

Does travel *provide* transformation? Transformative travel experiences of gender perspectives: Latin American women in solo, independent and cross-cultural travel



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Master Thesis

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This thesis is submitted by Erika Hernando Terán, student at Wageningen University, in order to meet the requirements for the degree Master of Science in the MLE programme.

“We the women here, take a trip back into the self, travel to the deep core of our roots to discover and reclaim our coloured souls, our rituals, our religion. We reach a spirituality that has been hidden in the hearts of oppressed people under layers of centuries of traditional god-worship.”

"El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision" (1981)

Foreword and Acknowledgements

There is no appropriate word to define well enough the contributions of many minds, their time and effort to the product of this research and the course of this study. I was born in a small town in the middle of the Huastecan jungle on the northeast side of Mexico. Many limitations attached to my gender and class were the daily bread; however, I was fortunate to follow my dreams, pursuing my own experiences and walking my own path. I want to thank my parents, Roberto Hernando Farfán and Elodia Terán Juárez for their unconditional love and support throughout my entire life. They have shown me to always stay strong and to believe in myself, especially in the most difficult moments.

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SUMMARY

Contemporary Latin American women have been actively engaging in solo and independent travel for leisure. Transformative Tourism (TT) promotes this type of journey to foster great potential to transform travellers and their social environment. Most TT studies focus on the features of travel as a potential provider of transformation; this approach has placed the trip as an initiator of a transformative process and travel is often considered an isolated event in the life of the traveller. According to Adult Pedagogy, Transformation is a process to deeply change our frames of reference. These are systems of beliefs used to filter our ways of experiencing our world. They involve personal, sociocultural and epistemic dimensions. They are socially constructed during childhood and significantly alter our experiences in adulthood. A transformation in these frames results in empowering and emancipatory ways of living by becoming aware and critical of “universal truths” that authority figures preach and often unconsciously limit our adult life. Latin American women at various levels have appropriated patriarchal premises, often resulting in limiting and oppressive ways to experience their world. While no academic research had yet documented Latin American women’s leisure experiences and engagement in perspective transformations, this master thesis explores these solo travellers’ engagement in personal, socio-cultural and epistemic transformations of gender perspectives (motherhood, family and personal freedom) with the main aim to understand how experiences in solo, independent and cross-cultural travel for leisure play a contributing role in these processes. A feminist qualitative and narrative methodology is used in this research. Semi-structured interviews with 9 Hispanic Latin American female solo travellers were held in order to retrieve their life and leisured solo travel stories of transformation. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) guides this research by identifying key triggers such as disorienting dilemmas, affective learning and critical reflection in their three previously mentioned domains. Additionally, a simple online survey was conducted to 130 Latin American female travellers from social network groups to sketch a previously inexistent solo traveller basic profile. The results show the Latin American solo traveller is generally a single, relatively young (26-35 years old) and well-educated woman who travels to experience new cultures and lifestyles. In the core methodology of this research, narratives find that solo travel for leisure is a step in a more complex and broader life transformative process which extends before, during and after their leisured solo journey and make use of other types of solo travel such as educational International travel. The roles that solo travel for leisure play are found to be different along the stages of their life, this research suggests a categorization based on their first solo leisured travel in three different roles; first as a consequence of an initiated transformative process, second as a reminder or confirmation of a previous transformation from educational travel or thirdly as an initiator of transformation.

1. Introduction

Contemporary women around the world have been increasingly engaging in the performance of travel for leisure purposes as active participants (Wilson, 2004). Throughout the last decades, women have opened their way towards one of the most pleasurable expressions of freedom: traveling on their own (Heimtun, 2012). Solo and independent travel in women is a growing trend characterized by females who are choosing to travel without the companionship of any partners or the support of mainstream commercial tourism services (Matthews-Sawyer McCullough, and Myers, 2002; McNamara and Prideaux, 2010). It is argued that embarking on a *journey on her own* (Wilson, 2004) foment absolute freedom of choice allowing female travellers to challenge themselves, leading to an increased sense of self-determination and personal freedom (Harris and Wilson, 2007; Wilson and Little, 2011). Engaging in the pursuit of new experiences, learning and self-awareness (Bond, 1997, in McNamara and Prideaux, 2010) these travel experiences are alleged to additionally allow "...a personal space which permitted the rewriting of the script of what it [...] [is] to be a woman" (Warner-Smith, 2000, p. 44); in other words, a space for perspective transformations. Transformative Tourism (TT) is an incipient field which promotes the potential of travelling experiences to significantly, profoundly and powerfully *transform* the traveller and thus his/her society (Lean, 2012; Reisinger, 2013; Sampaio et al., 2014; Robledo and Batle, 2015; UNWTO, 2016). Traveling experiences such as solo travel involving challenges and cross-cultural encounters (Wilson, 2004; Lyons, 2010) are claimed to foster enormous potential to transform our own taken for granted ways of living the world (Reisinger, 2013) as well as to become aware of our societies' limiting paradigms or "collectively held meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 46). While TT's media, marketing and academic literature focuses on the travel features *to foster* transformation (Sampaio, Simoni, and Isnart, 2014), TT emphasizes travel as the possible *provider* or *starter* of change (Robledo and Batle, 2015). TT overlooks the roles that solo travel actually is portrayed within the travellers' *broader life transformative process*, where transformation may not strictly be the *result* of an isolated travel experience.

Transformation in the field of Adult Pedagogy is defined as a process to change our perspectives or our frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Frames of reference or meaning schemes¹ are the structures of beliefs and assumptions through which we assimilate our experiences (Taylor, 2000). "Frames of reference are primarily the result of cultural assimilation and the idiosyncratic influences of primary caregivers" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6) constructed during our childhood. While in adulthood, experiences are to a big extent the

¹ Frames of reference and Meaning schemes are used interchangeably throughout this thesis

way lessons in life are learned (O'Sullivan, 1999), adult learning is understood as "a process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). It is argued that experiences or ideas that fall outside of our established frames of reference tend to be not tolerated, rejected or considered abnormal. However, whenever circumstances allow, a traveller or "transformative learner" (Cranton, 1994) is able to transform her/his established frame of reference through their *psychological* (ideas about one-self and one's capacities), *sociocultural* (the way the world works), and *epistemic* (how knowledge is constructed) domains (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) claims that certain key triggering components in a non-linear process should be present for transformation in these domains to occur, such as disorienting dilemmas, affective learning and critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000; Shaw, 2013). TLT argues that transforming our frames of reference results in emancipatory and empowering ways of thinking while critically reflecting on "absolute truths" established by society and other authority figures (Freire, 1970; O'Sullivan, 1999). "The move to a transformed perspective enables us to see how dependency producing and oppressive institutionalized social practices, norms and cultural codes [are, and] must be changed through social action" (Mezirow, 1993, p. 152).

While frames of reference are built by early education and cultural assets (Cranton, 1994), Latin American women at various levels have appropriated patriarchal paradigms and premises related to their gender (Herrera Santi, 2000; Novo, 2003) resulting in "...dependency producing and oppressive..." (Mezirow, 1993, p. 152) ways to experience their world; for instance embedded premises which attach *Femininity* to traditional female roles: family and motherhood (Jelin, 1996; Ramos Escaldón, 2007) or premises which constantly question female capacities, personal freedom and self-determination (Molina, 2006; Lamas, 2007). TT' research demonstrates that travelling solo is a way to transform these dysfunctional premises (UNWTO, 2016). Therefore, this study explores Latin American female solo travellers' engagement in personal, socio-cultural and epistemic transformations of gender perspectives with the aim to understand how solo, independent and cross-cultural travel for leisure plays a role in these processes. By using Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000), this research finds that travellers in this study make use of solo travel for leisure as a step in a complex and broader life transformative process which extends before, during and after their leisured solo journey and make use of other types of solo travel such as educational International travel. The roles that solo travel for leisure play in these transformations are found to be complex and different along the stages of the participants' life, therefore this research suggests a categorization based on their first solo leisured travel in three different roles; first as a *consequence* of an initiated transformative process, second as a *reminder or confirmation* of a previous transformation from educational travel or thirdly as an *initiator* of transformation at a very young age.

1.1 Problem statement

Gendered frames of reference have been surrounding our daily activities, our performances of travel (Enloe, 1989) and scientific research (Lerner, 1976; Rubin, 1986). According to Li, Wen and Leung (2011) “among the extant work on gender and tourism, very few studies have examined gender and pleasure travel behaviour...” (p. 413) as well as their experiences. While an obvious increasing phenomena of solo independent travel is being performed by contemporary women around the world (Wilson and Little, 2011) it has been until recently that feminist thought, particularly in western tourism literature has been addressing the experiences of contemporary western women as travellers. As Harris and Wilson (2007) stress, “the study of [...] experiences of women as tourists is still in its incipient stages compared to other fields of study...” (p. 235). The growing body of literature on travel experiences of women not only testifies uniquely to motivations and hindrances that women face while traveling solo but fails to recognize the non-western women as a traveller (Cantú, 2006; Li, Wen and Leung 2011); especially as independent agents and decision makers. Existing studies on women travel experiences exclusively observe female travellers from the West, such as Australia, Great Britain, Sweden, and United States (Wilson, 2004; Harris and Wilson, 2007; Fullagar, 2007; Dahlman and Stafströ, 2013). For instance, Guo (2014) argues that Chinese women have been disregarded as well from the social studies of leisure and travel “yet, their participation in these activities extends back to the end of Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and through to the contemporary period” (p. 179). While Western-centric perspectives have dominated tourism and feminist studies; Latin American academia has not been exempted from this same scope (Cantú, 2006; Oehmichen Bazán, 2013). Naught Latin, feminist and tourism literature have addressed contemporary Latin female traveller experiences and failed to identify her as an independent traveller. Western and Latin academic research on tourism and gender have predominantly studied Latin women from a neoliberalist and orientalist approach (Oehmichen Bazán, 2013); regarding her as the *local* (MacCannell, 1976), the *producers of tourism* (Oehmichen Bazán, 2013), the *tourées* (Cohen and Cohen, 2015) or as *gendered hosts* (Gibson, 2001), and thus not as the traveller, guest or consumer of experiences. Essentially, in Latin America, women in tourism academic studies impersonate the oppressed and powerless women in rural communities; empowered and/or affected by the tourism industry (Fernández Aldecua and Martínez Barón, 2010; Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Oehmichen Bazán (2013) for instance, critiques the way Mexican anthropology studies have languished in targeting the tourism phenomenon from the angle of consumption of experiences since the academy has been more interested in the perspective of production of tourism. This may be explained to a certain extent by the economic and socio-political events related to colonization throughout globalization

processes that occurred in the history of Latin America² (Cabrera, 2009; Aman and Ireland, 2015). Latin American social and anthropological studies related to female travel experiences found in this research focus on female travel-writers from the XIX century (Szurmuk, 2000; Spicer-Escalante, 2011; Ulloa Inostroza, 2012) through analysis centred in social critique discourses and changed perspectives emerged in their journey anthologies. These studies position the central role of female travel experiences settled in the socio-historical project of the XIX century imperialism (Ranero Castro, 2007; Molloy, 2010; Ulloa Inostroza, 2012). Contemporary studies related to the female Latin American travel experience are found in the vast array of publications on migration of the *invisible women* (Molloy, 2010) for instance the experience of Central and South Americans migrating to the “north” or other western countries (Martínez-San Miguel, 1996; Muñóz, 2003; Galeano, 2014; Maisterra Sierra, 2012). Recently, the work of Cuartas (2010) and Martínez Benavides (2014) address the experiences of contemporary young Latin women —Colombia and Mexico travelling to France and USA respectively— in au pair travel; however, their significant work in addressing these women’s travel experiences fall on issues of migration through domestic labour approaches. The growing knowledge of the participation of contemporary Latin female travellers in international solo and independent travel has been reflected through informal sources of knowledge such as internet websites and social media. Particularly it is noticed the growing participation of Latin women as travel-bloggers (i.e., www.dianamiaux.com, <http://mujeryviajera.com>, and <https://angheita.wordpress.com> among many others [last retrieved 06.04.2016]) and as members of travel groups websites. Most of these blogs and travel websites display experiences, travel guides, suggestions and critiques on issues such as fear to travel alone, empowerment and change through travel, and women’s roles in patriarchal societies (<http://www.sinmapa.net/>) among others. Traveling solo to international, regional and domestic destinations such as Asia, Oceania, Europe, North, Central and South America constitute a travel trend in Latin women. Travel groups such as *Mujeres Viajeras*, (Women travellers, with 9,623 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]), *Mochileras y viajeras* (female backpackers and travellers, with 9,872 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]) and *Soy Viajera* (I’m a (female) traveller, with 12,999 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]) have been connecting a growing community of Latin women in which solo travel is highly promoted. Other groups from Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru or Latin independent traveller’s groups have approximately more than 1, 587, 540 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016] among these communities, where demographic evidence suggests that Latin women are more prominent in the outbound traveling market than Latin men (ETC, 2011a; PROMPERU, 2001).

² Further developed in chapter2, section 2.2.2, p. 16

1.2 Scientific objectives and relevance

By addressing this gap of academic knowledge in the scientific feminist inquiry and non-western travellers' experiences and contributing to the incipient growing literature on the field of Transformative Tourism (TT), this master thesis aims to understand the role that experiences in solo, independent and cross-cultural travel play within their personal, socio-cultural and epistemic transformations of gender premises embodied by Hispanic Latin American solo female travellers. To achieve such aim the main research question is:

How do the experiences of female Latin American travellers participating in extended cross-cultural solo and independent sojourns for leisure purposes play a contributing role in their transformation of gendered perspectives (female roles: family and motherhood and personal freedom and self-determination) in Latin American societies?

In order to address this research question, literature on female travel, gender in Latin American patriarchal societies and transformative tourism are inquired, combined and addressed aiming to situate this research in context and to add to these fields of academic knowledge. Through social media travel groups adult Latin American female participants (who have acknowledged experiencing a transformation of perspectives in regards to gender paradigms through travelling solo, independently and in cross-cultural travel) have been recruited and have shared their life and travel experiences for this research. The experiences of these participants range from one first solo travel to a wide experience of travelling solo. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is used to gain a deeper understanding of their transformation process through the use of identified key triggers and dimensions of transformation in this theory of adult learning in their life narratives. A feminist narrative and qualitative methodology is utilized to depict their life narratives placing solo travel within the broader and very own life transformational learning process. This research is based on a constructivist approach; where the world, identities and realities are socially constructed (Butler, 1995) and a feminist approach, defined as "...a set of practices and perspectives that affirm differences among women and promote women's interests, health, and safety, locally and abroad. [...] it includes the aspiration to live and act in ways that embody feminist thought and promote justice and the well-being of all women" (DeVault and Gross, 2007, p. 174). This research not only studies the travel and life experiences of Latin women, but at the same time the participants' engagement in this research fostered feelings of empowerment, wellbeing and content by being considered and heard; which is one of the goals of the feminist inquiry.

1.3 Thesis Structure

Following this introductory section, this section provides an overview of the structure (see figure 1) within this thesis. Chapter 2 entails the Literature Review which begins with the conceptualization of the term solo and independent travel and addresses its debates in travel and tourism academia as a first section. In order to set women experiences into the context of travel, the second section is followed by existing knowledge on the phenomenon of Western and Latin American women within the solo travel experience, on issues of history, society, gender and mobilities. This section is preceded by literature which explores travel patterns in contemporary Latin Americans attempting to gather the existing naught knowledge on Latin American women who engage in contemporary solo and independent travel. The following fourth section provides knowledge on gender perspectives and female roles in Latin American patriarchal societies within a socio-political and historical approach to these women's trajectory of *limitation* based on Latin American and western literature. This chapter finalizes with a section dedicated to Transformational Tourism (TT) developed by western academia, exploring the potential that travel fosters to transform traveller's perceptions about the world as well as the emerging debates of travel as the *provider* of transformation processes.

Chapter 3 relates to the Theoretical Framework; a guideline for the assortment of the phenomena in this research. Transformational Learning Theory (TLT) has been used as the guiding framework of this research, grounded on a constructivist approach; this Adult Learning Theory is based on the epistemological premise that the social world is constructed from perceptions and actions of social actors, and these perceptions are mutable (Bryman and Bell, 2015) such as gender social constructions (Butler, 1995). Concepts utilized in this research are described, such as frames of references, psychological or personal, sociolinguistic and epistemic domains of frames of references, as well as TLT triggers; disorienting dilemmas, affective learning, critical reflection, culture and context. And explains the process an adult undertakes to transform its own perspectives.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology used to achieve the aforementioned aims. A qualitative feminist approach is utilized where female participant's life and travel narratives are explored to better understand their experiences of transformation as well as taking the opportunity to raise their unheard voices (DeVault and Gross, 2007). Narratives through semi-structured interviews and online correspondence to 9 female solo travellers from Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America are the core of this research; however as a complement to the lack of academic knowledge in Latina's solo traveller patterns, a simple and basic survey is conducted to 130 Latin American females (also Hispanic) who engage in

solo travel, in order to obtain basic knowledge on their profile as travellers such as their demographics and motivations.

Chapter 5 displays the Analysis of Data. The results found through the methodology are displayed as a matter of individual narratives of life and travel experiences denoting the contributing role of solo travel in their transformative process by using the triggers of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). While the transformative process considers a complex and intertwined range of factors (Lean, 2012), relevant events of their travels, life experiences and skills of the participants are briefly shown, selecting a couple of triggering occurrences inside and outside of their solo travel for leisure which seemed relevant to illustrate their transformation. These narratives are divided into three sections taking as reference their first solo travel for leisure in their stage of life. The aforementioned is also accompanied by the results of the survey.

Chapter 6 and last chapter discuss the findings from analysis of data linking to the concepts described throughout the Theoretical Framework, by answering the main question and sub-questions from this research. Conclusions are drawn related to the findings and objectives established in chapter 3 and respond to the main and sub-questions established in this research. Conclusions and suggestions for further research are shown and discussed in order to conclude this Master thesis.

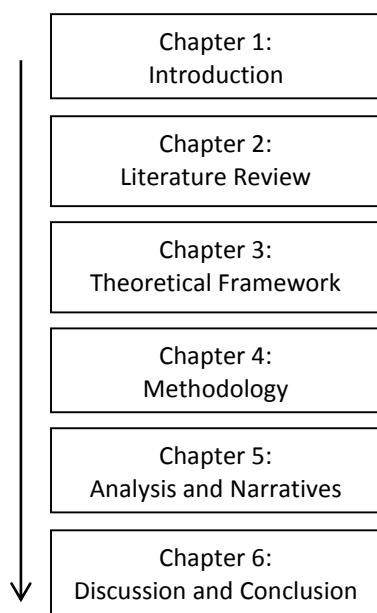


Figure 1 Thesis structure (Individually composed figure, 2016)

2. Literature Review

This chapter offers main background knowledge and foundations to the current subject in question by delimiting the focus specifications in this study. As previously stated, this section begins with the conceptualization of the term solo and independent travel in order to clarify to a certain extent the academic debate on this travel trend. It is followed by the review of the body of literature on the phenomenon of western and Latin American women engagement in travel as a gendered leisure activity revolving on issues of history, society, gender and mobilities; this section helps position the female individual in their historical and socio-cultural endeavour to participate in the travel as an independent and active agent. However, due to the lack of academic knowledge on Latin American women as independent travellers and their experiences, this section attempts to gather as much as possible literature which describes the Latin Americans travellers. The third section relates to the gendered perspectives and female roles in Latin American patriarchal societies within a socio-political and historical approach to these women's trajectory of social expectations based on Latin American and western literature. This section attempts to illustrate the context and cultural influence of Latin American societies' perceptions towards the conception of the "feminine" in issues about motherhood, family, personal freedom, and self-agency. This chapter finalizes with literature on transformational tourism developed by western academia, exploring the potential that travel fosters to transform traveller's perceptions about the world, their society and themselves.

2.1 Independent and solo travel and travellers

Women around the world have been engaging in solo and independent travel for leisure as avid participants; they "... are choosing this form of travel without the companionship of partners (male or female) or the support of packaged trips or tours" (McNamara and Prideaux, 2010, p. 253). This implies a distinction between solo and independent travel. Firstly, Independent travel in Yamamoto and Gill (1999)'s research was categorized as one of the three types of tourism based on the use of commercialized tourism services: escorted tourism, package tourism, and independent tourism. Escorted tourism implies the hiring of tour guide personnel (i.e. survival-adventure guides, mountain guides); package tourism involves previously arranged services such as transportation, flights, meals and accommodation within a tour. While Fully Independent Travellers (FITs) conduct their own travel arrangements all by themselves (although they often make limited use of tourism intermediaries such as commercial flights), they do not choose to use mainstream mass tourism channels; planned commercial excursions, all-inclusive accommodation, tours, and other tourist related activities. This categorization helps us understand independent travel from the angle of dependency of commercialized tourism services. However independent

travel has often been confused with Solo travel; Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger (2009) clarify and explain that "...the term independent traveller, [...] includes persons who would have only booked air travel, and thus have flexibility in their itinerary and some degree of freedom in where they choose to travel [...] [; a] Solo traveller would be a part of the independent traveller's group, referring to a person who arrives in a country alone [...] [therefore] the term only refers to one's arrival status" (p. 218). Moreover, many variations take place within these terms, for instance, planning a trip independently and arriving at a destination alone, yet spending that trip with a partner, family or group would not be considered solo travel (Wilson, 2004). For instance, backpacking, may also be a typology which foster travel solo and independently (Cohen, 2011) however it is known that backpackers additionally make use of hotels and spas (Zamaraita, 2015) as commercial services. While, solo travellers may not be fully independent (FITs), there are studies that indicate their preference for flexibility and freedom rather than a more structured organized holiday (Li, Wen, and Leung, 2011). Attempting to categorize solo travel, Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger's (2009) study aims to breakdown this segment based on travel status by transportation usage on arrival and departure within a sample of Swiss solo travellers. They suggested four types of travel:

1. SINGLE-SOLO: travel by persons who come from single households and travel alone
 2. SINGLE-GROUP: travel by persons who come from one-person households, traveling with a group of other people
 3. COLLECTIVE-SOLO: travel by persons who do not live alone, but travel solo
 4. COLLECTIVE-GROUP: travel by persons who come from collective households, but take off by themselves to travel as part of a group
- (Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger, 2009, p. 219)

Evidently, the aforementioned definitions and categorizations involve a wider and more complex variety of factors, imminently affirming the heterogeneous assets of this type of travel and travellers.

Tourism research suggests "...that solo travellers are mostly either young or female, and/or have a comparably high affinity towards adventure and backpacking tourism" (Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger, 2009, p. 218). Feminist studies regarding female solo travel involve as well emotional assets within the journey experience. For instance, Heimtun (2012) identifies in the solo traveller two modes of experiences in her study of Norwegian women. A negative side, referred as the solo or *Loner*, "...often produced painful feelings of being 'left out' and a fear of loneliness..." (p. 92) and in a brighter side the *independent solo traveller* which traveling alone provides the opportunity to explore their own limitations and new territories; enhancing feelings of "...independence, freedom and being in charge of where to eat, who to talk to and so on" (p. 93). McNamara and Prideaux (2010) argue that "solo women travellers are not loners; they are bold, confident, gutsy adventurers.

