, generalizations should be avoided, and more space should be given to subjective descriptions that can allow indigenous women to discuss different and more complex images of themselves, in this way making them active participants in the development of their own discourses and the discourses about themselves. Moreover, when outlining inclusive solutions, such as inclusive decision-making processes, the presence of power relations should never be underestimated or ignored, rather, a prior analysis should be done in order to implement actions that challenge the reproduction and internalization of oppressive power relations and that creatively work with unequal power relations that can never be avoided (Tschakert 2016).

In that sense and to answer my main research question, "how can pandemic politics (in particular through discourses and policy measures) reinforce gendered and ethnicized oppressions in Colombia?", my observations show that it is not just the pandemic, and the measures taken in its name that are contributing to indigenous women's marginalization, but also the politics of the fight against the pandemic through the way reports and policy documents are written. This is done by reinforcing discourses that privilege the picturing of indigenous women as "vulnerable", "agentless" and "voiceless", rather than recognizing that different struggles may be simultaneously contributing to the formation of a counter-discourse, which in turn shows how indigenous women are active actors in the fight against the pandemic. Moreover, and to conclude, the lack of contextualization in the declining of practical solutions, and more specifically in introducing inclusive decision-making processes, might contribute to the reproduction of oppressions if the existence and interplay of multiple and overlapping power relations and the capacity to creatively work with unequal power relations are not engaged with.

4.5. Further research

Considering the impact of the pandemic on the whole world, and the limitations of this research (see section 2.6), three complementary research ideas are suggested. In this thesis, I have argued that it is not just the pandemic that has its victims, but the politics of pandemic management is also potentially devastating. Yet, with an increased focus on agency and power plays, the pandemic can become a trigger for

radical transformations. Feminist and decolonial research have an important role to play in helping to identify potentially transformative practices and discourses. In particular, I suggest:

1. Investigate with semi-structured interviews how inclusive participation is framed by the authors of the publications that mentioned it as an action to take to overcome the impacts of the virus adopting a gender-sensitive perspective.

2. Include in this discourse analysis the voice of indigenous women and indigenous women's organizations. This could be done in various ways, including focus group discussions in different communities, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographies.

3. Investigate how the written sources and the podcast used as empirical material for this master thesis have been produced, which were the rationales behind the decision of publishing them and why the actors involved were chosen to be able to better discuss positionality.

4.6. Conclusion

This master thesis has pursued contributing to the discussion on how discourses and policy measures can reinforce oppressions. In particular, the focus of this study was set on pandemic politics and policies and their consequences on gendered and ethnicized oppression in Colombia. By drawing on feminist postcolonial theory and implementing discourse analysis to engage with the empirical material, and answering the endeavor that guided this research, this study develops three reflection points. (1) The discussion of agency in relation to gender and ethnicity is pivotal in order to challenge discourses that picture indigenous peoples and specifically indigenous women as agentless and voiceless. This contributes to the development of a counter-discourse where they are instead described as key actors for change and the development of measures and policies attentive to the need of different groups of the Colombian population. Similarly, (2) the use of terms that hint at higher degrees of vulnerability, especially in relation to indigenous women, should be used with an awareness of their duality. On one side, adjectives such as "vulnerable" or "invisible" might raise attention on different struggles and the subsequent need for specific support, on the other, this can lead to a discursive trap in which indigenous women, in specific, naturalize and interiorize the given subject-position contributing to the reinforcement and replication of colonial discourses that picture them as voiceless and non-agentic. The third (3) and final reflection point focuses on the importance of context in the discussion of inclusive decision-making processes. Particularly, acknowledging and addressing the existence of power relations within those processes should be a prior practice to implement in order to guarantee, effective inclusion.