When they hear the beckoning call to travel, they don't wait for or depend upon a husband, friend or tour" (p. 253). Other academics suggest that solo female travellers are highly influenced and concerned with issues of safety and fear (Wilson and Little, 2008; Berdychevsky and Gibson, 2015). Moreover most academic and feminist research regarding travel motives of western women travellers, range from challenge oneself, meet new people, extend beyond personal comfort zones, develop feelings of autonomy and independence and self-empowerment (Butler, 1995; Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Wilson and Little, 2005; Harrison and Wilson, 2007; McNamara and Prideaux, 2010; Heimtun, 2012) which indicates the contributions behind the pursuit of such experiences.

Arrival, departure, tourism services dependency, companionship, motivations, and emotions are not the only significant aspects in the discussion of this type of travel. Solo and independent travellers engage in a variety of social and recreational activities, from cultural, adventure, eco-tourism, relaxation, spiritual and backpacking (McNamara and Prideaux, 2010) Not forgetting educational travel, a popular way to travel solo, where the student may arrive alone to a destination and he/she often engage in solo and independent travel for leisure at *off-school* time (Kanning, 2008). Furthermore, a more interesting term for this type of travel is found in the feminist research *a journey on her own*. Wilson (2004) defines the independent and solo traveller as a "diverse, complex and growing market of tourists which seem to have needs and motivations different from the mass, organized tourist" (p. 8). Therefore considering this mosaic of multifaceted factors and considering this research started as an exploratory approach to leisure experiences in the Latin female solo traveller context. Solo independent travellers in this study are identified as Latin-Hispanic American women who arrive at a destination alone, who may spend an extent of the trip with new people met during their trips, but mostly travel at the destinations alone. These travellers do not engage in travel to a destination within an arranged package tour, group or trip (Wilson, 2004) and while their trip may include a variety of types of travel (backpacking, cultural, religious, and educational) they must engage in solo travel for leisure and recreation purposes.

2.2 Women and Travel

Contemporary women around the world have been increasingly participating in the performance of travel and leisure as active participants (Wilson, 2004). Throughout the last decades, women have made their way towards one of the most pleasurable expressions of freedom traveling on their own (Heimtun, 2012). Women empowerment and socio-political changes have multiplied women's opportunities which have been constantly expanding through the intensification of globalization (Scheiner, 2014). The increasing access to education for women in many regions across the globe has represented a great source of

empowerment not only in aspects of growing income and employment (Krawczyk, 1992; Wilson 2004), but for an increasing feeling of self-confidence, emancipation and personal freedom (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010; Harris and Wilson, 2007). Supporting and stimulating women in achieving economic and personal independence have led to expanding opportunities to travel and experience the world (Wilson, 2004); especially for middle-class women who live in societies that stigmatize the roles of women.

It has been argued that “tourism has depended on presumptions about Feminity and masculinity” (Enloe, 1989, p. 28). Being a woman in many societies has been intimately related to staying at home revolving on imaginaries of domesticity (Li, Wen, and Leung, 2011). While masculinity, on the contrary, has been attributed to travel, adventure and exploring (Leontidou, 1994; Wilson, 2004). In the past, and currently in some countries, if a woman stepped foot out of home with the aim to travel, and even without the escort of a well-known man, she was labelled as an “unrespectable” woman, then she stepped out of the ideological socially accepted of the *feminine* (Enloe, 1989). “However, while independent itineraries were tied up with male connotations of bravery and exploration, women did negotiate to find ways to travel and to travel independently” (Harris and Wilson, 2007, p. 237). Historically, there is a surprising number of women who, for one reason or another, undertook long journeys to the unknown; women who blurred their reputations and defied these presumptions by choosing to travel, flabbergasting the societies they lived in (Morato, 2007). Therefore, travelling for leisure in women has been defined as a ‘*heterotopia*’ or “...a space where women can resist, rather than submit to, male hegemonies and patriarchal systems of domination. [...] a form of resistance in which women become active, self-enabling participants in life rather than victims of an oppressive, patriarchal society” (Harris and Wilson, 2007, p. 239). From the western perspective, Enloe (1989) explains that during the World Wars women opted to dress up with men’s clothes and enrolled in the army; the “male disguise” provided these women with freedom to do as much as men did, such as travelling. The desire to travel was much greater than the dangers of facing war, hunger and the unknown. In the mid-1800s a notable trend of independent women travellers increased dramatically (Pemble, 1987) including female travel writing (Spicer-Escalante, 2011). While for the time, women’s voices were limited and restricted; anthologies and guidebooks of brave women travellers have provided historical accounts of such great journeys and the experiences they encountered in the “otherness” (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012) painting the canvas of the unknown world for their readers (Spicer-Escalante, 2011). During the “golden age of travel” demarcated by 19th century England’s Victorian times, a travel hype for women emerged, predominantly performed by privileged and well-educated daughters born in prestigious families (Clarke, 1988). Paving the road for contemporary women to engage in leisure international and solo experiences (Enloe, 1989), the prominent contribution of Victorian women travellers such

as Mary Kingsley, Fleur Tristan and Frances Calderón de la Barca as the tip of the spear in the shift of feminine forms of travel (Enloe, 1989). Within great challenges and admirable feats, concurrently the similar phenomenon was taking place in Latin America, however through their own diverse socio-political and historical contexts and processes.

2.2.1 Latin American women and the travel experience:

A historical approach

Ideological assumptions of travel and gender were not a particularity of the western world. There is evidence that shows that indigenous ethnic groups in Latin America also restricted travel to masculine activities; for instance Mexican cultures such as the *Nahuas*, performed a tradition at parturition. They cut the navel-string of a baby girl and buried it under the stove —*tlecuil*— representing that her place was home; while the navel-string of a son was buried at the top of the hill thereby he would be brave, work in the fields and travel far away (González and Iracheta, 2006). Traveling for a diversity of women around the continent may be difficult to access and address, however, literature on privileged women in Latin America at the XVII century was found available and relevant due to their documented engagement in travel for pleasure (Spicer-Escalante, 2011). For instance, lower economic classes would engage in religious pilgrimages to hegemonic spiritual centres (Cohen and Cohen, 2012), whereas women in higher classes, travel experiences related to cross-cultural and international types of leisure (Ferrús, 2011). While it is well debated that western societies are not the initiators of changes in social processes of female emancipation (Valenzuela Rodríguez, 2012), as they themselves have brought to the new world many limiting conceptions through religion and oppression (Cabrera, 2009); it has been argued that many upper-class Latin American women have been inspired by western women's pioneering and their progressive cultures (Suárez, 2009). Whereas western women travelled to the new or former colonies such as India, Indonesia, and the Caribbean, upper-class Latin women enjoyed of travels to the United States and Europe especially to Spain and France within "the *creole version* of the grand tour" (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012, p. 8 my translation). Latinas of the era also travelled inside the region, notwithstanding the popularity of the western centres (Batticuore, 1996; Ferrús, 2011). These travels were often with educational connotations (artistic and literary instruction and learning new languages) and to meet a culture they inherited, but also "to see a world that was losing its former glory" (Ferrús, 2011, p. 64 my translation). Furthermore, there is evidence that women from Chile (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012), Mexico (Ludec, 2007), Argentina (Szurmuk, 2000), and Cuba (Spicer-Escalante, 2011) travelled solo for leisure and in extended periods of time. In that epoch male chauvinism was deeply rooted in societies (Reyes Aguinaga, 1998), for instance in Mexico, the first travel content in magazines exclusively aimed for *Señoritas* was edited and published exposing travel experiences only

from male foreigners, pilgrims and poets. *“El Semanario de las Señoritas Mexicanas, educación científica, moral y literaria del bello sexo”* (1841) suggested limited access to education for privileged Mexican women, until then reserved only for men. However, while edited by men, it portrayed a content that would enhance her role as a mother, wife and home-maker (Ludec, 2007). While, education was the road to emancipation for many women and travellers (Ludec, 2007); increasing and progressive publications of Latin women travel experiences had been stimulated not only by education but by the modernization of means of transport, constituting a privilege that turned into a trend for bourgeois societies in the second half of the century. The travel experience was considered prominently modern (Spicer-Escalante, 2011). *“With the growing economic profile in the Hispanic-American continent in the 19th century, after the independence of European empires, the Hispanics increasingly travelled towards cultural and economic power centres. Women travelled even more to relevant hegemonic destinations of the era: Europe was the traditional destination for the Latin elite and also increasingly to the United States...”* (Spicer-Escalante, 2011, p. 2 my translation). Whichever their origins were, these women *“...insisted upon the separateness of their own experiences”* (Enloe, 1989, p. 23), demonstrating in such era, the need of embarking on a journey on their own; as Harris and Wilson (2007) state *“no longer were they travelling merely as accompanists [...] women were travelling independently and alone”* (p. 237).

In these times is denoted that traveling had the potential to stimulate a shift in social paradigms through self-reflection and reflection on societal structures; upon their return to their country of origin from their extended journeys, these women had changed, and so their ideologies which no longer fit the ones of the Latin societies (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012). The journey was alleged to result in their empowerment, awareness and self-determination. For instance the Cuban traveller Gertrudis Gómez de Avellanada, in her journeys to Europe she returns claiming a new role and greater participation in political and social life back in Cuba (Ferrús, 2011). In the same vein Ulloa Inostroza's (2012) study on the social critique constructed in the travel narratives of the Chilean traveller Maipina de la Barra Lira (1834 – 1904), dedicates a chapter on the discourse of self-transformation through her journeys in South America and Europe. Maipina's narratives shape a social critique of Chile and upon her arrival takes an active role in diverse projects of public matters particularly in favour of women's education, critiquing the role of the Latin American women as the *“ángel del hogar”* (angel of home), the *“republican mother”* and the educator. Ulloa Inostroza (2012) highlights that Maipina was part of the group of *“new citizens”* of the era; the new citizens who ventured in the first steps of shifting social paradigms and claim the banner of feminism on their time. In a similar case, Eduarda Mancilla an Argentinian traveller from the same century travelled extendedly to the United States. In his book, Spicer-Escalante (2011) analyses in Mancilla's travel narratives her

concerns on gender issues of the time, among others he underpins that for those male dominant and gender limiting times “these women were active agents of their own destiny,” (p. 2 my translation). By leaving the space of home to travel, on her own will, without the companion of any male figure and in an independent manner, namely, financing their travels through the product of their own work, writing about it and publishing it, it was then for the women in the XIX century, something astounding, even extraordinary (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012). The growing interest in the narratives of travel of women in Latin America in the last decade has highlighted that brave Latin American women experiences of travel already questioned not only their societies and the role of women play in them, but their own identity as women (Szurmuk, 2000; Ulloa Inostroza 2012). It was then that Latin women’s participation in travel and tourism allowed space to engage in a different and enriched perspectives manifesting knowledge and discovery, and mapping changes of the epoch on the world in which they moved and that they contributed to modify (Ferrús, 2011).

2.2.2 Latin America: gender and modern mobility

Latin American females throughout their diverse nuances, origins and classes have become increasingly active by performing new roles throughout public spheres reflected predominantly in the economic sector (Jelin, 1996; Rowlands, 1997). For instance, in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) female participation in the labour market had increased enormously, “women have played a critical role in achieving the [30% of] poverty declines of the last decade, with their labor market participation [...] from 2000 to 2010” (World Bank, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, slowly, Latin women have been as well participating in governmental and political positions (UNWOMEN, 2014; World Bank, 2012); for example Michelle Bachelet current president of Chile (2016) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner; former president of Argentina (2007-2015). Furthermore other social transformations have indeed influenced women in trying out new roles, for instance in Latin America the birth rate has declined substantially since the mid-1960s, when before for instance, the population in Argentina was growing by 3.5% a year (ETC, 2011b) seeing women’s choice to procrastinate family-making as a phenomenon (UNWTO-WYSE, 2012). Moreover, women had made their power visible not only through economy, politics and family planning; travelling has also been augmented by the women’s participation, (Wilson, 2004; Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2005). The quality of life had increased; women and young women from emerging countries have started to travel for the first time to distant places (UNWTO-WYSE, 2012). By expanding information and easier access to travel around the world globalization keeps playing a significant force to travel (Scheiner, 2014; Sampaio, et al., 2014). For women in Latin America, the intensification of travel and tourism fostered “the idea that the world is out there for the taking by ordinary citizens [...] alongside the growth

of tourism as an industry” (Enloe, 1989, p. 25). It is recognized that Latin American women are not only the decision makers in family holidays (Muñoz, 2003), but they have increased their participation in adventure, exploring, traveling solo and other types of travel (Hernando, 2016).

The lack of available academic knowledge —Hispanic and Western— on the travel patterns, behaviours, and motivations for leisure travel of contemporary Latin women must be noticed. Western and Latin academic research on tourism and gender have predominantly studied Latin women from an orientalist approach (Said, 1978); where the knowledge of the “non-western” justifies an imperialist domination. This perspective that is arguably “othering”, it observes the Latina as the “local”, (MacCannell, 1976) but not as the visitor; as the “producers of tourism” but not as consumers of leisure activities (Oehmichen Bazán, 2013); as the “toureers” (Cohen and Cohen, 2015) or as “gendered hosts” (Gibson, 2001), but never as the traveller, the guest or the consumer of experiences. For instance, in Latin America, women in the tourism field impersonate the powerless indigenous woman in rural communities; empowered and/or affected by the tourism industry; from artisans and food providers to hotel maids, waitresses and housekeepers (Fernández Aldecua and Martínez Barón, 2010; Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Oehmichen Bazán (2013) critiques the way for instance Mexican anthropology studies have languished in targeting the tourism phenomenon from the angle of consumption of experiences, since the academy has been more interested and prominent in the perspective of production of tourism (Muñoz, 2003). This may be explained to a certain extent by the economic and socio-political events related to colonization, industrialization throughout globalization processes that occurred in the history of Latin America³ (Cabrera, 2009; Aman and Ireland, 2015). Much of what is known about Latin women and travel experience is embedded in migration literature. The vast array of publications on migration of the *invisible women* (Molloy, 2010) overtake the stage of women mobilities in Latin American academia, for instance the experience of

³ Cabrera (2009) explains from an historical point of view the predominant production perspective of Latin America. “From the colonization throughout the independence of Spain any other activity that was not related to gold search was prohibited in Latin America, even agriculture. This led to 300 years were the economy of the occidental Indies stopped. After the independence, New republics faced a series of problems (the destruction of the little infrastructure and a high number of vulnerable people, product of own collateral damage of a long and violent wars) which expected the help of the new state and in particular: what to do to guide this new freedom?, a freedom that was barely understood and known how to handle. The search for new business partners, questions about the new national identity, replacement of external ruling classes by internal not so equitable justice, the power to calm the anxieties of a people in appalling conditions were the greatest distress of the free Latin America. There the consequences of the years of economic and productive “pause” already began. There was not much to produce or to exploit, the few resources left by then had not much “value” (such as water, coal, oil, etc.), it was a weak industrial infrastructure. Trade then was understood as the possibility of exchange needs to solve the situation. From that moment Globalization was present and Latin America begins its journey through the world market by posing the first question: what can Latin America offer to the other [West]?” (p. 40 my translation).

central and South Americans crossing the borders to the *north*, and other western countries in search for a better life, work or meeting their relatives (Martínez-San Miguel, 1996; Muñoz, 2003; Maisterra Sierra, 2012; Galeano, 2014). Recently the work of Cuartas (2010) and Martínez Benavides (2014) address the experiences of young Latin women — from Colombia and Mexico travelling to France and USA— in *au pair* travel however, highlighting their significant work in addressing Latin women travel experiences, their work fall on issues of experiences of migration through domestic labour approaches.

Aside from feminist and tourism social studies, the closer literature related to Latin Americans as travellers (both women and men) which were found somewhat useful, are outbound tourist profiles. According to IPK (2011) the four countries in Latin America that emit more outbound tourists are Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Chile, the traveller profile from these four emerging markets corresponds to a relatively young (24 -44 years old) upper-middle or upper-class traveller who usually travels abroad for pleasure. Specific information on the outbound Latin American female traveller points towards their leadership in the participation travel for leisure; in the mentioned countries women account for more than the half of the travel for pleasure outbound population (Argentina: 51.6% (MINTUR, 2015), Chile: 52% (SERNATUR, 2015) and Mexico: 52% (SECTUR, 2013)) From all governmental and institutional data on women as travellers on these countries, only Chile has shown a market outbound tourism research which its fundamental axis is gender “*Informe Turismo Emisivo Según Género 2014*” (SERNATUR, 2015). Argentina’s and Mexico’s reports on international and domestic travel display minimal data on gender. Despite this lack of attention, more consistent and specific knowledge on their travel experience is found through informal sources of Internet such as social media.

2.2.2.1 Contemporary Latinas and Solo and Independent travel

While demographic and profile market studies indicate that Latin women are either half or over the half of population who travel for pleasure (ETC, 2011a; ETC, 2011b; SERNATUR, 2015; MINTUR, 2014) the lack of knowledge on their travel preferences, especially on solo independent traveling remains imminently evident. In contemporary times, through the privileged access to information technologies, these sources suggest that women in Latin America are actively taking part in this global phenomenon through international and domestic solo travel. This has been reflected on websites and social media; particularly it is noticed the growing participation of Latinas as travel-blog writers (See Image 1) (i.e., <http://www.dianamius.com>, <http://marcandoelpolo.com/>, <http://mujeryviajera.com>, <http://bitacora-viajera.com/>, <http://www.sinmapa.net/>, and <https://angheita.wordpress.com/> [last retrieved 06.04.2016]) and as members of travel-related groups websites which include female participation in solo travel. Many of these

blogs and travel groups display experiences, travel guides, suggestions and critiques of issues such as fear to travel alone and the role of a woman in society (<http://www.sinmapa.net/>) among many related topics. Traveling solo to South America, Europe, Asia and other international destinations constitute a travel trend in Latin women. [Mujeres Viajeras](#), (See Image 2) (Female travellers, with 9,623 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]), [Mochileras y viajeras](#) (Female backpackers and travellers, with 9,872 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]), [Soy Viajera](#) (I'm a [female] traveller, with 12,999 members [Last retrieved, 19.05.2016]) have been connecting a growing community of Latin women travellers and growing in newly added members. Other social network groups from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico and Peru or *Latin Backpackers* have approximately more than 1, 587, 540 members among these communities⁴ where women are active participants. These women travellers encourage their female readers and members to travel the world alone by stressing the sense of freedom, empowerment and transformation that solo traveling may hold. Pamela a solo traveller from Chile, member of the Facebook group *Mochileras y Viajeras*, states:

"It is by far one of the best experiences of my life [...] The first trip was a kind of reconstruction of myself, understanding without the gaze of others, is an infinite freedom, then I understood who I am, no one is better company than yourself". [Retrieved 06.05.2016 and translated from: https://www.facebook.com/groups/mochilerasviajeras/permalink/1053103318090688/?comment_id=1053135628087457¬if_t=group_comment¬if_id=1462200302925653]

Dani from Argentina suggests that by travelling solo

"The imaginary boundaries that I had been creating were disappearing one by one." [Retrieved 06.04.2016 and translated from <http://marcandoelpolo.com/consejos-para-viajar-siendo-mujer/>]

Bloggers who have travelled solo also reflect on the status quo of being a woman and a traveller in their Latin society. As Vero a travel-blog writer from Argentina states:

"In Sinmapa (travel blog) I address Latin American women because I have discovered that western women have another story, another culture and a society that encourages and supports them in this kind of ventures [...] In many countries of patriarchal societies [such as Latin America] continues to prevail that women must ask first permission from their father and then her husband, for trivial and everyday

⁴ (source: Facebook groups). https://www.facebook.com/groups/mochilerasviajeras/permalink/1053103318090688/?comment_id=1053135628087457¬if_t=group_comment¬if_id=1462200302925653

decisions such as going out with friends, college and even on issues about her own body [...] It [society] has been tried to convince us [Latin America women], generation after generation, that "travel alone" without a man that "protect" us - is dangerous. We have been confined to the scope of the family (be daughters first, then wives and later mothers). Sinmapa aims to collaborate with the role of contemporary women. Women with freedom, keen to experiment, to redefine our own limits, women eager to know the outside world, but also the inside world. Many women are crossing our planet earth with no company but their own backpack ... I want to know them and hear their stories". [<http://www.sinmapa.net/sinmapa-la-razon-de-ser/> Last retrieved, 06.05.2016]

Latin American solo travellers recognize travel as a tool for broadening perspectives and to critique their own societies (Robledo and Batle, 2015). While their experiences, destinations and motivations have not yet been academically documented, it is possible to infer their pursuit for solo and independent travel experiences, their visible outcomes and their critical reflections departing from these informal sources of knowledge. Therefore through these inspiring statements, it appears that the *Heterotopia* (Harris and Wilson, 2007) of traveling solo supports the space to resist to these hegemonies, by stimulating experiences for reflection, freedom and self-determination (Reisinger, 2013), in which gendered perspectives built from their socio-cultural patriarchal environment play an important part as they established and taken for granted conceptions of womanhood and women's roles in these societies (Rubin, 1975; Butler, 1995).

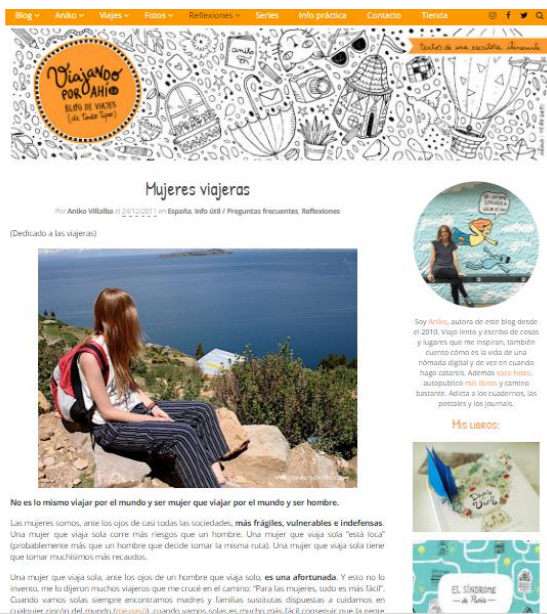


Image 1. Viajando por ahí “Travelling somewhere” Argentinian female Travel blogger

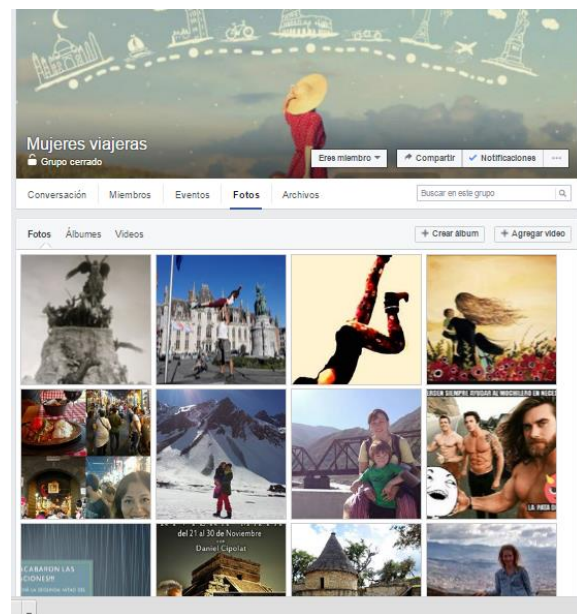


Image 2. Mujeres Viajeras “Female travellers” Facebook group

2.3 Women's roles in Latin American patriarchal societies

In order to diminish the male dominant gaze, expel social conceptions of women as passive agents and to embody women as subjects, Novo (2003) suggests that the endeavour is to examine the role that Latin patriarchal societies have granted women with, in regards to its contributions to their own social and personal development. It is impossible to understand our present conditions without knowing where one comes from (Grasek, 2008), and considering that “frame of references”⁵ shape our experiences. Contemporary women perspectives are also influenced and shaped by experiences of historical and cultural past, societies' paradigms and the past experienced by our parents or caregivers (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore this section briefly draws upon considered relevant issues from different historical political and geographical nature revolving around Latin American women and their roles in Latin American social and patriarchal structures tapping on issues of motherhood, family, personal freedom and self-determination in order to contextualize where Latin American women come from.

2.3.1 The Latin American context: Women

“Hashing, deepening, individualizing the perception we have of women brings us closer to a reality that has been hard to grasp, women in the city and in the countryside, indigenous or not, rich or poor, married or nun, submissive or free”
(Staples and Frost, 1988, p. 669 <my translation>)

It is clear that studying women and their roles in Latin American societies is a challenging endeavour. There is no clear delineation for the Latin female figure considering time, continuity, space, and class (Ruben, 1984; Frost, 1999). We are aware more than ever that the ethnic, historical, linguistic and geographical mosaic in the Latin American region relies on profound fragmentation of the *feminine* (Staples and Frost, 1988; Ramos Escaldón, et al., 2006). From women decedent from Indigenous prehispanic cultures such as Incas, Mayas, Guarani and Kunas to contemporary creole mestizo or white women from middle to high classes in Panama, Colombia and Venezuela in all their in-between nuances. González Montes and Iracheta Cenegorta (2006) suggest as well analysing women from their distinct shades in function to their role through the stages of her life cycle; daughter, young wife, mid-age wife, widow, mother, etc. However considering all these multiple angles it has been claimed that “in Latin America we share similar cultural origins and characteristics, as well as alike historical trajectories, [...] we could say that in general terms, the Latin-Americans share ways to see and live the world in a similar manner, due to the

⁵ Frames of reference or Meaning schemes are structures of assumptions, symbolic models and beliefs through which we understand our experiences; our ways of knowing and seeing the world (Mezirow, 2000). Further developed in Chapter 3.

socioeconomic and cultural trajectories, processes and realities that have defined and shaped Latin Americans along centuries” (Carballo, 2000, p. 1 my translation). For instance it is claimed that Mexican, Colombian and other Latin American women have had an *invisible* presence due to a lack of recognition on their role in social history (Jelin, 1996), taking part of a collective memory in the so-called presence and transparency of women in Latin American history (Ramos Escaldón, et al., 2006). Still, it is claimed that women in Chile and Argentina have had more participation and voice than the rest of the region (Belluchi, 1990). Furthermore, it is argued that currently, Latin women recognize they are belonging to a global community that includes identities, circumstances, and positions within broader social processes (Jelin, 1996). Underpinning the dynamism of shaping identities, roles, and experiences, and without the aim to “unify” the female figure in Latin America (as one of the aims of the feminist inquiry (DeVault and Gross, 2007)); this section aims to provide knowledge concerning women’s roles within their patriarchal societies in regards to motherhood, family, personal freedom and self-determination.

2.3.2 Patriarchal paradigms and women’s roles

Through socialization processes, individuals have appropriated certain behaviours that are assumed according to their gender (Butler, 1995; Novo, 2003). This differentiation is referred as *gender roles* and covers socio-culturally constructed standards of concrete behaviours, attitudes, values, tasks, etc. on aspects of femininity and masculinity (Herrera Santi, 2000). “Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power” (Lerner, 1986, p. 239). In order to avoid dualistic approaches, it is useful to understand there are different levels of power relations in patriarchal societies; however, Lerner (1986) implies when in the higher extent a society exert male domination, a less extent of power may be performed by women or other groups. Within these structures of society, this patriarchal power additionally allows men to individually and collectively appropriate individual and collective women’s productive and reproductive agency, their bodies and their products, either by peaceful means or by force such as using violence (Fontanella, 2008); for instance parents who restrict their adult daughters to take their own decisions in order to control them, or performances of male jealousy through domestic violence (Lopez Mondéjar, 2001). However the aforementioned does not state “...women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources” (Lerner, 1986, p. 239). While these notions of male superiority and preference are rooted worldwide at different scales (Lim, 1993), Latin America may be famous for its machismo (Pachón, 2007). This is demonstrated through a body of reports and publications for

instance on sexual harassment, glass roof, feminicides and gender inequalities among many others (Villareal, 2001; Pons, 2011; Chan, 2012; PAHO, 2013; Gayón, 2015). Patriarchal societies promote the belief that women ought to subordinate to men through the interplay of these power relations (Novo, 2003). These “collectively held meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 46) or the so-called Machismo or Male chauvinism transcends to all spheres of every women’s life (Herrera Santi, 2000), for instance on beliefs regarding their dependency, powerlessness or solo status “women are weaker than men”, “a woman is only complete through motherhood”, “a woman needs a man” or “a woman doesn’t know about sports”. These beliefs underpin the socio-cultural gendered paradigms (Mezirow, 2000) based on male dependency and control in many levels. In the same line, Gayle Rubin (1975) suggested for the first time the genesis of gender oppression as a social construction. Through the lens of political economy, she critiques the socially constructed and historical objectification of women as products where their value relied on their biological capacities of reproduction or productive attributes to maintain the man’s lineage. One of Rubin’s contributions was the distinction between the biological and the social notions of what she called sex/gender systems:

“The set of arrangements from which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity; with these cultural "products", each society sets up a sex / gender system, that is, a set of rules from which the raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by social intervention” (Lamas, 2002 in Martínez and Voorend, 2009, p. 18).

Patriarchy assumes that biology and the social are inherently intertwined; while according to Herrera Santi (2000), sex is assigned biologically at birth; gender identity is learned through concepts of feminine and masculine and gender roles are behaviours and attitudes socially constructed and expected from each sex. These dimensions or conceptions of Fertility are alleged to undertake the social construction of motherhood, family and other gender issues such as personal freedom and self-determination (Novo, 2003).

2.3.2.1 Motherhood and Family

In many ancient societies of Mesoamerica, such as the Maya and Aztec, marriage was seen as the culmination of female accomplishment. “In the myths of the Mayan cosmogony, settled in the Popol Vuh⁶, the woman had been created to accompany men and procreate; [...] conjugal union is understood as great social utility, because from birth, most girls were prepared to perform household chores”(FCSA, 2009, pp. 6-7 my translation). It is argued

⁶ The Popol Vuh, which translates Popol: community, council, and Vuh: Book, The Book of the Council or Book of the Community, is book of great historical and spiritual value, composed of a series of stories that explain the origin of the world, civilization, and various phenomena that occur in nature; based on the Maya Cosmology (Montejo, 1999).

that indigenous groups throughout the region forced women to marry in correlation to their reproductive *readiness* (12 to 18 years old), the one who remained single above the established age was considered a useless member for the population and even forced to leave the *calpulli* (the clan); this social response was logical, since they did not conceive the existence of a being that was not useful to society (FCSA, 2009). Reproductive function has been inherently attached to the female identity not only among the prehispanic roots in Latin American cultures, these conceptions seem to traverse in time and space merely with different actors. In the XX century in Chile and in many countries of the region marriage and family were and are, the upper end of the female existence, finding women in the domestic and family field a natural space for proper development (Pinochet Cobos, 2010).

Most academic literature in respect of gender roles construction in Latin America agree that through marriage the family was established as a social structure for domination where the *female identity* shaped and was shaped by these forces (Saloma Gutierrez, 2000; Ramos Escaldón et al., 2006). For instance after the independence from Spain great chaos fell upon the structures of the new republics, questioning what to do with this achieved new freedom (Cabrera, 2009). Most Latin countries fell into mandates of cruel military dictatorships established by their own independence and revolution “rebel heroes” such as Fidel Castro in Cuba and Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (Makaran, 2013) among a myriad of others who dominated for up to 35 years and established their family dynasties for decades after that (Montserrat, 2007). While dictatorships ranged from different temporalities (independence through beginnings of this century) and through diverse political realities in the region, in general, new republics highlighted family and reproduction as inbred *female roles* essential to establish the new social order (Cabrera, 2009; Makaran, 2013). These roles were 1) a mother, the biologic creator of the national community; 2) the educator, as a woman that transfers the cultural knowledge to the future national citizens; 3) the Virgin or faithful wife, emphasizing her as a symbol of chastity and purity of the “ethnic race” among other roles (Ramos Escaldón et al., 2006; Makaran, 2013). It has been said that an iconic image related to this heavenly figure was or still is her antithesis, the *dishonoured women* or *whores*. “Dishonour” for the nation and her family was manifested in the sexual engagement with other ethnic or lower-class members; as well when women took authority of their own lives and bodies (Marakan, 2013). During the course of the first half of the last century the ruling classes showed in several opportunities the concern about the “moral crisis” that was reproduced especially in lower classes given the absence of family models favourable to the social order (Pinochet Cobos, 2010). Thus, from all sectors and especially from the ecclesiastical sphere the call was made to strengthen family ties of the lower-class society, through the promotion of traditional patriarchal family models. Saloma Gutiérrez (2000) indicates that after the dictatorships, Latin American societies were highly hierarchized. González Montes and

Iracheta Cenegorta (2006) found in their study a patriarchal mode within the Mexican post-dictatorship society, where violence against females constituted a way to avoid women to take masculine roles in terms of mobility and sexuality. Their patriarchal hierarchy relied on the older men exercising power based on the control on the women's property and goods. Within this hierarchic order, daughters should constantly show demonstrations of submission and respect, disobedience was severely punished. The authors state that "in current times, many families still kiss the hand of their elder relatives"⁷ (p. 126) as a sign of submission. However, women in these societies were expected to embody the submissive role and accept and allow the dominance first from their fathers, then uncles, brothers and husbands. In terms of mobility women were allowed to leave home only when married, moving to the husband's household where the new wife would be attained to his commands (González Montes and Iracheta Cenegorta, 2006). Furthermore, in terms of sexuality, this study shows evidence from criminal records on violence against women when they rebelled against their partners' or husband's wishes. The distinctive Latin jealousy predominates even when the man had several sexual partners, this actually increased his manhood. In other words, being "*Cabron*" is a sign of manhood, while being "*cabrona*" was related to negative promiscuousness of women (López Modéjar, 2001).

The female predisposition to the private and domestic sphere as cultural spaces is clearly legitimated and recognized in a growing body of literature across Latin America consecrating the roles of wife, homemaker and educator (Jelin, 1996; Villareal, 2001; Chan, 2012; PAHO, 2013; Gayón, 2015)

Motherhood in Latin societies has been the most fundamental role in the female identity (Jelin, 1996). Cociamo (2005, in Róžańska, 2011) argues that the figure of the mother in the Latin allegory is very powerful and dissociated from the erotic body; focused on breeding, protection and affection. This power is associated with the supernatural and the mother earth; in most of the indigenous worldviews, mother earth, *Mapuñuke*, (Chile and Argentina) or *Pachamama* (Peru and Bolivia) is an ancestral concept equivalent to a female and male figure at the same time, which favours the multiplicity of the feminine. This sense has also been present in contemporary Latin societies where the respect and love for the mother is a fundamental and embedded strong value (Bridgeman and Fainchtein, 2012). Motherhood has also been inbred within collective cultural imaginaries as a fusion of two worlds; Róžańska (2011) argues in the light of the collective female identity, certain models of motherhood intertwined between the catholic ideologies brought by the conquest and the ancient prehispanic worship divinities which still manifest in contemporary times:

⁷ As a side note, the researcher has witnessed in many Mexican provinces, women addressing their parents usually use a discourse of respect-authority; using "usted", the formal word for you.

“The mother is undoubtedly the most polyhedral figure in the world of beliefs. Embodies the mystery of life; [...] Precisely in Mexico, the mother is the most important figure in society, [...] and the Virgin Guadalupe⁸ expresses for his people a sense of shelter and maternal protection, is the mother of Mexicans: the Indian mother. Latin America refers to the protective mother figure, which is linked to the myth of women as being more sensitive and emotional than men. The Virgin Mary, mother of God, is associated with the ancient female divinities, goddesses of the earth or Pachamama, Coatlicue. The merger between the two worlds gave figures of collective worship, as the Virgin of Guadalupe (Mexico), del Carmen (Chile) or Itati (Paraguay). (p. 5 my translation)

As figures of motherhood are influenced by hybrid cosmogonies of sociocultural constructions, Latin women have also universally accepted the motherhood and female identity discourse through media. Media has been an important source in the construction of gendered paradigms such as the famous Colombian and Mexican *Telenovelas* (TV soaps); the most-watched TV genre in Latin America (Brown, 1995). The Telenovelas were frequently utilized by authorities in various Latin countries to transmit socio-cultural messages, by incorporating them in their storylines (Vega Montiel, 2010). For instance, a helpless woman meets a rich man and end with a wedding and motherhood. In the 80's and 90's, a world pioneer in using telenovelas to shape behaviour was Mexico where the idea of family planning was successfully introduced by these means (Soto Lavega, 2007).

It is clear that the role of women in the social sphere has been largely seen through the glass of her reproductive function (Pinochet Cobos, 2012). Motherhood, family and women's roles are constantly transforming and restructuring. Latin America has been engaging in complex and profound processes. The *second feminist wave* stimulated emancipation and freedom of reproduction in the Latina within her roles in family among others (Jelin, 1996; Ramos Escaldón, 2007). For instance Argentina has taken the lead of feminist liberation in the region since in their political history an atmosphere of questioning ideas prospered; an convergence of thoughts from anarchists, socialists, feminists, utopians, moral reformers, suffragists, secularist thinkers and liberals, all joined forces with the aim to subvert the bourgeois order through proposals for liberation; personal and gender liberation among them (Belluchi, 1990). In the same line the access to education for women and their participation in the economy (which greatly occurred all through the region in the 70's) (Jelin, 1996) as well as advents of technology in the medical field had a great impact in Colombian women's decisions to procreate (Pachón, 2007).

It is a reality that in many Latin American countries, the territory of women would be dictating the walls of the home and childcare (Rivera Gómez, in Guardia, 2013), However,

⁸ the Virgin of Guadalupe (Spanish: Virgen de Guadalupe), is a Roman Catholic title of the Blessed Virgin Mary associated with a venerated image enshrined within the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. The basilica is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage site in the world, and the world's third most-visited sacred site. (Travel and Leisure, 2012)

“...if innate male [...] dominance [is] at the root of female oppression, then the feminist program would logically require either the extermination of the offending sex, or else a eugenics project to modify its character” (Rubin, 1975, p. 157). Parallel to the ideological power, socio-political, technological and cultural flows influences where female and male and their roles revolve in a continuous process of construction and transformation (Maier, 2008), many Latinas throughout history of time are modifying their character and sheltering increasing notions of freedom, consciousness and free will.

2.3.2.2 Personal freedom and self-determination

There is evidence that shows that contemporary women engaged in the feminine social imperative, experience feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction in their lives by following the path marked by others and ignoring their own wishes and desires (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012), for instance in terms of marriage or “female-like” professional paths; “I did it because I had to do it”, or “it was what was expected of me but I do not know if I wanted to or that makes me happy”. While some women do not feel the urge to pursue their own route, others feel entire freedom and some others struggle following their own path albeit social exclusion threatens them with feelings of guilt, insecurities and self-doubt (Heimtun, 2012). According to Gergen (1991, in Molina, 2006) due to the influence of technology, defining ourselves undertakes a series of multiple transformations, where the boundaries of the self and the concept of the individual lose consistency. The self is constructed as a product of social relationships in which people are immersed by various means; what emerges is the relational self, not inserted in an individual and internal reality but in the space in relationship with others. This phenomenon is deployed where a wide proliferation of social relations, characterized by superficiality and transience, bares the psychological consequence of social saturation, leading to the rupture of the individual in a multiplicity of investitures (what Gergen called *multiphrenia*) along with offering multiple possibilities. This generates feelings of permanent duty, self-doubt and feelings of failure, requiring new capabilities to face the contradiction, and ambiguity, tolerance identity, self-questioning and acceptance of many possible rationales (Gergen, 1991 in Molina, 2006). However For Ehrenberg (2000), the self is menaced by a paradigm shift from the normative to the possibility. The individual has been apparently freed from the limitations imposed by cultural norms, but she is caught in the confrontation between the possible and the impossible. In this case, the question of identity is bonded to action: facing the need to take responsibility for her own life insights and autonomous action, while experiencing insecurity about her own identity. Comparing the situation experienced by a recently emancipated Latin woman in parallel to the recently independent Latin American republics, chaotic streams of structuring and restructuring flows prevail among both subjects to maintain their order and avoid the chaos; what to do with this new achieved freedom?

“‘Choice’, ‘freedom’ and ‘agency’ are terms liberally appropriated in recent years by popular women’s cultural genres to advance an image of the new, empowered woman confidently embracing patriarchal heterosexuality and commodity culture” (Chen, 2013, p. 440). The Bolivian feminist, Julieta Parades (in Valenzuela Rodríguez, 2012) states that Latin American women have been and still have a struggle terrain; their bodies, space, time and memory: “It is the body. From there we can discuss sexuality, the right to be a mother, abortion, even existential and identity processes to regain our power over it, because it is our beauty, our bodies are different as women and we have to appreciate it. It is the most intimate decolonization. Then there is the space. What areas are there for women? From the soil to the spaces of the home, do women really have a home? Or are we a pariah? Here we can also talk about political space. Another battlefield is time, time to work. Domestic work is work, it’s not love, it is working, it is time. If men have time is because they don’t do domestic work. [...] And finally, the memory, which is the long journey of our wisdom and our struggles inherited from our grandmothers (pp. 36-37 <my translation>).

With the aim to surpass “absolute truths” of female emancipation from patriarchal hegemonies and take into account the mosaic nuances in contemporary Latin American women’s realities, it cannot be argued that the region is famous for the support of the female personal freedom. Some contemporary women for instance, still have to appeal for these struggle terrains from their parents or husbands to make trivial decisions over her own life and over their own bodies, time and space (Pachón, 2007). Now “off the social path” women experience social exclusion; in a torrent of feelings of guilt and rejection related to the unsuccessful fulfilment of their expected roles (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012) leading perhaps into the entrepreneurship of restructuring their lives.

While this section frames a history which has been positioning women’s role as a passive agent and as a victim of the atrocities and social circumstances surrounding her, the truth is that, women have been more active than what history (written by men) or most available publications preach (Jelin, 1996). The proof relies on the power embodied in *rebel* women who broke out of the socially expected; for instance, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, an intellectual and poet in the 1600s, used critiques on the role of a woman in society in her writings for instance the poem of “*Hombres Necios*”

“Foolish men that accuse women without a reason, without seeing that you’re to blame for the same thing you accuse. If with unparalleled zeal you beg for their disdain, ¿why do you want them to act proper, if you incite them to evil?” [Translated from Spanish, Fragment of *Hombres Necios* by Sor Juana de Asbaje]

In the same line, other women who have pioneered to open their way to freedom as active agents are the female travellers; Maipina de la Parra from Chile (Ulloa Inoztroza, 2012),

Eduarda Mancilla from Argentina (Spicer-Escalante, 2011) or many progressive artists. Róžańska (2011) in her study of female stereotypes in Latin America, mentions the painter Frida Kahlo (image 3): a politically involved painter, with a careless attempt to publicize her “off the road” life in society: *“Femininity represents new models, symbols of rebellion and independence. One is Frida Kahlo: artist, communist, transgressive, brave, fierce, wounded and challenging...”* (p. 8 my translation). While some women have experienced or embraced more freedom than others, in general, Latin women had experienced in different levels and intensity long history under androcentrism. In one way or another, gendered realities are conceptualized and deeply inbred within our frames of references (Mezirow, 2000); how to understand the love and immense respect, for instance, a Chilean or Mexican man portrays for his “holy” mother, while domestic violence against his wife is the order of the day? (Fontanella, 2008) Despite these masculinized frames of reference, this research aims to engage with women that open new ways and new roles they can perform in society. In this context, Giddens (2003) argues that the most significant changes in today's world, concern to our private lives, relationships, sexuality, marriage and family. It seems consistent to address the female in her endeavour of defining herself, as TT scholars suggest travel as a way to transform limiting society-established paradigms and beliefs (Reisinger, 2013) the following section further examines the transformative potential of travel.



Image 3. Frida Kahlo [standing left] wearing a man's suit at a family portrait (1926) Museum Casa Azul, Mexico

2.4 Transformational Travel Experiences

“The enlightened traveller does not seek to see landscapes and monuments, but to break the boundaries of their experiential world and experience new people, cultures and power structures” (Perez, 2011, p. 10 <my translation>).

Travelling has been argued a way of enlightenment and transformation of perspectives (Reisinger, 2013). By Travelling one can experience “...*the estrangement and criticism of one's own society* ...” (Perez, 2011, p. 10, <my translation>) and thus one can be able to undertake processes of change in our ways of thinking and knowing absolute truths (Radel and Hillman, 2013). According to Mezirow (2000) an authentic or real perspective transformation is an internal process of permanent change of established systems of beliefs which result in a wider and panoramic gaze that “enables us to see how dependency producing and oppressive institutionalized social practices, norms and cultural codes must be changed...”(Mezirow, 1994, p. 152). In this section, the conceptualization of transformation is defined and described in order to clearly set the guide to the term transformation in this research. Additionally, literature on transformative tourism is reviewed with the aim to understand the discourse of transformation or “*seeing the world in a different way*” within the tourism academic field. This section provides the context in which transformative tourism is setting and how this incipient area of knowledge relates to the objectives of this master thesis.

2.4.1 What is Transformation and who are transformed?

Transformation can acquire diverse connotations in function of its context. According to Cambridge dictionary (2016), a transformation is described as, “a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved”. “Visions of caterpillars emerging as butterflies and deathbed conversions are popular images of transformation. Perhaps because [...] [transformation] incites such far-reaching changes...” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 15). It is understood that transformation is associated with processes which move towards, perhaps, an *evolved* being⁹. While transformations are usually contextualized as positive and victorious, transformation regarding the individual’s process in the tourism and travel scientific field has been not the exception to this approach. Reisinger (2013, p. xii) argues that:

⁹ However, as a side note it must be noted that not all transformation processes may bring improvements as a rule of thumb, for instance in social processes; i.e. the progress in technology and globalization have transformed societies into more digital ones (Scheiner, 2014). This may seem improving for telecommunications and technology science; however, it is known these advances as well transform the quality of the environment in a damaging way by their mass production, high use of resources and waste or as well by harming the participation of users in community life and social relationships by the intense use of these means (Kraut, et al., 1998).