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Annex 1

Codes

CODE 1 Indigenous women mentioned
CODE 2 Indigenous people mentioned
CODE 3 Women mentioned
CODE 4 How are women described
    Code 4.1 Vulnerable
    Code 4.2 Dependent
    Code 4.3 Risk group
    Code 4.4 Pivotal for the fight against Covid-19
CODE 5 How are indigenous people described
    Code 5.1 Risk group
    Code 5.2 Subject of humanitarian crisis
    Code 5.3 Invisible
    Code 5.4 Custodians
    Code 5.5 Stigmatized/discriminated/marginalized/excluded
    Code 5.6 Vulnerable
    Code 5.7 Subject of inequalities
    Code 5.8 Disproportionally affected
    Code 5.9 Resilient
    Code 5.10 Key actors
CODE 6 How are indigenous women described
    Code 6.1 Discriminated
    Code 6.2 Risk group
    Code 6.3 Vulnerable
    Code 6.4: Resilient
    Code 6.5 Disproportionally affected
    Code 6.6 Obstacled
    Code 6.7 With less possibilities/ disadvantaged
    Code 6.8 Important
    Code 6.9 With limited access
    Code 6.10 Strong
    Code 6.11 Guardians
CODE 7 Explicit relation between Covid-19 and gender

Code 7.1 Description of relation between virus and gender

CODE 8 Explicit relation between Covid-19 and ethnicity

Code 8.1 Description of relation between Covid and ethnicity

Code 8.1.1 Worsening of pre-existing inequalities

Code 8.1.2 Exposure to risks

Code 8.1.3 Decrease in the respect of human rights

Code 8.1.4 Additional threat

Code 8.1.5 Threat to livelihood systems

Code 8.1.6 Opportunity

Code 8.1.7 Threat to traditions

CODE 9 Explicit relation between Covid-19 gender AND ethnicity

Code 9.1 Explicit relation between Covid-19 gender AND ethnicity

Code 9.1.1 Causing more vulnerability/exclusion

Code 9.1.2 Facing more difficult situations

Code 9.1.3 Worsening of pe-existing inequalities

Code 9.1.4 Additional challenge

Code 9.1.5 Causing devastating effects

Code 9.1.6 Obstacle to access to services

Code 9.1.7 Increase of domestic work

Code 9.1.8 Affecting livelihoods

CODE 10 Solutions described?

Code 10.1 Proposed solutions

Code 10.1.1 Collect data

Code 10.1.1.1 About gender

Code 10.1.1.2 About indigenous people

Code 10.1.2 Take into consideration multiple overlapping features of women

Code 10.1.3 Financial help

Code 10.1.4 Involvement of women in the decision-making process

Code 10.1.5 Ensure access to healthcare

Code 10.1.6 Activate support systems against violence

Code 10.1.7 Ensure access on information of rights

Code 10.1.8 Adjust all measure to local beliefs and practices

Code 10.1.9 Introduce incentives for equal distribution of domestic work

Code 10.1.10 Increase public investment in international cooperation in favor of women rights

Code 10.1.11 Involvement of indigenous leaders in the decision-making process

Code 10.1.12 Ensure access to basic services

Code 10.1.12.1 Mental healthcare

Code 10.1.12.2 Water and personal hygiene

Code 10.1.12.3 Food

Code 10.1.12.4 Proactive healthcare

Code 10.1.12.5 Education

Code 10.1.13 Develop an equity plan

Code 10.1.14 Access to land rights

Code 10.1.15 Encourage formal economic participation

Code 10.1.16 Provide translations of essential information

Code 10.1.17 Ensure respect of human rights

Code 10.2 Already existing solutions

Code 10.2.1 Security Protocols (self-protection)

Code 10.2.2 Monitoring systems

Code 10.2.3 Legal actions and complaints

Code 10.2.4 Mental care assistance

Code 10.2.5 Use of traditional medicine

Code 10.2.6 Measures to enhance food security and agriculture

Code 10.2.7 Translation and diffusion of COVID-19 information

Code 10.2.8 Hotlines and diffusion of prevention material

Code 10.2.9 Practice of community solidarity

CODE 11 Are indigenous people described as active in the adoption of solutions

CODE 12 Are women described as active in adopting solutions?

CODE 13 Are indigenous women described as active in adopting solutions?

CODE 14 If passive, who is the one who should act?

CODE 15 In the description of solution, are both gender and ethnicity dimension considered?

CODE 16 If yes, does one prevail?

Symbols

X = NOT MENTIONED