“In order to make a change [...] we need to follow a transformation path. We need to transform ourselves – our values, life priorities, lifestyle, and the way we use resources and spend time [...] We must move towards a world in which we learn about the purpose and meaning of our life, a world that gives way to new values of [...] empathy for others, non-violence, human rights and equality.”

In this context it is inferred that so as to completely *change or transform* into an *evolved or improved self* (changes in lifestyles, values and behaviours among others) a re-structural process within oneself must be undertaken (Mezirow, 1970) setting the individual as the conductor or responsible agent of this process of “growth” or improvement.

In contemporary academic studies in the field of transformation and which have built upon Human psychology and Critical Theories, the improvement of an individual is represented towards the fulfilment of his or her highest needs; those for meaning in life in particular (Rogers, 1970). Therefore according to these theorists, basic needs such as shelter and food, for instance should be fulfilled in order for the individual to seek for further areas for fulfilment (Rogers, 1970) and self-determination. This implies a westernized approach to transformation through privileged or rich classes; dismissing transformative experiences for classes which struggle to achieve their basic needs. However, in this line, the Brazilian theorist, Freire (1996) in his theory *pedagogy of the oppressed* suggests that lower classes which struggle to achieve their transformation or *conscientization* towards areas of fulfilment such as self-determination and freedom may achieve this through learning to critically reflect. Then the individual may become aware of his own conditioned beliefs. Based on this philosophy, the most groundbreaking and used theory of transformation in Adult Pedagogy and which currently expands to other scientific fields is Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Taylor, 2000). TLT suggests that transforming our taken for granted perspectives of ourselves and our world, entails the achievement of emancipating thinking of the individual as an autonomous agent rather than to uncritically act on tradition and judgments of others. According to Ross (2010, in Robledo and Batle, 2015, p. 2) transformation is:

“. . . a dynamic sociocultural and uniquely individual process that (a) begins with a disorienting dilemma and involves choice, healing, and experience(s) of expanding consciousness [...]; (b) initiates a permanent change in identity structures through cognitive, psychological, physiological, affective, or spiritual experiences; and (c) renders a sustained shift in the form of one’s thinking, doing, believing, or sensing [...].”

This individual process positions the learners in a panoramic viewer to understand her or his world in detached from old and limiting ways of observing in order to become a “Responsible thinker”(Mezirow, 1991). *Responsible thinkers* have acquired through transformational experiences new ways of thinking, those which are inclusive, tolerant and

self-reflective. According to the contributors and supporters of this theory including travel and tourism literature, responsible thinkers are a need for the challenges that the twenty-first century fosters challenges of true knowledge (O' Sullivan, 1999; Taylor 2000; Mezirow, 2000; Reisinger, 2013; Robledo and Batle, 2015). Therefore transformation in this research is understood as a "...non-linear [, non-step-wise, recursive and evolving] process involving self-reflection and the adoption of new and broader self-definitions" (Robledo and Batle, 2015, p. 2).

2.4.2 Transformation potential of travel experiences

Transformation in tourism is not a new concept, as previously mentioned Latin American female travellers from the XIX century have already travelled to remote destinations broadening horizons and obtaining knowledge of one-self (Szurmuk, 2000; Ferrús, 2011; Spicer-Escalante, 2011; Ulloa Inostroza, 2012) or transformation shaped in the classical stories and myths where "The Hero, a person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe or civilization [...] [as] a metaphor for the transformational [travel] experience that everyone goes through towards becoming a whole and contributing member of society" (Robledo and Batle, 2015, p. 1). The term Transformational Travel (TT) in academic research has been coined by Kottler (1998); the psychologist argued for the first time that a person can change through travelling experiences. He argues there is "no other human activity that has greater potential to alter your perceptions or the ways you choose your life" (Kottler, 1998, p. 14) as traveling does.

"Today, legions of tourists travel to India for instruction in the various ways of Eastern meditation, test their limits practicing extreme exports such as bodyboarding or canoeing, undertake pilgrimages to Compostela or Mount Kailash, backpack around the world, attend courses or conferences on Kabbalah or integral theory, experiment with shamanism and sacred plants in Peru or Mexico, participate in voluntary or missionary tourism, visit power places such as Stonehenge, experience special events such as full solar eclipses or winter solstices, or attend Buddhist or Christian retreats" (Robledo and Batle, 2015, p. 2)

However, one wonders as to why research on transformation in travel studies increased in the last couple of decades? On one hand, the increasing access to travel (Sampaio et al., 2014) and on the other, the modern society's paradigms of success and happiness fail to achieve a long-term or permanently fulfilled individual (Gergen, 1991 in Molina, 2006; Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012). From a consumption perspective, Robledo and Batle (2015) mention that society imposes the consumption of material goods as necessary for the individual's happiness "that is why many people confuse true happiness with substitutes such as pleasure, satisfaction and the euphoria that material consumption and entertainment provide" (p. 3). These society-imposed paradigms bring temporal fulfilment

to individuals while taking asymmetrical power relations such as gender paradigms for granted (Field and Stanton, 2000); where i.e. the *female fulfilment* is posed on “family and home”. “The result is often existential emptiness, a common disease in [...] society” (Robledo and Batle 2015, p. 3). While social paradigms of fulfilment and gender are embedded in socio-cultural premises, Pritchard and Morgan (2013) claim that by traveling one can stimulate a shift in their system of beliefs; “by critically reflecting on world perspectives we can push ourselves away from our taken-for-granted and dominant ways of knowing and open up alternative ways of seeing, being and understanding in our multiple worlds [...] is in many ways the beginning of transformation” (p. 6).

2.4.2.1 Does travel provide a transformation?

“Tourism [has long been considered an] [...] exogenous force, i.e. as an ensemble of socio-economic structures and lifestyles that originate outside the community, [...] with great transformational power” (Sampaio et al., 2014, p. 93), where travellers are perceived as agents of change but seldom as subjects of change. As TT field is still emerging, tourism academic literature has been recently addressing the potential of travel experiences in the perspectives of travellers who undergo a journey of inner transformation (Horrocks, 2015; Robledo and Batle, 2015). For instance Reisinger (2013), in her book *transformational tourism: tourists perspectives*, the potential of tourism is observed as a tool to transform oneself, one’s own perspectives and society structures. This is pursued by studies which focused on the self, (i.e. empowerment, emancipation and changed perspectives) to global issues (i.e. Global warming, poverty and inequalities) involving a diverse typology of traveling modes. Recently the transformational potential of travel has gained global attention as the World Tourism Organization (2016) released its Global Report on *The Transformative Power of Tourism: a paradigm shift towards a more responsible traveller*. Within the UNWTO agenda, this report engages in the promotion of the *new travel trend* (p. 17), focusing on issues of sustainable consumption and production. In this publication the new trend of *transformative tourists* is sponsored; the transformative tourist “use travel to reflect upon their lives and get the courage to make crucial life changes upon their return back home...” (World Tourism Organization, 2016, p. 17). In this report tourism and travelling experiences also have shown to be powerful catalysts to shift paradigms. It has been suggested that TT includes fostering changes on issues over inequalities, poverty (Reisinger, 2013) and gender since “transformative travellers use their trips to reinvent [...] the world they live in” (p. 11). However, the powerful concept of transformation attaining to tourist contexts has been shaping tourism practices and expectations as “... a worn-out cliché that circulates in tourism advertising, travel writing, and other media” (p. 96) including films such as *Wild, Eat Pray and Love, The beach and Motorcycle diaries* (Sampaio,

2014) where the travel-as-transformation narrative has been one single discourse, the travel as the *provider of transformation* (See image 4 and 5) and therefore the travellers’ “attitude of passivity” (Sampaio, et al., 2014). This positions the traveller on a certain extent under the mercy of transformation, feckless of his own process. While several modalities of travel and tourism have been alleged allowing transformation (educational, CBT, volunteer, survival, adventure, wellness, cultural, farm etc.) (Word Tourism Organization, 2016), academic literature has not been exempted from the focus of travel as the “*provider*” of transformation (Lean, 2012):

“Travel and tourism *can shift* [emphasis added] our perspective on life and *change* [emphasis added] the course of our knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviour” (Reisinger 2013, p. xii)

“The dramatic personal changes they [Travellers] underwent, *which are attributed to the trip* [emphasis added]—to the activities and the experiences it encompasses” (Noy, 2004, p. 87)

“Travel changes people. Equally well established, foreign travel changes people greatly” (Lyons, 2010, p. 286)



Image 4: Mundo Joven Travel Agency Ad (2016) “Find yourself in Thailand: travel with the heart”



Image 5: Travel agency “for transformational, soul-stirring and awe-inspiring spiritual journeys”

Through this focus, research in this field has identified several aspects within the journey to potentially transform the perspectives of the individual (Morgan, 2011). For instance, studies focused on constraints in solo travel experiences significantly *transformed* female travellers into more empowered individuals emancipating themselves from limiting premises of fear (Wilson, 2004; Harris and Wilson, 2007) While “the traveller confronts a series of tests and trials *that start* [emphasis added] the process of transformation...” (Robledo and Batle, 2015, p. 6), solo cross-cultural travel has also been identified as transformative by various researchers, for instance, Lyons (2010) argues that Autonomous (solo and independent) Cross-Cultural Hardship Travel (ACHT) is the most powerful means for transformation. In his study being alone, facing constraints and additionally encounter high cross-cultural difficulties provide greater challenges for the traveller. He argues that “the degree to which international travel is transformative may very well be the degree to which it involves cross-cultural contact” (Lyons, 2010, p. 291). In this line researchers also place the weight of transformation in the strangeness of physical spaces. Morgan’s (2011) research suggests “...that places and journeys [...] provide an encounter with [the] Otherness, whether in terms of different cultures or the “more than human realm” of nature and wilderness...” (p. 246). Therefore constraints, cross-cultural encounters, physical otherness and solo-travel-status have been highlighted as elements in the travel experience to foster transformations; due to the difficulty it involves and since the traveller is to a great extent “culturally bounded” (Adler, 1997) all these allow space for challenge and reflection on their own systems of beliefs (Mezirow, 2000). While many studies have focused on the features in travel to transform perspectives (Lyons, 2010; Sampaio, et al., 2014; UNWTO, 2016), emerging studies underscore the active role the traveller has within its own transformative travel. Ross (2010) argues that a travel journey may be considered transformative only when the process has been intentionally pursued by the traveller. Few studies tap superficially on this pursuit, for instance, Noy’s (2004) research, observes Israeli backpacker travel narratives of adventure holding a profound discourse of personal transformation and tapping on the traveller’s own skills of inner reflection and retrospective. Robledo and Batle, (2015)’s research suggests 8 elements that foster transformation in travel, two of them were personal features of the transformed traveller; one is “Theme 4” *Presence* or mindfulness, which is typical asset which entirely depends on the individual, “living in the moment with full awareness” (p. 8) and “Theme 7”: the capacity to *self-reflect* (Noy, 2004; Shaw, 2013; Lean, 2012). In terms of some of the impacts of transformational travel experiences, research highlights a higher sense confidence, social values and tolerance post-travel. The particular study by Kanning (2013) studied post-trip narratives of young travellers in extended backpacking international trips. The participants recognized acquired skills which created an increased self-determination and he also identified that “empowered participants [were able] to formulate unique points of references through which transparent and tacit US cultural expectations, norms, values and societal priorities were juxtaposed with those of other cultures” (p. 131). This is supported by research that suggests that after trip travellers are prone to engage or awaken interest in social action (Pritchard and Morgan, in Reisinger, 2013), due to the engagement in diverse socio-cultural realities (Tomljenovic et al., 2016). It is argued that it

is once the traveller has come back home, it is when she comes to terms with her transformed identity in contrast to their home culture (Smith, 2002). Studies reveal that post-trip transformative experiences stimulate higher social values in the identity of the travellers (Brown, in Reisinger, 2013).

Moreover, while growing literature lead to a more active or engaged traveller, Lean (2012) claims that transformative tourism field "...generally, failed to recognise the relationship of physical travel, and the transformations that take place, with other mobilities experienced before, during and after travel. This includes acknowledging the continual alteration of individuals, societies and cultures through these forces..." (p. 152) Leans' (2012) longitudinal research illustrates the complexity of elements that stimulate transformations in the individual, within this wider and complex phenomena, he considers experiences before, during and after travel. Using a mobilities approach, this research finds elements of a broader life transformative learning process through a different scope. While the shaped concept of "travel transforms the traveller" has been dominating TT research, one of the interests of this thesis is to unravel this veil of the traveller's passivity and analyse through TLT framework their wider transformative process and delimit the role that solo travel, as a "potential source of transformation" play in such alleged transformation.

3. Theoretical Framework

The previous chapter outlined the knowledge on Latin women and travel, patriarchal gender roles and transformative travel experiences, providing a broader overview of the understanding of this particular study. This following chapter offers the theoretical framework, a guideline for the assortment of the phenomena in this research. “The theoretical framework provides an adequate argument based on existing theories and concepts, and results in a conceptual framework” (Horrocks, 2015, p. 22). This research uses the Transformational Learning Theory (TLT)¹⁰ as a framework with the aim to understand the role of solo and independent travel experiences of Latin women who have undergone a transformative learning process. This thesis inquiry is grounded on a constructivist approach, which is based on “experimental learning through real life experience to construct and conditionalized knowledge” (Chmiel, 2014, p. 1).

This chapter begins with a brief review of the background or foundations of Transformative Learning Theory through Human Psychology and Critical Social Theories, with the aim to set into context the strain of thought in which TLT is based upon. This section is followed by the fundamental concepts utilized and described along with their relations to the areas under investigation of the Transformative Learning Process. These concepts are Frames or reference¹¹ and their three dimensions; personal or psychological, socio-linguistic or socio-cultural and epistemic as domains of learning within the individual. Conceptualization on the identified triggers which may contribute to the transformative learning process (TLP) are as well defined and described in this section, such as disorienting dilemmas, affective learning and critical reflection.

3.1 Transformative learning experiences: TLT background

Mezirow (2000) argues that “a defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos. If we are unable to understand we often turn to tradition, thoughtlessly seize explanations by authority figures, or resort to various psychological mechanisms, such as projection and rationalization, to create imaginary meanings” (p. 3) Socrates, in his introduction to “critical self-reflection” claimed that each person construct their own meanings while being engaged in an experience (Daudelin, 1996). The Transformative Learning Theory coined by the sociologist Jack Mezirow (1970) sets its foundations in this strain of thought and it has been used over the last 20 years for

¹⁰ Throughout this section Transformative Learning theory is also referred as TLT or Transformative Theory. Transformative learning process may also be referred as TLP.

¹¹ Frames of reference or meaning schemes are concepts used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

Transformation in adult pedagogy. The development of TLT was influenced by the concept of paradigm and paradigm shift, relevant factors in Kuhn's (1962) *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In this publication the term paradigm has been described as "...characteristic set of beliefs and preconceptions..." (p. 17) adopted by a specific group, and paradigm shift as a change in this body of perceptions. Mezirow (1990) argues that a transformation of a paradigm is equal to a perspective transformation. The development of TLT has been rooted in the Frankfurt School of German philosophers through Critical Theory and their social critiques; in this strain of philosophy, critical reflection exists as a resource to debunk hegemonic ideologies towards a free individual (Mezirow, 2000). Another ground breaking theory mentioned earlier in which TLT is founded is Freire's (1996) theory of *pedagogy of the oppressed* who argues that issues of poverty, social injustice and inequalities are based on socially constructed paradigms. His model based on illiterate working class in Brazil suggests that through education and learning to think autonomously (critical reflection), the individuals dominated by oppressive society systems would experience freedom and emancipation by understanding the influence on authority figures into their lives. Within Freire's (1996) sociocultural approach to transformative learning; his social emancipatory view is grounded in the context of poverty, illiteracy and oppression. The Brazilian educator claims that our past experiences create our knowledge and with this we are prone to build our future, a future of oppression or empowerment and freedom. Furthermore, Jurgen Habermas' (1984) work is recognized as the most influential for the development of TLT. "Habermas builds upon Kantian sense of "critique" in which reflection refers to reason's reflection on its own principles and categories, by adding the concept of reflection as a form of self-formation that emancipates as it releases one from constraint of dysfunctional beliefs" (Mezirow, 2000, p. xiii) In this way Habermas (1984) introduces key terms on communicative and instrumental learning as major learning domains; setting as central role the performance of critical reflection as a way of "self-education" to achieve emancipation of unexamined beliefs (Mezirow, 1991). Jack Mezirow's theory emerged from the most extensive qualitative research up to date in transformation for adult education (Taylor, 2000). His empirical research was based on women from the United States who returned to post-secondary education or labour field after an extended period of time out of the school. He identified key elements that facilitated or obstructed women's learning progress. The foremost conclusion of this study was that a 'personal transformation' was embraced by his female participants. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) explains "how adults interpret life learning experience, make meaning of it and change beliefs, attitudes or an entire worldview [...] [A] change in worldview[s] (perspective) is personally emancipating; one is freed from previously held beliefs, values and feelings that have constrained and distorted one's life" (Reisinger, 2013, p. 17). Mezirow has largely received critics due to the individualistic nature of his theory, by letting aside the social aspect of a

learner (Taylor, 2000). It has also been pointed out its westernized emphasis on critical reflection, by assuming the individual's skills of logic rather than emotion. A relevant critique on this theory is the presumption on "relationships of equality among the participants, [...] when in actuality, most human relationships are asymmetrical" (Belenky and Stanton, in Mezirow, 2000, p. 73). Therefore along the decades, researchers in the adult educational field had built upon and expanded Mezirow's theory deepening in its multifaceted complexity. For instance Robert Boyd's (2003) work is associated with the psychoanalytic approach explaining the significance of symbols as well as the decisive role that unconsciousness plays in the learning process, he claims that through the understanding of one's own inner psyche conflicts, self-actualization can be achieved. Daloz (2012) portrays a more psycho-developmental approach. Highlighting the intuitive nature of the Transformative Learning Process he focuses on the relevance of stories in learning and he also acknowledges that people have the need to make meaning from their experiences. These theorists have contributed to study TLT through the locus on the individual, under the premise that it is important for any individual to create their own meanings. Furthermore, Taylor (2000) claims two general patterns of research within TLT. One focused on theoretical critiques on issues of "social action, critical pedagogy, adult development, reflection, power, and context" (p. 285); the second one involves diverse areas associated with the relationship of TLT and adult lifestyles and career path changes and recently in areas of travel and tourism as means of transformation (Noy, 2003; Methorst, 2011; Kanning, 2013; Lean, 2012; Reisinger, 2013; 2015; Horrocks, 2015).

3.2 Transformative Learning Process

The Transformative Learning Process (TLP) is based on the initial premise that "the Justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context—biographical, historical and cultural— in which they are embedded" (Mezirow, 2000 p. 3) and which are constructed throughout our lives specially in childhood by the influential idiosyncrasy of our first caretakers; parents or other authority figures such as professors or mentors (O'Sullivan, 1999). For a child any uncritical explanation is enough to explain "how things work in the world", however when one reaches adulthood, ideas and interpretations may not work in the same way as in childhood. "Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses [...] that define their life world" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) These are taken for granted ways one see one-self and the world, and individuals are conscious about them since they represent how the world ought to be. As adults, individuals understand experiences through different dimensions, mostly "under what conditions an expressed idea is true or justified" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). When an individual encounters new

knowledge she or he filters these experiences through this frame of reference and add the knowledge to the accumulated baggage of experiences. Most of adult learning takes place in this way, however, it does not transform individuals; it is a build-up of previous experiences (Taylor, 2000). A Transformation process takes place when the individual is able to identify deep dysfunctional beliefs which have guided his own behaviours towards harming, oppressive, limiting or auto-sabotaging experiences, and being able to eradicate these premises by adopting new and constructive premises of one-self and the world. In a current world where rapid change occurs and in the absence of absolute veracity, we cannot fully trust what we believe or know. TLT identifies a learning process in which people radically, significantly and powerfully change in long lasting ways.

3.2.1 Frames of reference or Meaning schemes

Frames of reference “selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our “line of action.” Once set, we automatically move from one specific activity (mental or behavioural) to another” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). According to Mezirow’s Theory (1997, p. 6) a frame of reference:

“...encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, [...] abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. These codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological. [...] [They] become articulated in a specific point of view—the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation”.

Frames of reference may be performed through behaviour as a response to a situation such as motherhood, for instance a patriarchal and socio-cultural belief of “motherhood is an inevitable part of life of a woman”. A change in these frames may be allowed by critical reflection when conflicts or a contradiction emerges by experiencing a situation where a destination culture understands motherhood is a choice, not as an inevitable part of the life of a woman. Reflection takes place with the aim to solve this contradiction/conflict and detect the necessity to change the assumption (Mezirow, 1997). “This happens whenever we try to understand actions that do not work the way we anticipated” (p. 6), as it has been mentioned in previous chapters experiences that break ranks of our frames of reference are considered weird, wrong or not logic. Kanning’s (2013) study underpins the transformation in the frames of reference of backpackers towards their role in the society after their long-haul trips, “Life stage benchmarks identified by the participants included education, marriage, owning a home, having kids and retirement. Upon return, societal orthodox expectations via life stage benchmarks were increasingly scrutinized by the backpackers in terms of reflecting on their lives, as well as the lives of their social peers and

family” (p. 125). Explaining the latter, Mezirow (1994) indicates that “Most meaning perspectives are acquired through cultural assimilation, [...] others are stereotypes we have unintentionally learned regarding [for instance] what it means to be a woman...” (p. 3). Within these cultural assimilations and stereotypes, TLT categorizes Frames of reference into three domains or dimensions in which the individual filters their experiences (Mezirow, 2000).

3.2.1.1 Domains of frames of references

These domains, realms or dimensions are taken place by the conceptions and perspectives as a result of the individual’s action and interaction in the world (Herrera Santi, 2000). These are the personal, socio-cultural and epistemic dimensions of adult learning and are described in the following paragraphs. Furthermore it has been said that meaning schemes often manifest as distorted or underdeveloped (Mezirow, 1990), this guides the individual “to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, impedes differentiation, lacks permeability or openness to other ways of seeing, [and] does not facilitate an integration of experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 188). It is argued that while distorted meaning schemes are embedded in these three domains, “The remedy for any epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological distortions is the perspective transformation” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 133).

Personal or Psychological meaning schemes; these are the set of beliefs about oneself and beliefs in regards to one’s capacities, for instance, premises on “I am the kind of woman that doesn’t like fancy dresses”, or “I wouldn’t be able to ride a motorcycle” These are “self-concept[s], personality traits or types, repressed parental prohibitions that continue to dictate ways of feelings and acting in adulthood, emotional response patterns, images, fantasies, dreams...” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). This realm is also related to premises that impede taking action. During childhood traumatic situations resulted from primary caregivers or the childhood environment are embedded in these frames of references and continue to inhibit the action-taking throughout adulthood (Gould, 1988), producing anxiety feelings and fears to surpass them (Robledo and Batle, 2015). “This dynamic results in a lost function - such as the ability to confront, to feel sexual, or take risks - that must be regained in one is to become a fully functional adult (Mezirow, 1990, p.5). To regain this function, adults may understand the nature of the source of the dysfunctional premise and taking a decision to move forward from this limiting belief.

The second aspect is called *Socio-Linguistic or Socio-Cultural meaning schemes*, this category denotes taken for granted beliefs about the world and how society is organized

specially regarding legitimized and enforced power by institutions (Mezirow, 1990). It involves cultural canons, social norms and traditions among others; it revolves around issues of class, race and gender; for instance, beliefs such as “Women should obey their husbands” and “Women’s place is at home” etc. “A common sociocultural [or socio-linguistic premise] distortion is mistaking self-fulfilling and self-validating beliefs for beliefs that are not self-fulfilling or self-validating” (p.5). This means beliefs socially-imposed which are collectively accepted as satisfying and which do not really produce a self-fulfilled individual. Other mistaken premises in this domain are generalizations; “assuming that the particular interest of a subgroup is the general interest of the group as a whole” (Geuss, 1981, p. 14). If an individual believes that feminists are radical, men-haters and aggressive and treat them accordingly, then feminists in his/her eyes may become aggressive, radical and men-haters. Therefore while basing these mistaken premises such beliefs become a “distorted meaning perspective” (Mezirow, 1997). “As critical social theorists have emphasized, ideology can become a form of false consciousness in that it supports, stabilizes, or legitimates dependency-producing social institutions, unjust social practices, and relations of exploitation, exclusion, and domination. It reflects the hegemony of the collective, mainstream meaning perspective and existing power relationships that actively support the status quo” (p.5).

The third and last characteristic is called *Epistemic* this relates to what a person believes about what knowledge is and how knowledge is constructed; it “focuses on parts or wholes such as “absolute truths”. For instance in regards of a socio-linguistic premise such as “women’s lack of self-determination”, she may ask herself “How did I obtain this knowledge?” or “Why do I need this knowledge?” “How beneficial is this knowledge?” This dimension relates to for instance the source of the limiting frames of reference.

Summary: According to TLT making meaning of experiences entail the use of a filter which shape the way we perceive our experiences, this filter is called Frame of reference. Frames of reference “selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) and they are constructed throughout our childhood. Frames of reference are profound ways of thinking, feelings and acting based on our assumptions influenced by culture, social and psychological codes. These shape a particular interpretation of an experience. Experiences that contain contrasting encounters that challenge our frame of reference are potentially transformative for our perspectives on ourselves and our societies. Frames of reference are also categorized in three domains of learning which is Psychological or personal which entails ideas about oneself and one’s capacities; Socio-cultural, entailing beliefs about the individuals world and ideological cultural canons and Epistemic, which relates to how knowledge is contrasted and what knowledge is.

3.2.2 Key components that trigger transformation

There is a vast array of triggering elements that allow a person to transform a worldview and incorporate the new and different worldview into their own frame of reference (Lean, 2012). Transformation may emerge from a sudden change to a series of events that trigger the transformation phases (Taylor, 2000). However, it is argued that essential key components in the process must all be present to trigger the transformation. Academics in Transformative Learning Theory suggest powerful key components which are necessary for a transformation of our worldviews, 1) disorienting dilemmas and 2) critical reflection (Kanning, 2013). However in this research it is considered important to observe 3) affective learning, (namely the emotions that emerge in the transformation process (Taylor, 2000) and their recognition) While the debate on the importance of critical thinking has set emotions in the background, this research finds useful to consider emotions since they are based on women's experiences. Emotions and their own recognitions are claimed related assets and strengths in the feminine individual in order to observe and evaluate circumstances (Jaggar, 1988; Brebner, 2003). The following sections describe and contextualize these triggering elements of transformation.

3.2.2.1 Disorienting dilemmas

The transformative learning process begins with encountering an experience that provokes a conflict or disturbance against the established frame of reference or meaning perspectives this is described as *disorienting dilemmas*. For instance in the socio-linguistic realm: *how things should work* in our frames of references seemed conflicted through encountering a disorienting dilemmas which shows how *"it is not working in that ought way"*. In Adult pedagogy, disorienting dilemmas are argued to manifest from daily to liminal experiences as life changing events such as existential crisis, traumas, the loss of someone or a divorce to more subtle disturbances like a challenging new career or cross cultural encounters (Kanning, 2008; Lyons, 2010). Taylor (2000) indicates that these dilemmas can manifest once (one event) and change abruptly a person's perspective or can manifest as a sequence of events through a period in life. In tourism literature, disorienting dilemma "...is an important factor in two different ways: as a motivator to travel and as a catalyst for change"(Robledo and Batle, 2015), throughout educational, voluntourism, solo cross-cultural travel, reproductive tourism, roots or homeland tourism, or thanatourism (Sampaio et al., 2014) For instance as the disorienting events that occur through the travelling experience, such as challenging or adventurous activities that push limits of the travellers or embodying extremist cultures (Lyons, 2010). Disorienting dilemmas must be processed to be understood; processing these experiences is called *Critical Reflection*.

3.2.2.2 Critical Reflection

Critical reflection has gained most of the attention in Mezirows theory, since it has been argued the most essential to the transformation process (Kanning, 2013). This is a process of cognitive nature which enables the individual to revise and examine one’s own assumptions, values and beliefs which shape the way one make sense of our world (Kitchenham, 2008). Critical reflection “is about standing back and reflect on [an] experience [...] [it is] the ability to initiate thoughts and actions which involve imagination, solutions and capacity for change [...] [it is] to review ‘meaning structures’ on which judgements are based and are about reframing the reference of internal experience” (Shaw, 2013, p. 320) According to TLT (Mezirow, 1970) there are three ways to engage in *content reflection*, *process reflection* and *premise reflection*). Content reflection is where the individual reflects upon the actual experience; understanding the disorienting experience using the filter of the current/old frame of reference to reflect on what was done, which only transforms her/his points of view. Process reflection consists on using a new frame of reference to observe the process considering for instance actions, origins and other factors of the experience and using strategies like problem solving. This reflection also results in the transformation of points of views. Both types of reflections do not perform any deep transformation, they are more superficial transformations. However, the third type of Critical Reflection provides a powerful and profound transformation. Premise reflection is the one which contrasts and compares the new experience with our previously held assumptions and long held values and believes; it analyses if this experience fit in with what the individual believes or makes us transform those profound values, this type of reflection transforms a meaning perspective or frame of reference. These three ways to engage in Critical reflection relate to the three areas or domains of frames of reference, (see table for Types of Reflection and Meaning Perspectives).

Reflection	Perspective		
	Psychological	Sociolinguistic	Epistemic
Content	What do I believe about myself?	What are the social norms?	What knowledge do I have?
Process	How have I come to have this perspective of myself?	How have these social norms been influential?	How did I obtain this knowledge?
Premise	Why should I question this perception?	Why are these norms important?	Why do I need/not need this knowledge?

Table 1 *Types of Reflection and Meaning Perspectives (Cranton, 1994, p. 51).*

3.2.2.3 Affective Learning

Taylor (2000) highlights that most studies of adult pedagogy based on TLT lack of targeting other key elements which highly trigger the transformative learning process; one of them refers to the intrinsic link between critical reflection and affective learning. While Critical reflection's role in TLT is highly significant, studies have found that "critical reflection can only begin once emotions have been validated and worked through" (Taylor, 2000, p. 303). Affective learning is the emotional arena of the transformation process and is "reflected by the beliefs, values, interests, and behaviors of learners [...] Affective learning is concerned with how learners feel while they are learning, as well as with how learning experiences are internalized so they can guide the learner's attitudes, opinions, and behavior in the future" (Gano-Phillips, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, emotions may demonstrate how the individual perceives the experience by how he or she reacts to situations such as disorienting dilemmas. Within the transformative learning process, these feelings may involve frustration, anger, anxiousness or happiness, flexibility and acceptance among many others. Tourism and travel studies have demonstrated that solo and independent travel in females stimulated feelings of fear and vulnerability by facing constraints in their travel experiences (Wilson, 2004; Harris and Wilson, 2007; Heimtun, 2012). Affective learning also involves "developing empathy viewing of others perspectives and trusting intuition" (Taylor, 2000, p. 303) which have a relevant influence on the recognition of their emotions and other's emotions. It is argued that sense of tolerance and inclusivity are developed affective skills that emerge from transformational tourism experiences (Kanning, 2013; Grabowski, 2013; Lyons, 2012; Lean, 2012). Therefore, Affective learning in this research refers to the emotional responses towards conflicting situations or disorienting dilemmas including the developing of empathy and tolerance throughout the transformative process.

Summary: TLT suggests essential components are argued to trigger the transformation process: Disorienting Dilemma (An event or experience that conflicts our established set of beliefs), Critical Reflection (to stand back and assess the experience in three ways, content reflection, to reflect in the actual experience; process reflection, reflect on the origins that created the conflict; and premise reflection, reflecting in one's own assumptions that provide the conflict. Only premise reflection provide a frame of reference transformation) ; (Mezirow, 1991, in Taylor, 2000) Other key components to consider are Affective Learning, which entails the feelings that the dilemma arises and which are claimed to detonate critical reflection.

3.3 Scientific relevance and Research questions

The scientific relevance of this study relies on the contribution to the existing literature of travel experiences in the emergent Transformative Tourism field from a non-western centric approach and to Feminist Latin American (Cantú, 2006; Oehmichen Bazán, 2013) travel and tourism research.

3.3.1 Research goals and research questions

The main purpose of this research is to explore the contributing role that solo, independent and international travel play in the transformative learning process on female Latin American travellers.

Main Research question:

How do the experiences of female Latin American travellers participating in extended cross-cultural solo and independent sojourns for leisure purposes play a contributing role in their transformation of gendered perspectives (female roles: family and motherhood and personal freedom and self-determination) in Latin American societies?

Sub-questions:

1. What is the basic profile of the Latin American solo female traveller?
2. How do the TLT triggers that contribute to changing perspectives take place in their transformative process?
3. How do these triggers relate to first and consecutive solo travels?
4. Are there features of travel and travellers' skills that allow women to engage with transformative processes as active agents? If so, which ones?
5. What are some of the socio-linguistic premises or paradigms regarding women's roles and personal freedom that participants currently hold?
6. What are some of the outcomes of social action that emerge from the transformation process?

4. Methodology

This chapter displays the methodological approach used in this research; data collection, sampling, and data analysis. This research utilizes a qualitative methodology as the main foundation in order to address the “subjective and contextual nature of transformation...” (Kanning, 2013, p. 127) Thereby this feminist and ethnographic approach is the core methodology of the research; however, as a means of minor complementation, a basic statistical survey is used to obtain fundamental knowledge on the Latin female travellers in solo and independent travel in order to understand where this research is standing. Through this chapter data collection, sample population and data analysis are described in order to demonstrate the procedures utilized to answer the main and sub-questions of this research

4.1 Data Collection

This research is divided in two sections, the first section attempts to respond the first sub-question mentioned in the previous chapter; namely “who are the female Latin American independent solo travellers?” Due to the inexistent academic knowledge in this matter, a brief survey of demographics and their solo journeys as data collection from these travellers is carried out in this primary section through an online survey available in female traveller social media groups (See section 4.1.1, 4.2.1 and 4.3.1).

As mentioned earlier, the second section is the core foundation of this research, it belongs to an interpretive, qualitative and feminist approach to research methodology selected in an attempt to understand the transformations in relation to solo travel experiences embodied by 9 Latin women travellers through Narrative analysis and interviews. The Narrative method is used in order to allow women to speak about their lives and experiences, in their own voices and in their own terms (Wilson 2004; Norris and Wall, 1994; Swain, 1995; Gibson and Jordan, 1998; Small, 1999). “There is a need to tell women’s stories of travel and tourism in their own voices and words” (Harris and Wilson, 2007, p. 236) Analysis of themes aims to find women’s own construction of their life and travel experiences, enabling conceptualization which contributes to a description of the concepts of transformative learning through travel (Harris and Wilson, 2007). The gathered and assessed data will be introduced through a story line format, an alleged appropriate methodology to present Narrative inquiry and Interviews (Kanning, 2013). Since the evident main aim of this research is to understand the role that solo and independent travel play in their perceived transformation on perspectives of the social constructs of female roles, the first section aims uniquely to provide palpable data that confirms their participation in the global phenomenon of solo and independent travel. Encouraging further elaborated

research in order to obtain extensive data to assemble a panoramic and solid profile of the Latina Solo and Independent Traveller.

4.1.1 Online Survey

In order to answer sub question one, a survey (See Annex 2) is delivered to several social media network groups from which Latin women travellers participate as active members, and using SurveyMonkey© as a provider (web-based surveys). The groups are described in detail in section 4.2.1 Through these groups the questionnaire will answer sub question one in order to explore the solo travel profile of Latin American women. The survey is carried out in Spanish language and composed of 10 questions grounded on the study "*Why do women travel solo for purposes of leisure?*" conducted by Chiang and Jogaratnam (2005). They designed a survey destined to women from United States who engage in solo travel by collecting sociodemographic data as well as motivations and characteristics of their most recent solo travel. In contradistinction to this detailed research, the interest relies only in obtaining basic demographic data with the objective to demonstrate the participation of solo travel market for women in Latin America, as aforementioned there is no literature that shows their participation in this type of leisure activity (Hernando, 2016). However a certain extent of the survey retrieves useful information to support the core argument of this research.

Solo and independent travel concepts are clearly defined in the introductory section of the survey along with the delimitation of the criteria required from the respondents as their country of origin should be from Hispanic-Latin American countries including some insular countries where Spanish is spoken (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico). In the first section respondents are required to select themselves as participants for this research through responding whether they have engaged in previous solo travel experiences specifically for leisure purposes. Those females who had indeed participated in solo travel for leisure purposes will be considered in the survey. The second section composed of 5 questions relates to demographical data such as age, marital status, average annual income, education and country of birth. The third and last section is related to the characteristics of their last solo trip and general motivation for solo travel, such as when was their last solo trip and its duration. One question requests the selection of the destinations they have travelled alone for leisure purposes; this question aims to demonstrate the most visited countries for the majority of Latin women solo travellers who answer the survey. In order to obtain more accurate data the countries are selected instead of their regions. The last question is related to the general motivation to travel alone, based on Chiang and Jogaratnam (2005) study; five motivational dimensions for women who travel alone are derived: experience, socialize, self-esteem, relaxation and

escape. The survey is first tested on 3 social facebook groups: *Mujeres Viajera*, *Soy Viajera* and *Mochileras y Mujeres Viajeras*, and afterwards to other 8 social Facebook groups such as *Viajeros y Mochileros en Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Paraguay*, and other countries throughout the continent. The Survey was available online among these groups from May 18th to July 10th 2016 and results are analyzed using SurveyMonkey@ analysing tools.

4.1.2 Narratives and interview guide

“As qualitative researchers [...] we collect people’s life stories in order to study various aspects of the human experience and the primary way we gather stories is by interviewing people” (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012, p. 1).

A feminist ethnographic methodology is used in this section as a tool to develop interviewing through qualitative research in order to understand experiences of life and travel in the stories from the minority, disadvantaged or unheard social groups within or outside power structures (DeVault and Gross, 2007). While feminist methodology is seen as a liberatory practice by itself, along with “getting to the people”, interviewing through this approach highlights the power structures emerged and within this method. DeVault and Gross (2007) mention an important feature of the contemporary feminist inquiry, which defines the deconstruction of “...the notion of woman as the unified and foundational subject of feminism. Arguing that women are diversely situated in history, culture, and class; that genders are multiple; and that gender itself is a discursive production, theorists of gender and sexuality (and their intersections with race, class, ability, age, and nation) now resist any simple reliance on this categorical identity” (p. 175). Under this premise and in the awareness of the diversity among the participants in this research, this study makes use of narratives with the aid of semi structured interviews which retrieve stories and details of life and travel experiences (see the interview protocol in Annex 1).

Organizing and conducting interview encounters are strictly concerned with a highly important feature to this approach which is “active listening; [through] the opportunities afforded by a focus on language, narrative, and discourse; interviewing ethics and the risks of “discursive colonization” (Mohanty, 1991 in DeVault and Gross, 2007). The use of narratives “allows for the intimate study of individuals' experiences over time and in context” (Clandinin and Caine, 2008, p. 542). Ateljevic and Hall (2007) as well indicate that stories are crucial to obtain the understanding of the cultural and the social throughout the individuals experiences, namely the cultural and social realm of gendered Latin American female perspectives as well as their cross-cultural travelling experience. “Literature on narrative research describes three claims or underpinnings of this methodology. The first

claim states that human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives [...] Second, narrative researchers maintain that the stories told depend on the individual's past and present experiences, the individual's values, the people to whom the stories are being told, the addressees, and when and where the stories are being told [...] [and the last claim] relates to the multivoicedness that occurs in the narratives" (Kear, 2012, p. 33). Answering question 2, their relevant cross-cultural solo and independent travel experiences for leisure will be elicited to all of them. By not strictly limiting the focus on one single trip, and in function of the broader travel experience of the travellers, flexibility accounts in solo and independent leasured experiences engaging in eye-opener encounters. In this way, through the travel narratives question 3 is answered by the identification of key significant components which trigger transformations of perspective towards gender roles. Question 4 will be analysed throughout the life and travel narratives while for instance relevant skills pertaining to the solo trip may be developed in childhood or either through travel or other events in their life. The individuals travel experiences along with the multivoicedness are certainly useful to capture what society or authority figures may impose as a belief, answering question 5 which relates to the transformed perception of gender may encounter their societal paradigms which constructed their premises in first place. The participants' "stories illustrate the process [...] that [demonstrate] we are positioned within a particular culture with certain privileges and power relations" (Kroth and Cranton, 2015, p. xiv) including previously unchallenged presumptions and values. Question 6 will be answered as the narrative takes along their present and current life where their profession or current interests may translate into activism or social order interests (Freire, 1996).

9 interviews were conducted via Skype or Facebook video/phone-call this depended on the participant's preference as well as their availability for the interview. The use of these means of communication is due to the geographically distinct locations of the participants and the researcher. Participants were located in Mexico, Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Spain and Middle East and the researcher was located in The Netherlands. The interview was approximately 1 hour length, following up with correspondence which took place via, email, skype or Facebook call and chat. Follow up online correspondence was used to complement and enrich the interview's data collection throughout the analysis of the data for instance in clarify certain aspects of the data. While the interview was conducted the researcher was guided by the developed interview protocol (See annex 2). The interview protocol is "more than a list of interview questions; it also extends to the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what [is said] [...] before the interview, [...] at the conclusion of the interview, prompts for the interviewer to collect informed consent, and prompts to remind the interviewer the information that she or he is interested in collecting Interview protocols become not only a set of questions, but also a

procedural guide for directing [...] through the interview process” (Jacob and Ferguson, 2012, p. 2). For instance, the beginning of the interview initiated with the introduction of the topic and the researcher, clarifying the aims of the interview and what this research is looking for in their experiences; this section of the interview allowed to create a comfortable atmosphere where the interviewee felt at ease to share their intimate experiences (DeVault and Gross, 2007). This was followed by the participants’ introduction and their life and travel stories with the guidance of the developed questions and ending this interview with their last comments, suggestions and thanking them for their participation. This last section also provided information of the continuation of the research and the interviewees’ further participation in order to clarify any issues that the analysis may further request. Firstly in order to validate the accurate use of this methodology, a pilot interview protocol was tested with the first couple of participants, where the questions were adjusted and modified for the following interviews. During the interview the researcher made use of a voice recorder as a tool to document their voices throughout the dialogue. Field texts were used in order to nurture the research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) during the interview and throughout the data analysis. This was followed by the transcription of the interview through Word Microsoft Office documents; once the transcription was ready, the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees in order to verify the accuracy and validity of the information retrieved. Only two participants replied and requested minor changes. A side from the interviews and transcription correction, during the data collection, the participants and the researcher engaged in constant and close communication. Further contact by online sources (Facebook chat, Gmail, WhatsApp and Skype) was carried out in order to explore in a greater extent their narratives, where the participants (All of them) were able to clarify and add knowledge to the retrieved information. Anonymity of the participants was not requested from all of them; however they all agreed to make use of their pictures for this research.

4.2 Sample population:

4.2.1 Websites and Social media travel groups

The sample of the research is comprised of women traveling solo and independently for the purpose of leisure. The participating women are selected through a random sample. They had travelled alone for pleasure, recreation or leisure purposes, regardless of the type of destination (international, domestic or intercontinental) length of the trip, age or location among others. The social network groups selected are Facebook groups of [“Mujeres viajeras”](#), (women travellers) with 9, 629 Spanish speaking female members [Last retrieved, 22.05.2016]; [“Mochileras y mujeres Viajeras”](#) (Female Backpackers and

travellers) with 13,008 members [Last retrieved, 22.05.2016]. In addition, in order to capture a greater number of participants other groups are considered such as *Mochileros* (Backpackers) in [Argentina](#) (49,724 members), [Chile](#) (64,486 members), [Colombia](#) (57,583 members), [Bolivia](#) (1,943 members), [Mexico](#) (81,812 members), [Peru](#) (15, 049 members), [Uruguay](#), (1,217 members) and [Venezuela](#) (5,459, members) [All last retrieved 22.05.2016]. The first three groups *Mujeres Viajeras*, *Soy Viajera* and *Mochileras y Mujeres Viajeras* have female members exclusively; these groups promote solo travelling experiences (hiking, cultural, adventure, backpacking etc.) among others, as well as suggestions on a variety of issues such as “destination selection, money/expenditures, safety, fear issues” it also provides a useful platform to exchange experiences and recommendations to plan the female travel. The members are Spanish speaking women from Latin America including some members of Spain and Italy.

The remaining groups include Latin American men and women who also engage in several types of travel including solo travel, however, these groups are exclusively to share tips, experiences and suggestions accordingly to the countries they mention such as Latin America, Europe and Asia. These groups are considered due to their potential to host solo female travelers, as backpacking has been described as a type of travel of heterogenic nature which also includes travelling independently, in solitude and with constant cross-cultural interactions over extended periods of time (Wilson, 2004; Kanning, 2008).

In this section the aim is to hoard women from Spanish speaking countries in Latin America; Guatemala, Mexico El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay who have access to online social networks. Even when Brazil accounts for a growing number of female travelers (IPK 2011) literature in Portuguese language from Brazil is not considered due to the researcher’s language barrier, as well as for their historical, political and socio-cultural differences in contrast to the rest of Latin America. Therefore, similarly, Suriname, Guyana, French Guyana and other countries in the same category are not included in the study.

4.2.2 Female solo travellers in qualitative narratives

In order to access a group of women who had already embodied or experienced a transformative experience and engaged in solo and independent travel, the sampling of this section starts out through a purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling “is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices (Maxell, 2008, p. 235). Maxwell (2008) explains the usefulness of purposeful sampling as it

demonstrates representativeness of the contexts, individuals or activities which are selected and “[it] capture[s] adequately the heterogeneity in the population” (p.235); especially for the cultural and biographical diversity inbred in the participants in this research. Interviews are conducted with Latin women who claim to have had a transformative experience. This transformation may not be a perspective transformation strictly on issues of gender roles, but transformative cross-cultural experiences that have made them see the role of a woman differently. Through the online basic survey in the previous section women have been invited to participate as well in the qualitative study requesting information on their age, nationality, travel experiences and critical opinions on the role of women in Latin America. Purposeful sample has also been combined with snowball sample. 9 interviews were conducted with Latin American female participants; 1 from Colombia, 1 from Chile, 1 from Uruguay, 3 from Argentina and 3 from Mexico. Online correspondence was also taken into account. Their ages range from 29 years old the youngest to 40 years old the oldest. All of them have travelled solo and independently at least once in their lives to culturally diverse destinations in comparison to the culture of their country of origin; however 3 of them have outstanding experience travelling around the world and in a solo and independent manner (not exclusively solo travel). Without exemption their last solo and independent travel for leisure purposes has occurred in the last six months from the time of the interview and some of them were still on the journey. Most of them have travelled only within Latin America others additionally to United States, Europe and others to Asia, Africa and Arab countries. They are all single, well-educated, one of them holding a PhD. Currently all of them are either entrepreneurs or economically independent, two of them are active travel-bloggers. Most of them live within Latin America however not exclusively in their country of birth; some of them do not live in the region anymore. They are all motivated to travel solo by experiencing different cultures and lifestyles; however they all acknowledge that solo travel experience contain high levels of spiritual and/or personal growth by getting to know one-self through constant challenging situations. For every single participant travelling solo is intrinsically linked to the concept of freedom, to plan and carry out the trip with flexibility.

4.3 Data Analysis Design

While using a qualitative research methodology, data analysis and data collection should be conducted simultaneously (Maxwell, 2008), the later provides a progressive focus over the interviews and observation notes in order to decide how to test the conclusions. There are two combined strategies selected for this inquiry; categorical strategies, which involve coding analysis, and connecting strategies, which correspond to narrative analysis.

4.3.1 Online Survey Design

The analysis of data of the results of the survey is done through basic statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation and percentages) provided by SurveyMonkey© basic statistical data analysis. There is no further deepening on the data collected in this section due to the primarily nature and aim of this master thesis which is a qualitative study and as well due to time constraints. Therefore the data emerged from this survey is only informative to the basic profile of a Latina Solo traveller. In the survey, question one will help discriminate the participants who have selected “traveling solo for leisure purpose”. The analysis of the next questions will inform the percentages and the idea of which groups belong the greater or less numbers of female solo and independent traveller in participating nationalities, economic class, age, civil status and education. The last analysis will display the characteristics of the solo and independent travel, such as preference or tendency to travel in a certain length of time and temporality. The question regarding motivation will show whether experiences, socialization, self-esteem, relaxation or scape are the most or least prominent motivations to travel solo and independently. Finally the last question will inform the most and least visited destination for Latin women to travel alone for leisure purposes.

4.3.2 Narrative Design: Coding and Themes

In qualitative research, “categorical analysis involves the researcher separating segments of data from the text and placing these in a file with other segments from the same or from other interviews” (Morse, 2015, p. 1318). The aim of coding relies in “the fracture” (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) of data and to rearrange it into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and between categories” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 237). In this research categories are derived inductively from Transformative Learning Theory (TLT); as well from literature drawn from selected emic categories on Roles of a woman in Latin American society. Boyce and Neale (2006) suggest the following steps to conduct the analysis of interviews through qualitative research; the first step is to “read through the interview responses and look for patterns or themes among the participants” (p. 7). Firstly

by reading the transcription twice, the researcher aims to identify the triggers of TLP (disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection and affective learning) emerged from their travel stories. This also involved the identification of a continuing process cross-cutting their life from childhood throughout their present times and understanding the emergent topics of gender premises and paradigms; and additionally used constant comparison to guide the analysis of this research. “The second step is to find out whether there is a variety of themes in order to group them in any meaningful way” (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 7); for instance codes are defined as “disorienting dilemmas out of travel”, “disorienting dilemmas from solo travel”, “critical premise reflection”, “content reflection” and “motherhood and family” among many others. In this way, “categorizing makes it much easier [...] to develop a general understanding of what is going on, to generate themes and theoretical concepts, and to organize and retrieve[...] data to test and support these general ideas” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 237). As a third step, they suggest to “also identify the responses that seem to have been given with enthusiasm, as opposed to those that the participants answered in only a few words” (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 7). This research also accounted for the participants’ evident demonstrations of concern or fierce passion towards certain topics such as media and family influence on gender expectations and other socio-cultural, historical and political issues; social pressures of motherhood, the controversial news on female travel tragedies in Latin America and their engagement in social activism and feminism. Once the codes were identified and analysed, the narratives are presented in a story-line and very brief manner in order to illustrate the process of transformation found in this research; placing solo travel within this life process and taking into account relevant quotidian experiences that play a role in this TLP, these illustrations are elaborated in the following chapter.

4.4 Positionality

As a qualitative researcher through a constructivist and a feminist approach I take into account my experiences and personal involvement with the research topic as elements to the operation and design of this study. Recognizing that my own person; social class level, education, culture, ideologies and travel experience influence in one way or another this research study procedures, what is being studied and the manner in which the findings will be presented. To support this argument, Morse (2003) discusses the dominant positivist paradigm in scientific research as *biasphobia*—or fear of bias—the rigor of the qualitative studies may very well rely in the fear of biasing our research. She claims that “bias is essential and must be used if qualitative inquiry is to be done well. In fact, biasphobia [...] severely impedes the quality of qualitative inquiry. Strategies that researchers are using to avoid bias, paradoxically, are making qualitative inquiry much more difficult by diluting,

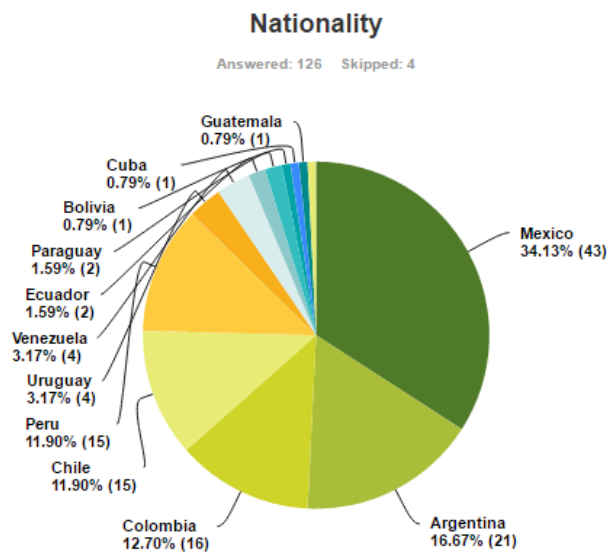
contaminating, and concealing the phenomena the researchers are trying to explore, describe, delineate, and reveal” (p. 891). As mentioned by Morse (2003) biasing or being involved in this qualitative research and Latin American women’s experiences enhances the co-construction of the quality of the different realities the participants embody. “Being an insider rather than a ‘distant authority’, [...] has advantages in understanding women’s lives and travel experiences” (Harris and Wilson, 2007, pp. 240-241), for instance, through data collection, it was clear that women felt more confident to talk about their feelings and intimate experiences when the researcher integrated her own Latin American background, language and colloquial expressions and promoted an empathic, informal, friendly and equality environment; becoming a confidant. It is this *insiderness* that allowed interviewees to become relaxed and expressed truly, fluidly and openly. In the same line, while the researcher has experienced a patriarchal dominant past and gained awareness of gendered premises and related issues with the aid of international solo travel, this experience helped the researcher to look at aspects in the participants’ experiences that may or may not relate to her own transformative experience rather than basing the narratives only on the information they provide; of course with the discretion and carefulness to respect and obtain the authentic information from the participants’ own unique experiences. This helps to co-create knowledge and enrich the research, as Rowlands (1997) argues that the *insiderness* has helped in the identification of the issues and interpreting the topics to acquire in depth knowledge of the tourism phenomena in question. Which in this case the experience that is sought at is in the empirical world is that there exist multiple realities rather than one absolute truth to explain these experiences (Jennings, 2001). In terms of reflexivity in research, Harding (1991) argues that it must not be seen as a ‘problem’, “as it is in traditional positivist approaches, to a ‘resource’ that adds depth and richness to our understanding of the social world” (Harris and Wilson, 2007, pp. 240-241) In addition, Clandinin (2006) mentions that “Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants’ experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. This makes clear that, as narrative inquirers, inquirers, too, are part of the metaphoric parade” (p. 47). Therefore my own respective reflections would assist to demonstrate, that positioning as insiders, is a strength that can build trust linkages with the participants and produce and reproduce knowledge that would enhance the findings of this research.

5. Analysis of Data

In this chapter the collected data and its analysis is displayed in order to illustrate the findings which respond to the objectives of this study. The first section shows the results of the online survey as aforementioned with the attempt to scanty build the profile of the Latin American traveller in solo and independent travel. The second section exhibits the life and travel narratives from the 9 participants corresponding to the qualitative part of this research.

5.1 Profile and motivations of solo independent Latin American female travellers:

According to the results of the online survey responded by 130 hispanic-speaking Latin American female solo travellers and traveling for leisure purposes show that the great majority of the female Latin American solo travellers belong to a young-mature age group between 26 to 35 years old (53.91%) followed by two small groups with a close percentage; 18 to 25 years old (22.66%) and more than 36 years old (23.44%). Regarding their civil status, 71.65% of the participants are single corresponding to the largest share. 14.96% are married and three small minor groups represented in cohabitation agreement 6.30%; divorced 3.94%; and separated 3.15%. According to the nationalities of the participants, (See Graphic 1), largest groups corresponded to Mexican (34.13%), Argentinean (16.67%) and Colombians (12.70%) followed by Peruvians and Chileans (each with 11.90%) in smaller numbers other participants are from Uruguay and Venezuela (each with 3.17%), Ecuador and Paraguay (each with 1.59%) and the smallest



Graphic 1: Nationalities of the participants in percentages in between brackets the amount of participants who responded.

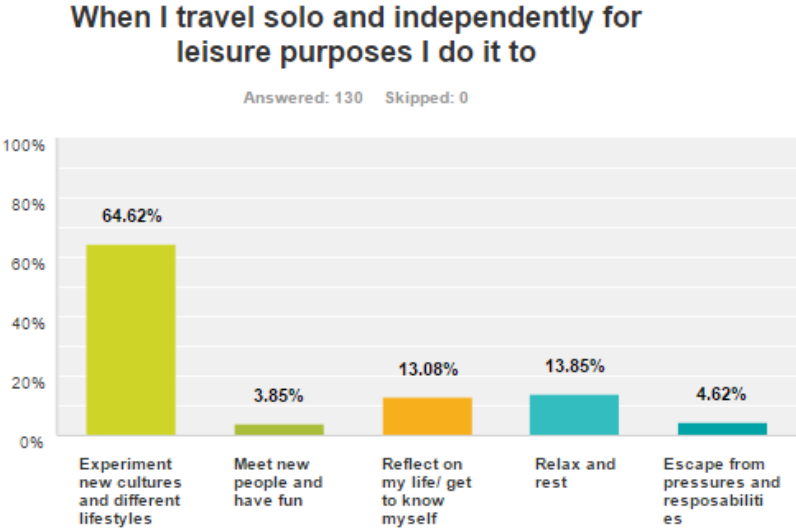
and Paraguay (each with 1.59%) and the smallest group composed of Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras and Bolivia (all with .79% each). The rest of the countries which were not named in this list entailed zero participants from the respective nationalities (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, Salvador and Nicaragua).

Most of the female solo travellers are well educated; 53.54% of the participants have acquired a University degree, followed by post graduate studies (Master 21.21% and PhD 1.01%) only a few had lower education such as high school (19.19%) and Secondary (7.07%). In regards to the annual income the percentages are equally distributed, the mean is 2.26 and the standard deviation is 1.14, a large standard deviation signifies that the values in the data provided by the respondents in this question are farther away from the mean on average. This is due to the fact that many of the participants do not live in Latin American countries and therefore wages are variable. Some live and even within the region others in Western countries or countries that have higher or lower average income than Latin America. The largest groups earns the least amount of annual income which is 1000 to 5000 USD (35.87%); earning 5001 to 10000 USD correspond to a 21.74%; 10001 -15000 USD shares the 22.83% of the groups and the highest income; more than 15000 USD correspond to a 19.57%. This may be explained by the current travelling status women undertaken by the time of the interview as well as many travellers may be economically aided by their families to perform travel, it may also relate to the geographical and economic disparities among their country of residence.

In sum, according to the results the profile of the Latin American solo traveller is generally a single relatively young (26-35 years old) and well educated woman.

The most visited countries for Latin American female solo travellers exclusively for leisure purposes are located in Europe: Spain (32.56%) and France (31.78%) as top destinations followed by Germany (27.13%) and Italy (24.03%) among others. Europe is the most popular region visited by this type of travellers. United States follows Europe with a 27.13%. These results underpin their preference for western countries as participants mentioned they are more "safe" for women travelling solo. However as part of North America; Mexico (17.83%) and Canada (8.53%) are visited in less preference compared to other countries in South America. South America is the second largest group, Argentina (24.03%), Brazil (21.71%) and Peru (20.93%) as their three leading visited countries, Bolivia (11.63%) and Ecuador (12.40%) are also frequently visited. This may also respond to the physical proximity of their country of origin (IPK, 2011). Asian countries are not significantly visited for this type of travellers, however their most visited Asian countries are Thailand (7.75%), Cambodia (6.98%), and Vietnam (5.43%) which represent a minority. Countries in Africa are even less visited; however the top destinations are Egypt and Morocco with (2.33%) each. Therefore the Latin American traveller usually visits western countries (Europe and United states to perform solo travel, followed by South American countries as a second most visited region.

In regards to the characteristics of the latest solo journey, results showed that these women are active travellers since the largest group corresponding to a 52% has travelled in the last 6 months, 17% has travelled between 1-2 years ago, 16% has travelled in a period of time from 6 months to 1 year and 15% has travelled more than 2 years ago. The leisureed solo trip is lengthy; the greatest group (36%) travelled more than 4 weeks; followed by 1 to 3 weeks (32%); two smaller groups travelled a shorter time; 4 to 6 days (19%) and 1 a 3 days (13%). The majority of the participant’s motivations (See Graphic 2) for solo travel and based in the study made by Chiang and Jogaratnam (2005) which their five categories were taken as a baseline. The majority of the solo travellers travel in the search of experiences; to experience new cultures and different lifestyles with a 64.62% of the total share; this result is confirmed through the qualitative section of this research. The qualitative participants all agreed that they travelled in order to experience different cultures and new ways of thinking. The main motivation is followed by motives of relaxation and rest (13.85%). A smaller group of participants travelled in order to reflect on their lives and get to know themselves; indicating a self-realization motivation (13.08%). The smallest groups travelled alone to escape runaway from pressures and responsibilities (4.62%) and also for social purposes (13.85%); meeting new people and have fun. These findings contrast with the main motives found by Western solo travellers for leisure, since their motivations range from challenge oneself, meet new people, extend beyond personal comfort zones, develop feelings of autonomy and independence and self-empowerment (Butler, 1995; Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Wilson and Little, 2005; Harris and Wilson, 2007; McNamara and Prideaux, 2010; Heimtun, 2012) This suggests that Latin American and Western solo travellers may not travel for the same reasons.



Graphic 2: Motives for travelling solo

5.2 Solo and Independent travel narratives of transformation

In this section, the analysis of the interviews and correspondence are presented in a form of individual narratives. The life and travel stories of the participants are shown individually demonstrating the emergent steps of their own and unique transformational process. While “the number of factors related to transformation through travel is arguably innumerable, [...] [and while] an individual experiences various processes of maintenance and transformation...” (Lean, 2012, p. 157) in order to illustrate this process, the display of narratives mentions two or three relevant events during travel and quotidian life which are relevant to the transformation of personal, socio-linguistic and epistemic dimensions. The narratives consider frames of reference, its dimension and key triggers (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000) on issues such as motherhood, family, personal freedom and self-determination (Herrera Santi, 2000; Novo, 2003). All participants engaged in transformative processes using solo and independent travel for leisure as part of that process. This complex and broader life transformative process extends before, during and after their leisured solo journey and make use of other types of solo travel such as educational International travel. While most of them began a transformative process before solo travel for leisure for the first time, a categorization based on their first solo leisured travel is suggested in three different main roles. The first section gathers life and travel stories where disorienting dilemmas emerged in their quotidian life and from quotidian life initiated a transformative process that led to solo and independent travel for leisure for the first time. In this section solo travel is represented as a *consequence* of an initiated and continuing transformative process throughout their lives which helped to transform the three dimensions of frames of reference. The second set of narratives women as well initiated a transformative process in their quotidian life before they travelled solo for pleasure, however in contrast to the first set of stories; this initiated transformation from quotidian life uses international educational travel as a powerful catalyst for transformation which further led to solo travel for pleasure. This locates solo travel for leisure as a *confirmation or reminder* of a previous advanced transformative perspective process. The last set of narratives involve women who during their childhood experienced travelling and tourism as a normal part of their lives, this positions their first solo travel for leisure at an early age (under 19 years old). They did not pursue to engage in travel as a consequence of disorienting dilemmas nor to be reminded of a previous learnings, however this first solo travel is an “*starter*” or *initiator* (Kanning, 2013), only in a personal-dimension transformation where the further accumulation of quotidian and travel experiences stimulated their intermittent transformative learning process which this time involved socio-cultural and epistemic transformations.

5.2.1 Solo Travel as a consequence of an initiated transformation

5.2.1.1 Alondra

Alondra grew up in a middle class conservative family in Uruguay. Her socio-linguistic meaning schemes (Mezirow, 2000) in relation to womanhood delimited social acceptance through established gender roles, demonstrating the connection between the biological capacities and female identity in her society (Rubin, 1976): *“My family taught me that getting married and being a mother were the basic principles to be accepted as a woman...”* However, Alondra showed her daring nature from a very young age:

“My mother didn’t allow us [daughters] to shave our armpits until we were 15, but at age 12 I was hairy as hell! so I shaved them anyway, then I walked in the room and showed my mother my mischief—look what I did!—Of course I had to handle the beating afterwards...but I didn’t care...”

Family education was hierarchical; a dominant mother and submissive daughters (Róžańska 2011), limited in decision-making even on their own bodies (Maier, 2008). On the psychological dimension of her frames of reference (ideas of one-self), she believed she has never been the “feminine type” according to the standards her society promotes (Novo, 2003); she was not fond of make-up and uninterested in motherhood. Alondra’s meaning schemes were embedded in the premise that being accepted as a woman was equal to follow society’s paradigms, where female *personal freedom* was a linked to debauchery; a distorted premise (Mezirow, 1991). At age 15 she moves out from her mother’s home with the pursuit of taking her own decisions. Contradicting premises are noted; on one hand regarding psychological dimension; *“I was always a person who didn’t care what people say, I did what I wanted despite the people’s talk,”* And on the other side the socio-linguistic dimension, a fascination for religions and strict guidelines to bring order to her life; *“when I converted to a religion I followed it meticulously [...] I have been catholic, Jehovah’s Witness, Evangelist, Buddhist, Metaphysic, Mormons, Afro Umbanda, besides studying yoga, reiki and meditation...”* Through religion Alondra seemed to find balance between the pursuit of personal freedom-debauchery and those set of rules of behaviour religions preached in the search of validation (Mezirow, 1991). At age 30, she marries and divorces 5 years later due to a deep depression emerged from an unexpected abortion. While she was not fond of motherhood, the “failure to conceive” (biology-Feminity (Rubin, 1976)) confirmed her premise where she “indeed” not fit the *Feminine type* (Mezirow, 1990). The abortion and divorce were crucial disorienting dilemmas occurring outside solo travel experience which led her to a huge life crisis: *“It was very painful, after that I came back to my party life until I found religion, the Islam pacified me”* From this crisis a transformation process is identified. These disorienting dilemmas produced emptiness and depression (Robledo and Batle, 2015) which without further critical reflection she turned back into tradition (Mezirow, 2000); her party life.

Getting involved in the Islam provided the strength to overcome her crisis and at the same time led her to her first solo travel. After two years learning the Islam and one year learning English, she embarked on her very first solo journey for leisure to Pakistan. At the beginning of her travel disorienting dilemmas pertaining to the personal or psychological dimension emerged (Mezirow, 1990) challenged by her own capacities of being alone and self-sufficient at a faraway country. However along time and culture involvement dilemmas related to the socio-cultural dimension loomed in aspects such as female personal freedom which stimulated her previously began transformative process (Cranton, 1994). Alondra considered herself an insider; she lived in flesh and bone the Muslim culture for 5 months. She stayed with local families, wore the Muslim garb and travelled mainly to provinces rather than urban centres. She realized the inexistent freedom local women possessed, by experiencing being limited by her gender:

“They want to control you, I said I wanted to visit a certain place, they tell you — no, no, look, this one is better — eh... No! Take me where I told you — you have to talk serious because they think that because you are a woman, they decide for you, they decide even to where you are going to go, no matter if they know you or not, whoever the man is...a neighbour, the taxi driver, an uncle... the man wants to control the situation of the woman, so I was forced to face this in many situations with a harsh temper eh, being hard more than I ever be in my country, the other day I was at the market and I said I want 1 kilo of potatoes, they say, take a kilo of onions because they are better...”

Expressing her emotional response of discomfort (Taylor, 2000) towards these dilemmas, she *critically content reflects* (Mezirow, 1990) by analysing the situation as rooted in the limited freedom for women (within socio-linguistic premises); *“Women are objects, [...] it’s like visiting the world of men! Really...you go outside and you only encounter limitations just by being a woman”*. During her travel she experienced a prevalent array of situations related to the social position of the woman (Jelin, 1996). However Alondra highlights an important event which significantly aided the transformative process:

“In Quetta, at the border with Afghanistan, the family I stayed at come from Afghanistan, the mother of the boy -who is my friend now-, is a mature woman, they only speak Pastor language, so the boy translated what I said from my lousy English...The mother was bought 3 times by the husband, and at the third time they decided to get married and have children, so they don’t know of other opportunities outside of their religion, because for them, I am an American whore, a horrible word right? But I am talking clear, it is the truth,—the shame of a woman I am— so when the mother heard my life story... I could just see all the women... expressing a caged bird face-like... when suddenly the mother said, —you know, I would’ve liked to have the courage to be like you— and the other women looked at her surprised...and the men, looked like if they just got kicked in the liver! —“what do you mean my mother would like to be like this woman? My mother cannot think that; she has to be the saint of the house— so later I understood they have very limited beliefs...”

Alondra is able to further reflect by identifying the locals’ (sociolinguistic) premises of surprise and rejection (Taylor, 2000) towards her lifestyle back in Uruguay and how this

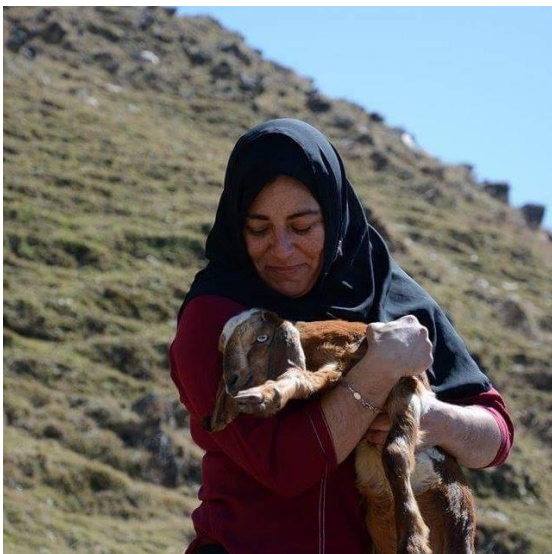
extent of freedom Alondra enjoyed in her country has turned her into a "whore" in the eyes of the locals. Therefore in this culture, being a "whore" seemed equal to enjoy personal freedom in a woman whereas women under male control seemed positive and right (Lerner, 1986). Alondra also reflects in the epistemic dimension of how knowledge is constructed, as she mentions, *"they know their world through religion"* (Mezirow, 2000). After these several experiences premise reflection is performed on her own dysfunctional premises of female personal freedom and debauchery (Pinochet Cobos, 2010):

"In Uruguay, I confused freedom with immorality, the point of moral is that I am not the one who decides, because then I am invading the freedom of others, the point is to be happy without harming anyone, I travelled here with a very narrow mind and I come back with a total different perspective, because in my country I was labelled as minx and now I believe freedom is my right..."

Furthermore, Alondra used religions to balance her premises of female freedom and society's guidelines. Travelling to Pakistan also stimulated the process to reframe her religion premises, no longer as a meticulous guideline of "order" but towards social action as she mentions she has now become a feminist:

"I'm someone else, I discovered something that I did not have in mind, because if there were no religions there would be no gaps among humans, no labels, or placing women in a certain place...the story is the same in all the religions... I think that I became feminist in this country",

Alondra is now 40 years old and single. By the time of the interview she was leaving from Pakistan to continue her journey to China. Her experience illustrates solo travel as a step in her broader transformative learning process.



Alondra in Pakistan, 2016



The world of men, Pakistan – Alondra

5.2.1.2 Belén

Belén was born in Necochea, a small town at the east coast of Argentina. Her education was based on gender equality; therefore her dimensions of frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991) towards womanhood were not limited to strict patriarchal gender roles as most of the participants: *“they raised me to be free”*. From an early age her uncle introduced her to motorcycle races and 4x4 events: *“the irons are my passion”*. Belén’s interest in exciting experiences such as racing was as normal as cooking dinner (Herrera Santi, 2000). However at age 23, a first disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1990) in her quotidian life emerges:

“I hit the ground, I had a massive disagreement with a boyfriend and this was related to “our life together”, he wanted to get married and I thought there was much more to live than just settling down, you know? I mean, I would like to but I wanted to discover stuff first and then I would know if I want to settle down [...] It had to do with our routinary life you know? I realized every week was the same, work and on weekends go out, everything was predictable and I didn’t want that”

Belén’s feelings of discomfort emerge from the routine (Lean, 2012); her transformation was triggered by the accumulation of ordinary life events where the marriage pressure was the fulminant trigger which led to content reflection (Mezirow, 1990); a predictable future she may possibly experience. From these events Belén decides to move to Buenos Aires in *“in search of an exciting experience”* (Kottler, 1998). Living in the capital was not a challenge for her, she was already quite self-sufficient; within a month she was already settled, had a job and a place to live. The transition between her hometown and the big city was not radical for her; through her socio-cultural dimension, Buenos Aires was found culturally familiar (Cranton, 1994). Nevertheless it empowered her by supporting her personal freedom and self-determination (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012); *“I could take care of myself without anybody”*. However, a second disorienting dilemma emerges at Buenos Aires; she again experiences the routine as a triggering factor invading her life. The trigger for critical reflection undertook several conflicting and perhaps minor dilemmas such as the daily events (Taylor, 2000). She reflects once more on the routine related to the previous disorienting dilemma (Kitchenham, 2008); this recurrent conflicting dilemma triggered content, yet not premise reflection (Mezirow, 1990). However similar to the previous dilemma, she rejects her pre-determined life. In 2012 she embarks on her very first leisured travel for the next 4 years, touring 60.000 km, to 17 countries with Filomena, her 100cc motorcycle, few luggage, a tent, 500 USD and the hope to get to Alaska.

“During the first year [...] I became stronger in things I didn’t think I could do, that I became aware by baring a lot of things, it was amazing! If I didn’t have limits before, now I really have no limits”.

In terms of her personal or psychological dimension, her perspectives on her own capacities transformed (Mezirow, 1990), although she was not limited by her gender in her

frames of reference, this experience transformed her by the recognition of her capacities through challenges (Wilson, 2004). (i.e. fixing her motorcycle in the middle of nowhere and getting jobs in unknown countries). This first solo travel rediscovers her power and capacities which she achieved in previous stages of life: Buenos Aires (Cranton, 1994). While her socio-linguistic meaning schemes in Argentina were based on gender equality (Belluchi, 1990), the contrast found among cultures among the continent contained an array of dilemmas as she acquires close insight of gender paradigms (Novo, 2003):

“I was surprised of the place of women... I could tell, especially when they saw me, a woman riding a motorcycle, it was like they were seeing a ghost. At the borders they saw not only a woman riding her motorcycle but a woman traveling solo and everyone was alarmed, both women and men said, —How come are you travelling alone? This cannot be! You cannot do it, I couldn’t do it— No? Why not? Why can’t I do it? — It was like a reflection, that they were not able to do what I was doing... because it’s like breaking the barriers of fear... they usually said, —No, no, I have a family and I love my children... they constantly asked me if my husband allowed me to travel alone, when I told them I was not married then they asked my age, and say why aren’t you married?...”

Recurrent episodes of locals alarmed by her Belén’s personal freedom, she impersonated female self-sufficiency throughout Latin America. Belén is reflective of socio-cultural premises attached to “female capacities” and gender roles many Latin women accepted as true (Mezirow, 2000): *“I could not do it, [...] I have a family and I love my children”* setting the delimitation their duty as women (children and family) (Makaran, 2013). A vast lineup of events built up related to female personal freedom, being “alone”/unprotected (Rozanska, 2011), to events where locals questioned her intelligence as a woman. From these several experiences affective learning takes place: *“that was rather annoying because here in Argentina, women have a very independent role, she can chose, she can work, have children, a husband but also have her own life... and she has an important role and over there this was totally different”*. According to her in Argentina women’s roles are more progressive (Belluchi, 1990) than most of the rest of South America, Central America and Mexico:

“...crossing the continent I could realize that more and more women stayed home...and men dominated much more, it was difficult to learn to live with this and observe it, but later one understands a lot of things, like for example there is a tendency to follow what has been told, —you have to finish school, meet someone, then get married and have children, it’s like most people do this, so the ones who don’t are weird, like me...also I understood that for many years they believe these things and it is also very difficult to change from one day to the other...”

Belén also makes a clear difference in regards to these feminine worldviews in contrast to United States and Canada where she mentions it is highly accepted for women to perform male roles (Schein and Mueller, 1992). The exposure to these diverse socio-linguistic frames (Mezirow, 2000) provided a kaleidoscope of worldviews which throughout her transformative process materialized as tolerance and understanding of the inexistence of absolute truths (O’Sullivan, 1999).

“I feel extremely lucky [...] to live, and to live not what people say but what I want to live [...] throughout so many kilometers toured, I have realized that the realities I have experienced can be capitalized by leaving a message that lasts and crosscut frontiers, that we are all free if we want to”

Belén returned to Argentina from her journey on January 2016, she has become a public figure due to her motorcycle adventure and has been participating in social activism, for instance against female violence in Argentina, and currently moved to Canada where she saves and plans her next motorcycle journey starting in Southeast Asia.



Belén arriving to a Glacier, Alaska 2015



Interview at Radio Universitaria, Argentina 2016

5.2.1.3 Verónica

Verónica was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her mother became the owner of a travel agency and motivated Veronica to travel *“she [her mother] told me the best university is the world, she encouraged me to experiment and discover...”* At age 21 Verónica engaged in her first international travel experience; a solo and independent travel. However, her gendered frames of reference (Mezirow, 1990) towards womanhood were influenced by female stereotypes in media and TV Soaps (Staples and Frost, 1988). According to her such stereotypes framed the “helpless woman” in need of a man; since she was not only afraid of being alone and helpless but she was also engaged to be married; her first dilemma:

“I had a boyfriend for 4 years and I was already engaged before I was going on my first solo trip, you know? in Argentina we get married and have kids at a very young age...I remember very well that my in-laws were planning to give us a house so we make our family, ssss... I really did feel that pressure... to marry him, then have kids and be that happy couple, I wanted to break with that, and that was one of the reasons of my first solo trip, I could predict my life 10 years from that moment, I was afraid because I could really see what was going to happen, I didn't want that”.

Veronica illustrates the socio-cultural premises (Mezirow, 1990) of gender expectations in Argentina at that time, by exposing the social pressures of her in-laws anticipation to their

expected marriage (Herrera Santi, 2000). While she was following such premises, fear and anguish (Taylor, 2000) appears facing this first dilemma (Mezirow, 1990) which stimulated not only her first solo travel experience but her transformational journey (Pritchard et al., 2007). Veronica reflects on the content of the situation, *"I realized we wanted different things from life and despite I loved him very much my future was not with him"*. Ending her relationship a month prior to the trip, she travels for 1 year to United States, Europe and Egypt. During this trip she encountered several dilemmas, affective learning and reflections on the psychological frame of reference (Mezirow, 1990). Being self-sufficient and capable of taking care of her own (Wilson, 2004) *"I was super afraid of being alone"*. As other participants the first leisured solo trip appears to materialize transformation through empowerment and the confirmation of their capacities as women (Harris and Wilson, 2007). From this trip she moves to London. Where she gets involved in a multicultural environment, especially to the exposure of the personal freedom (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012) European women enjoy in contrast to the Latin American women *"I could see how easily they [Western women] moved, the confidence they had [...], something that was very difficult for me...but in time I realized it's all about culture and education you know?"* Personal and socio-cultural dimension of frames of reference are stimulated to transform (Mezirow, 1990) through the involvement with the western gendered paradigms of higher personal freedom and self-determination (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 1991). The epistemic dimension of her meaning schemes is also transformed as she identifies the cultural and educational construction of these gendered premises (Cranton, 1994). She later embarks in her second leisured solo and independent travel to Southeast Asia for seven months. Traveling to India, Cambodia, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries allowed the continuation of this transformational learning process. Similar to Belén and Alondra, disorienting dilemmas on socio-cultural paradigms attached to the destinations' "female capacities" and gender roles (Herrera Santi, 2000). Other dilemmas emerged from the involvement with local families, such as in India, where she makes a good relationship with the young daughters:

"This girl didn't want to tell me openly because evidently being a lesbian in India is unaccepted in fact it is punishable and this girl asked me [...] if she can marry another girl or a man... this was very hard, because she was forced to marry in two weeks with someone she hasn't even met [...] other girl asked if I could help her get the papers to move to Australia because she didn't want to marry and her family didn't understand that, so these kind of situations you live at first-hand...you get involved... and for me this is super difficult, it is frustrating, cause everyone should have freedom ..."

Previous to this trip Veronica set *female personal freedom* in Latin America in disadvantage to western women (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 1991). However traveling to Asia provided a twist in this perspective by the involvement in for instance India's gendered social paradigms; which according to her, diminish women's self-determination in a greater extent. Veronica's emotional response to these dilemmas are translated in frustration

(Taylor, 2000), however this time she premise reflects (Mezirow, 1990) among others the epistemic dimension; culture, education and media, as the source of female fears and male domination and how these premises affect the development of women to experience their world (Herrera Santi, 2000; Novo, 2003):

“our family teaches us many fears, for example I have many female Friends [in Argentina] whose mothers did not support them, they said —don’t go!, something bad will happen to you— remember this stigma that the woman is not safe without a man...that you are exposed to dangers, but they don’t tell you are exposed to wonderful things, and in fact these female friends have never travelled and today with almost 40 years old are afraid of things happening to them... And fears are not only inculcated by family but media as well, remember what happened with these two Argentinean girls in Montañita, Ecuador¹²? They were two girls who travelled and most of the feminists in the world threw themselves to their necks¹³— what do you mean they travelled alone? They were two! Just because they didn’t have a man next to them? A macho that protects them? In my criterion the South American culture is still very machista. And currently they keep preaching those values; if you are a woman travelling solo you evidently deserve to be raped or assaulted”

To capture these experiences from a mindful (Robledo and Batle, 2015) active engagement of Veronica, which Mezirow (2000) refers as the enabler of critical reflection, Veronica holds strong critical opinions by detaching from her old beliefs. These solo travel experiences influenced the previous transforming perspective into a broader level of consciousness (Reisinger, 2015) towards female personal freedom and self-determination; *“I turned into a feminist, I learned firstly the fortune one has depending on which country one is born, and secondly that it is possible to break with all the social pressures if you are brave enough”*. By using this wider feminist filter through which she currently experiences the world (Mezirow, 2000); It is through her trip to Southeast Asia where she decides to become an entrepreneur; a freelance travel-blogger. Veronica is now living in Spain, she is single, 38 years old and she engages in social activism through travel conferences and projects with the aim to inspire Latin American women to travel solo as a mean of empowerment. This year’s next destination is South Africa.



At the wedding in India



Veronica at Jornadas iati, Spain

¹² Two Argentinean women were murdered while backpacking in Ecuador:
<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-35756321>

¹³ Colloquial expression of showing strong disagreement, defense or attack.

5.2.2 Solo travel for leisure as reminder or confirmation of previous transformations emerged from international educational travel

5.2.2.1 Catarina

Catarina was born in Santiago de Chile. As an only child the pressures by her mother concerned the best education; a prestigious school for girls. The construction of distorted perceptions (Mezirow, 1991) was based on contradicting premises of women empowerment and powerlessness (Novo, 2003):

“The role of this school was very potent in my life, they stuck in your head the image of the successful woman... she has to go to certain schools, follow certain carrier paths and how women can be empowered...but also the education was super male chauvinist, with ideas such as a woman needs male protection and she can't make it alone [...]get married, have a house, children, a good car... a lot of pressures that I didn't understand, but in the bottom of my heart I knew I didn't want ”

According to Catarina, from an early age she was already experiencing disorienting dilemmas (Taylor, 2000) from these gendered paradigms. Therefore the first dilemmas manifest from events where social expectations in regards to pressures of a predetermined life (Robledo and Batle, 2015) and female personal freedom (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012) take place; *“...I struggled immensely to make my family trust my capacity of being free and independent, being a woman and take my own decisions”*. At age 22 Catarina found herself in a major catalyst for transformation; an existential crisis. She was taking a career path which was not fulfilling, but she chose it through influences of social expectations (Gergen, 1991 in Molina, 2006; Robledo and Batle, 2015). At that point Catarina engages in a congress of pedagogy in Argentina from Mothers of Plaza de Mayo¹⁴. This crucial event is her first solo travel; however while being a trip for educational purpose, the content of this travel, triggers the critical premise reflection that was gestating along the years:

“I get involved in politics and social issues and here I realized that there is a meaning in this life, these mothers with missing children in dictatorships... they completely changed their perspective from losing a child... from grief, fear and sorrow, and not being heard...to... life... life emerged...And this happened to me as well for a long time, I was afraid of doing something new, I was always responding to what was expected from me and trying not to fail, and suddenly I said No! I realized I can do what I wanted... like these women, I could be a teacher. That my socio-political life project was broader than a degree ... I realized that I was going to live as I wanted so I decided to be a French teacher... and returning from the congress I broke with everything that was expected of me, I decided to apply to teaching training in French and during that limbo is when I travel solo to Bolivia, to break with everything that was expected of me”

¹⁴ Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, is a university and a foundation emerged from the mothers and grandmothers from the disappeared university students during Argentina's dictatorship, their children were arrested and disappeared by this regime, after long years struggling to find them, they decided to create a university to continue this legacy, to generate an academic space their children loved, and continue the legacy of the reason their children died, for freedom.

In the case of Catarina, travelling to Argentina and getting involved in socio-political discourse of gender freedom was a decisive occurrence which triggered the transformational learning process (Mezirow, 2000). The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo stimulated the critical psychological premise reflection (Mezirow, 2000) *“I was always responding to what was expected from me and trying not to fail [...] I realized I can do what I wanted”*. While this transformative process does not emerge from a leisured experience, rather a travel experience with academic purpose, back in Chile she is challenged to put into practice this new premise (O’Sullivan, 1999). While pressures from her family and society threatened her new path towards self-determination and freedom (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012), her first solo travel for leisure emerges as way to strengthen her perspective *“during that limbo is when I travel solo to Bolivia, to break with everything that was expected of me”*, she materializes the personal freedom she was seeking, throughout several experiences, for instance:

“One day at Isla del Sol in Bolivia, I met two Argentinians and a German, we visited the island and returned to Copacabana, we agreed to have trout for dinner that night. On my way to the hostel, I ran into a Peruvian girl who I met earlier in La Paz, she said, —Hey! I am with two Chileans, we are taking the bus to Tiahuanaku now, we leave in 10 minutes, come with us — I thought, that's not in my route! It was not in my plan... and the trout for dinner? Suddenly I said, and so? Routes can change! And I start running, set up my backpack and I went flying to catch the bus! The bus was already full and already on the way so I took a taxi to chase them. The people on the bus were cheering me up!! Haha I then realized and applied it to my life. Before I had a very strict education, very systematic, without a margin for errors, without improvising, from 2007 [trip to Bolivia] up to now I live life differently, I can break the plans, I changed my career. That trip to Bolivia was a super powerful and very revealing journey, in the sense of empowerment that means. I healed many wounds with myself and with the world which totally changed the perception of myself...”

This first solo travel for leisure indeed concreted her transformation on her personal realm by being capable of taking and carrying out her own choices (Mezirow, 1991). While she commenced her transformation in Chile, then in Argentina, she then put into practice this new perspective during her solo trip in Bolivia. Therefore in the case of Catarina, solo traveling for leisure is a confirmation of a previous transformation process, while acting upon the new set of premises (Cranton, 1994). After this first solo trip she successfully conducted and concluded pedagogy in French education and obtained a scholarship in France, where she engaged in several solo travels for leisure to Spain and Italy:

“Each time I acquire a new outlook, I feel happy of the decisions I've made, to be out of that predetermined life and build a life based on my own decisions”.

Back in Santiago, Catarina is now 31 years old and is currently working as a French professor at one of the most prestigious schools in Chile and through her passion she seeks the ways to leave a mark in this life through social action (Freire, 1996). By the time of the interview she was planning her next solo travel adventure once again to Europe.



Catarina [left] and a friend in Buenos Aires, Catarina in France

5.2.2.2 Jackeline

Jackeline was born in Cauca; a remote province from Colombia. She grew up in a strong moralist and catholic village. Like most of the participants her gendered frames of reference were based on dysfunctional concepts of “women powerlessness” and submission (Lerner, 1986): *“I wanted to marry the macho guy from my village, [...], he cheated on me... there was psychological harm in many occasions... but I really wanted to marry and I bared everything”* While marriage is eagerly denoted as imminent part of life (Pinochet Cobos, 2010) this psychological abuse emerges from power relations and expressions of gender roles that society promotes among men and women as a “pathology of love” (López Mondéjar, 2001, p. 7). Jackeline’s distorted personal and socio-linguistic premises (Mezirow, 2000) were conflicted as disorienting dilemmas emerged during adolescence:

“...they [caucan society] have trouble seeing a woman alone, from your father’s home straight to your husband’s home, there is no in-between to make up your mind, for them, the idea of happiness is always having someone next to you... always, they feel pity for the woman who is alone...”

Similar to Catarina, the quotidian and constant discomfort (Taylor, 2000) points out several disorienting dilemmas where her dysfunctional romantic relationship plays a key trigger for the beginning of a transformational process (Mezirow, 2000). Without further reflection and a relationship rupture, Jackeline at age 24 engaged in PhD studies; her first international solo travel. While her first goal was merely professional; this experience in Argentina was significant for her transformative learning experience. Firstly, in the socio-linguistic domain: she was challenged by the multicultural environment of the university (Brown, in Reisinger, 2013) which allowed the engagement with people from Europe and Latin America. This also included getting involved in the Argentinean socio-cultural

premises of gender equality in contrast to Colombia: *“Argentina is totally different from Colombia; [...] I was impressed of the support women received [...] there were no limitations for women”*. And secondly, in the psychological dimension she is able to discover her own premises towards the powerlessness and submission (Lerner, 1986). Through a non-leisured travel experience the transformation led to become empowered (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010) and taking control of her life (Heimtun, 2012). During the interview she explains her critical premise reflection on the process of this transformation:

“At the beginning was weird because is different from what you were used to... at first you say Oh no! But in reality nothing is weird or wrong, what happens is that it is a different way to see...and treat women, then I start to change my mind when I started to accept this and once accepted, I started to make it mine and with that change things turned smoother. Then you begin to open your head and say “Ah! The only society was not the one I knew, and like this one, there has to be more societies, yes, and then I realized there are models of life that society impose”

Her critical reflection clearly states the transformative learning triggers, from disorienting dilemmas; *“is different from what you were used to”*, affective learning; *“this is weird”*, Critical reflection *“nothing is weird or wrong, what happens is that it is a different way to see...and treat women”*, and making use of these new knowledge, *“I start to change my mind”* among others. The continued transformation in Argentina allowed the empowerment to follow her self-determination path (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010).

Back in Cauca she settles down. Her return was disturbing, what Adler (1981) calls cross-cultural readjustment; her lifestyle didn't agree with the Caucan paradigms (Kanning, 2013) of a woman in her thirties. Not married, living alone and feeling the glass roof at her job, Jackeline once again find these quotidian conflicting dilemmas as she decides to solo travel genuinely for leisure and for the first time. In Bolivia she encounters several challenges (Wilson, 2004) reminding her of the transformation undertaken in Argentina, where she is able to practice once more her own capacities through personal freedom (Heimtun, 2012). However for Jackeline this trip entailed a more spiritual journey (Noy, 2004). In Bolivia she ran into 4 women from different latitudes at the Lake Titicaca:

“we were seeking the same thing... an incredible thing, we talked a lot, we had the same ideologies, it was amazing to think that people from afar were there together [...] one of the girls said — I'm a sports journalist, but because I am woman, I am then ignored at my job because women don't know about sports right? — We realized that we were in the same situation in the same search to reconnect and to recognize ourselves as women; I thought it seemed this trip energized me, to regain strength to keep fighting because it's a daily fight as a woman...”

Jackeline encounters experiences that are shared with other women, a travelling experience that helped her regain strength from the oppressive paradigms in her society (Taylor, 2000). Through this solo and independent travel for leisure, Jackeline is reminded of her previous perspective transformation in order to keep following her own path.

Jackeline is now 34 years old, works as a professor at the university in Cauca and by the time of the interview she was travelling solo to Northeast Colombia.



Jackeline in Lake Titicaca, Bolivia



Jackeline in Buenos Aires, Argentina

5.2.2.3 Martina

Martina was born in Mexico City; she is the only child of a young single mother. Martina's frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000) were highly influenced by two generations:

"all my life I lived with my gramma so let's say that I had a very rooted idea that women should be at home... but my mother always encouraged me to do everything I wanted without relying on a man and although my grandmother was also a single mother, she raised me with the idea that women need a man or a husband".

Martina explains the personal and socio-linguistic beliefs her grandmother helped to construct in Martina's perspectives attaching the traditional patriarchal paradigm of women "in need" of male protective figure (Lerner, 1986) as well as fear and limited self-agency¹⁵. At age 19, Martina begins to experience several disorienting dilemmas, while she enrolled in Agricultural Engineer studies; *"not a lady-like career"* argued her grandmother or other marriage pressures by her young female cousins who were engaged to be married. However, Veronica states *"I have been the only one in my family who has done whatever I want with my life"* Having taken this choice and a path of her own, a couple of years later Martina engages in an solo journey for 6 months through an internship in Utah, United States. Although Martina travelled solo for educational purpose similar to Jackeline and Catarina she engaged in wider transformation processes (Lean, 2012). Firstly, the personal

¹⁵ This statement also exemplifies this same gendered premise embedded in the ideology of her grandmother, who has demonstrated great self-agency as a single mother; however, these limiting premises still filter her experiences in life (Mezirow, 2000).

dimension of frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991), transforming in her premises on her own capacities, and on the socio-linguistic dimension; by engaging with an American family who showed her the different roles a woman is able to perform (Novo, 2003):

“The woman was the one in charge of the fields in which I was doing the internship; she was practically the boss and the husband mostly helped in all the housework. That was like a shock, like —oh! Not only do women do this! — This made me think why do they do it? Why it is not like this in Mexico? — I felt like shocked but with time I understood and I thought well I’ve been living all my life among women... for example even when my mom is independent it is a quotidian situation that you don’t reflect until you are out of that...I am now certain that If I ever get married or live with someone I want to do other tasks and I want my partner to do the same...”

Engaging in the sociocultural gendered premises of the western “otherness” (Picard and Giovine, 2014) in this experience a disorienting dilemma emerges in her socio-linguistic frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000) where affective learning turns into surprise/shock (Taylor, 2000); However it seems significant that critical reflection is not immediate, Martina highlights a time element, *“with the time you understand”*; As well as Jackeline, the involvement and *time* to adapt are relevant for this transformation (O’Sullivan, 1999). While critical premise reflection took place, she was able to review her frame of reference and even identify the epistemic dimension her education and culture; *“Why it is not like this in Mexico?”* (Mezirow, 1991) Integrating this new perspective into her meaning schemes, empowered Martina goes back to Mexico in the pursuit of living on her own, but collides with her family expectations of marriage *“my grandmother and family kept on pushing”*. These disorienting dilemmas led to Martina’s engagement on her first solo and independent travel experience for leisure. Travelling in Europe entailed an array of experiences that challenged her fears attached to gender premises, especially the beliefs of her grandmother, on self-agency. However others related to her socio-cultural premises, she mentions a significant experience in Italy:

“The way I saw women, being so free, [...] so confident about themselves, like if they didn’t have that fear, [being alone] [...] I asked myself If they can be like that, why can’t I be like that?”

The accumulation of experiences such as this previous statement of involvement with Italian women helped her to compare her own premises to these women’s gendered paradigms, which relate to personal freedom and self-agency. This stimulated critical reflection on her own premises, for instance in the personal dimension (Mezirow, 1991): *“why can’t I be like that”*, therefore she inquires in the epistemic dimension on where does this fear and limitation comes from (Reisinger, 2013). However, she is able to transform these distorted premises through critical reflection:

“Before I travelled solo, I felt insecure, like I had to ask everyone to know If I was doing ok, like asking for support, but I felt like transitioning from fear to feel like “ok I can do it” and that I was travelling

all alone, I didn't got lost at all, so I thought ok, I can do it, as a woman being alone in another country, speaking another language, meeting new people, new cultures and these experiences gave me as much confidence in myself, after that trip I grew up a lot, or I was much more able to do other things that I felt limited when I was in Mexico"

Martina returned to Mexico reminded of her strength and self-determination. She decides to continue her career path despite social pressures of marriage (Herrera Santi, 2000). Martina is now 29 years old, single and finalizing her master studies in Holland. By the time of the interview she was solo travelling throughout England.



Martina traveling solo in Italy



Solo travel in USA, Dead Horse Valley,

5.2.3 Solo travel as an initiator for transformation

5.2.3.1 María

María is the oldest daughter from an upper class and conservative Mexican family. Among a traditional environment her parents always supported her; however socio-cultural premises on her frames of reference promoted patriarchal female roles (Pinochet Cobos, 2010): *"I was raised to be housewife"*. Media (Staples and Frost, 1998) was an important influence in her female premises *"...I grew up among this moralism and fear that the woman is not able to be alone, that she needs a man...like Maria la del barrio¹⁶ or Disney princesses"*. At age 17 Maria engages in her first solo and independent travel throughout Western Europe for 5 months. She initiated a transformative process (Mezirow, 2000) emerged from her first solo travel experience:

"...that trip was completely alone, I was terrified, the first days in Barcelona, I think I didn't even know Barcelona because I was crying the whole time at the hostel [...], can you imagine? Hahaha, I

¹⁶ *Maria la del Barrio* is a famous Mexican TV soap from 1995 which is part of the trilogy of Marias. It entails the story of a poor Young woman who is rescued by a rich handsome man, falls in love and provides her with a privileged life.

was terrified to get out, [...] So it was very hard, was very, very hard because I felt helpless and I was afraid someone would assault me or that I would get lost, like feeling super vulnerable, without anyone to take care of me, I was all alone! A helpless woman Haha, until I said dude! Why can't I be alone? I didn't come to Europe, to be locked up in the horrible lousy hostel room in a wretched bed that doesn't even have a good mattress, [...] worse than what I have at my house and I said "fuck it" I wiped my tears and went outside to the street to the gothic quarter... and I was there all alone impressed looking around thinking wow! All this! Why didn't I travel before?"

Being alone in a faraway country entailed the first disorienting dilemma from the psychological dimension, the affective trigger (Taylor, 2000) pertained to fear and vulnerability (Wilson, 2004); which stimulated critical *content* reflection, to perceive or recognize the situation from a different angle by "changing these structures of habitual expectation to [...] a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). By being exposed to practice her personal freedom which produced extraordinary empowerment "*that trip made me realize I have the power to do anything I want*" and decides to travel as a lifestyle. While Maria travelled in different travel modes along her life, however, at age 31 she embarks once again on a long solo travel to Southeast Asia as an indirect result of a major disorienting dilemma (Cranton, 1994). She had just ended a painful relationship and got fired from her job "*I lost everything [...] this was the worst crisis of my life*". During this limbo Maria, looking for a job discovers a course on Buddhism taking place in Nepal. Similar to Alondra, Maria was inspired by this new set of beliefs originated by her crisis, and this took her to a one-year solo trip to India, Nepal, Thailand and Vietnam. In this trip she encounters many challenging experiences providing the opportunity to continue her transformative process of empowerment and self-determination (Harris and Wilson, 2007):

"The entire trip to Asia was confronting, for example once I was three weeks at some tiny town at the Himalayas, I hiked a lot, suddenly a stray-dog bit me and I had to go to the hospital for vaccines every week. My buttock was sore and not even being able to sit properly because the dog ripped a piece off my buttock which the doctor didn't want to suture [...] he didn't want to look at my buttock! I told him, —Look! Look! — And he turned around closed his eyes and sent female assistant haha, a tiny town 3,500 masl, the routes were closed because it was very snowy! [...] like in Europe, I didn't come all the way over here to be paralyzed, I can do it"

Maria shares many experiences which positioned her in situations of self-agency. These dilemmas contradicted her "*helpless woman*" premise (Mezirow, 2000) and once again the affective response is fear (Taylor, 2000). In her personal dimension of frames of reference, (beliefs on her own capacities) the first solo trip to Europe appears a transformation to overcome her gendered limited premises (Mezirow, 1991) and retake this transformation process in Southeast Asia. Consecutive trips reinforce such beliefs and bring up new challenges or opportunities to practice such learnings (Robledo and Batle, 2015). However, in the case of Maria and many participants the confrontation one overcomes is translated

as the critical reflection that emerges from the accumulation of experiences. Maria reflects on the process and content through the recognition of similitudes between both solo trips (Kitchenham, 2008). She claims that through the learnings of her Buddhism course during her solo trip enabled her to become reflective of her own behavioural patterns acquired in childhood (Welwood, 2014). Back in Mexico Maria seeks for therapy in order to continue her transformational process by dissolving childhood patterns of dysfunctional experiences (Mezirow, 2000). With a broader cumulus of experience she premise reflects on her personal, socio-linguistic and epistemic dimension of meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1990):

“They [family] always tell you which is the role a woman plays...she cannot do it without a man... it is a fear that this inherent, it is part of the ignorance that parents are not aware of, is part of the co-dependent processes according to which type of family we have grown in... it's like in childhood when parents disqualify you, when you express an opinion but it has no worth for them, what you think or feel is not true. Then you start to believe that the world you perceive is not true and when you become an adult these fears are intensified by the belief you adopted as a child, by the way your parents interacted and this has a lot to do. Through self-reflection, the recapitulation of actions...Travelling to Asia was uuff... it was very important for me because then I began to see my behaviour patterns and that's when I started to realize that I disqualified myself too”

Demonstrating premise reflection (Kitchenham, 2008), María explains the epistemic dimension on how fears and premises of the “helpless woman” are constructed (Cranton, 1994). She describes patriarchy, where children and women are positioned in a lower rank and thus their voices or opinions are not valid or heard (González Montes and Iracheta Cenegorta, 2006). She explains her own transformative process and identifies her acquired distorted premises (Mezirow, 1990) of gendered fear and disqualification. Maria undertook an elongated transformation as a build-up of the sum of travel and life experiences; the empowerment emerged from this process inspired her to carry out her own business. Back in Mexico, María is now 38, single and a successful entrepreneur.



Maria and her employees interviewed by a Azteca TV programme



Maria and her mother in Baja California, Mexico



Nepal Meditation course [Maria left]

5.2.3.2 Marcela

Marcela's family comes from a small provincial town in Sinaloa Mexico. During her early years her education was based on notions of female strength (Rózańska, 2011) yet her role models transmitted highly patriarchal gendered premises within her personal and socio-cultural dimensions of frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000):

"My mother was the figure of both economic and emotional support, however she was very conservative in our education [...] very old-fashioned...even though she worked and brought money home, she still cooked, cleaned and asked nothing from my father, the atmosphere in that sense was very male chauvinist"

While her mother was performing both parental roles, Marcela recognized her father's performances of jealousy and dominance over her mother (López Mondéjar, 2001): *"I have never agreed on that behaviour as natural or as the law of life"* as well as her socio-cultural premises embedded in a strong belief of male abuse as natural (Herrera Santi, 2000):

"My family, my friends, my neighbours, the news and specially TV soups showed me that it is normal...being jealous and having distrust is the right behaviour when you are in a relationship"

While her first solo and independent travel for leisure took place at age 16, going to Canada and arriving to a Quebecoise family her parents knew, she engaged in western gender roles (Herrera Santi, 2000) however, she claims she was more concerned with *"the wonderful feeling of being in another country"* rather than paying attention to contrasting family dynamics. This trip empowered her to pursue a travelling lifestyle back home. However, at age 21, a year later from her parents' imminent divorce, Marcela embarks on her first entirely solo and independent travel for leisure purposes. Like all of the participants, in this experience, fears and challenges (Wilson, 2004; Heimtun, 2012) take place as disorienting and affective learning (Mezirow, 2000) where she transforms her psychological dimension of frame of reference empowered by the discovery of her own capacities (Mezirow, 1991). However, while Marcela travels solo to Europe; (Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Germany) she transforms her socio-cultural dimension throughout several experiences she highlights a particular experience in Estonia:

"I met a couple, [and] within a second we made an unbelievable connection of friendship... they were a couple with an incredible trust, an incredible communication, it was mostly a friendship with love. So they made me change the perspective I had on the relationships because of my family and culture, because my family is from Sinaloa, and they are super machos, are highly male chauvinist, very attached and possessive. I did change a lot this perspective because, she [the wife] had no problem with meeting us [the husband and Marcela] alone, we went for a tour through the city alone, then travel together with his family, he gave me a tour in the woods alone, and she was very serene, she just said —did you enjoy it? — He also took care of the children and was very respectful to his wife, I was super surprised about that, because I was raised with the mentality that is normal"

to be jealous and to have distrust, and even to not show it meant I was not showing love...not showing distrust and jealousy...so they [the couple] made me detached from this something I had stuck in the head by my culture..."

Marcela critically reflects on her socio-linguistic dimension of frames of reference, (Mezirow, 2000) by engaging in the gendered paradigms embodied by the couple in Estonia (Picard and Giovine, 2014) where other possible gender roles can be played. She also reflects on her epistemic dimension (Taylor, 2000) where she identifies how this gendered premise has been constructed through her society's patriarchal paradigms (Lerner, 1986), such as the "macho" beliefs of distrust and jealousy from her family and culture in Sinaloa (Fontanella, 2008). For Marcela travelling solo through Europe was a transformational experience "to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and [...] acting upon these new understandings" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167):

"I started to look for successful men, economically and emotionally stable, mature, without addictions, simple, humble and admirable, the counterpart of what my dad was. However I have to say that if it wasn't for travelling to Europe [...] I would still think that I had to get married, have children and that my experiences should be here with my family, or to need a man to be happy but now, this is not necessary, the main thing is not to find a man, or any man, at least in my culture even a man that supports you economically, it is to follow my own dreams...experience my own experiences, and if I find a life partner that share this same ideology, that make you grow..."

After a year she went back to Guadalajara, Mexico where she is currently living. Marcela has been travelling solo and independently in the subsequent years, to Europe several times and to Guatemala. Currently she works at the ministry of education and enjoys of a healthy relationship.



Marcela in Tallin, Estonia



Atitlán Lake, Guatemala, 2014

5.3.2.3 Tamita

Tamita's parents come from the limits of the Pampa plains in Cordoba Argentina; they moved to Buenos Aires and formed a family. Similar to all of the Argentinean participants' education, gender was not a limitation to perform other roles (Belluchi, 1990; Herrera Santi, 2000). Tamita enjoyed of a gender supportive environment and grew up with great confidence and support from her parents and learned to be independent through travelling:

"I grew up travelling, when I was 6 years old my mother sent my sister and me on the bus, we travelled alone and my aunt waited for us over there [Cordoba], I loved to travel to the countryside"

Travelling at an early age integrates not only perspectives of independence but adopting traveling as a natural lifestyle (Kanning, 2013). Throughout her life Tamita has been travelling within the safety of a group; however, inspired by her sister, at age 18 she embarks to her first solo journey of 4 months to Argentina, Peru and Bolivia. Tamita's first solo trip began a transformation process (Mezirow, 2000) pertained to the personal dimension of frames of reference increasing her confidence and self-agency leading to empowerment (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). From this trip Tamita at 24 years old decides to live on her own. During this stage Tamita engages in several types of travel and one of them is a solo trip which takes place in Ecuador and Colombia. In this trip Tamita gets involved in several experiences of gendered socio-cultural paradigms (Mezirow, 1991) and observe women's roles in contrast to Argentina:

"First I was impressed by how little were women valued, uh... in the sense that women are seen as powerless and vulnerable, as if they are not be able, unprotected, So, uh ... I cannot say the same for my country because there is a strong feminist movement that we're living, but in the rest of other countries, uh, you see that the woman, do not question and have no voice [...] It happened to me in many situations, people were surprised if I demanded something, during the solo trip to Ecuador, I was hiking on a trail and I found a small town, I stopped to rest and I met locals, nice people.. they invited me to eat, I was there at the table only with the man, he was only talking to me, asking me about my life... and the wife at the back of the room doing everything, cooking, feeding the baby, cleaning, crushing some coffee beans all at the same time, and she even served him the food and once she was done she sat down behind him for a second, she didn't sat down at the table, I tried to include her but the husband was always answering for her, it was almost like a slave..."

While her personal and sociocultural premises are embedded in gender equality from her education and Argentinean culture (Belluchi, 1990), getting involved within the patriarchal dominant paradigms of women as "voiceless" (DeVault and Gross, 2007) within this Ecuadorian family she experiences a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000). Epistemic reflections take place as she recognizes the role that culture play in the construction and shaping of these oppressive gendered roles (Herrera Santi, 2000). Other experiences in

Cartagena, Colombia for instance where she engages in experiences of patriarchal power relations promoted by social gendered paradigms (López Mondéjar, 2001) such as being sexually harassed or men trying to take advantage of her “vulnerability” (Pinochet Cobos, 2010) or while she asked for direction to the hostel address:

“the police man mocked me, so I said — Can I know what are you laughing about?— he said, —that street does not exists— I said — How come it doesn’t exist? Look this is the address— and he answered —No—, so I said well instead of laughing you should help me, but not mock me... — so I come to this; the people is so used to think that women do not know anything, do not understand anything, so... the policeman looked at me like saying -you know nothing-, and I was very angry, because he cannot treat me like this, I was just looking for the address of the hostel, I looked at him and asked —do you have Wi-Fi on you mobile? So you can help me because you are a policeman and you are not helping me— He answered —no—, he laughed and left me there...”

Within a vast array of experiences during her trip, this particular experience exemplifies the policeman’s socio cultural premise, related to patriarchal gendered roles on male superiority even in terms of intelligence (Lerner, 1986). This disorienting dilemma turned her affective learning (Taylor, 2000) on frustration to critical premise reflection, the treatment she received by this man conflicted her own personal and socio-linguistic premises (Mezirow, 1991) based on Argentina’s gender respect and equality (Belluchi, 1990) The accumulation of patriarchal hegemonic experiences through her travels have helped her to become aware of other’s women realities by dismissing absolute truths (Freire, 1996) and adopt new skills and perspectives to positively deal with these situations:

“To the extent I’ve been traveling, I’ve been growing, the first solo trip is not the same as the one I did last year in Colombia, uh, because I am more aware, this doesn’t affect my mood anymore because I understand that eh... people are not used to women questioning or travelling alone, I changed by analysing what is the position of women and provided tools that helped me was against risks, against harassments, eh libidinous guys”

Tamita’s transformative learning process concretized throughout her life and travel experiences; being travel a powerful trigger to become empowered (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010) and tolerant to other realities (Freire, 1996). Tamita is now 34 years old and single. She is a tireless traveller and works as a teacher for disabled children in Buenos Aires.



Hitchhiking in Argentina



Solo travel, Cartagena, Colombia

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In this final chapter, the findings from the interviews and correspondence are discussed linking to the concepts described throughout the Theoretical Framework: Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Discussions are drawn related to the objectives established in chapter 3. Therefore sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 respond to the sub questions 2 and 3: “How do the TLT triggers that contribute to changing perspectives take place in their transformation?” and “How do these triggers relate to solo travels?” Section 6.4 answers sub question 4; “are there features of travel and travellers’ skills that allow women to engage with transformative processes as active agents? If so, which ones?” Section 6.5 relates to sub question 5 “What are some of the socio-linguistic premises or paradigms regarding women’s roles and personal freedom that currently women hold? And 6.5.1 deals with sub question 6 “What are some of the outcomes of social action that emerge from the transformation process? Conclusions are displayed in section 6.6. Section 6.7 displays suggestions for further research and concluding this master thesis, section 6.8 include the limitations of the research.

6.1 The role of Solo Travel as a consequence

The first set of life and travel narratives englobe experiences of women travelling solo for leisure purposes for the first time in their lives and at a mature age; they have never engaged in any type of international travel prior their solo trip. This position their initial solo travel as a step resulted from a broader initiated transformational life process:

“the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures [...] and finally making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167).

In these stories, solo travel emerges from disorienting dilemmas related to social pressures or personal crisis in their day-to-day life. While scholars have addressed “quotidian life pressures” as catalyst or *motivation* to travel (Lean, 2012; Robledo and Batle, 2015), this research has found that the role that solo travel plays is not merely produced by disorienting dilemmas as motivations (Belén’s social pressures, Alondra’s divorce and abortion and Veronica’s marriage pressures) but it is also one powerful piece on the broader puzzle, a consequence of a continuing transformative *life* process.

During this process, affective learning (Taylor, 2000) or emotional responses to disorienting dilemmas are materialized as feelings of frustration, anger and fear. Challenged by their own personal and socio-cultural dimensions of frames of reference (Cranton, 1995) these emotions take place outside of travelling experiences. Travelling solo emerges in this

process and through high cross-cultural involvement (Lyons, 2010), solitude and constraints (Wilson, 2004) stimulating critical reflection in all of the dimensions of meaning schemes (Mezirow, 2000) in this same first trip. This first experience undoubtedly helped to transform their personal dimension of meaning schemes, or their own ideas about themselves (Mezirow, 1991). It enhanced self-sufficiency, personal freedom and empowerment (Wilson, 2004; Harris and Wilson, 2007; Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010) through the transformation of "...self-concept[s], personality traits or types, repressed parental prohibitions that continue[d] to dictate ways of feelings and acting in adulthood..." (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). At the same time they transformed their socio-linguistic dimension of frames of reference from gendered cultural canons and ideologies in several ways. For instance Alondra's solo trip was a step to transform her distorted socio-cultural premises of female personal freedom vs. debauchery acquired throughout childhood and affecting her adult life (Novo, 2003). Labelling herself as a "minx", this transformation originated from the disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) of her abortion, followed by the divorce, followed by her party life/debauchery, and then religion. By falling back into old patterns, Islam helped to overcome this crisis (disorienting dilemma) taking her to travel to an Islamic country; Pakistan. Belén's solo trip was a step to transform her premise on her socially predetermined-life (born-study-get married-have children...). She initiated a process of transformation from the dilemma of routine and marriage pressures, through critical reflection on her own life: *"Is this what I want with my life?"* where travel as well emerged as a step within this transformative process and helped to critically premise reflect on gendered paradigms across the cultures of the continent, explicitly in relation to female personal freedom (Ritteneur and Colaner, 2012) and socially-established rules of life (Kanning, 2013). In Veronica's story, the transformation is observed in a wider spectrum since throughout her 3 solo trips, the line of the transformative process is clearly visible. Similar to Belén and Alondra, her first trip was also a step from quotidian disorienting dilemmas about marriage pressures and a socially predetermined-life. Female personal freedom is the topic throughout her story line; from her first trip to Europe where she intimately engages in the western paradigms of female inclusivity and individuality (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 1991) to Southeast Asia, where women she engaged with had limited beliefs towards their personal freedom (Stivens, 1998). These experiences led to critically reflect on socio-linguistic (Latin American women's position in society (Novo, 2003)) and epistemic dimensions (Education, culture and media framing the fragility of women (Staples and Frost, 1988)). Furthermore, while Alondra has acquired a high level of critical reflection, the initiated process seemed has not reached an end, since the steps to concretize this transformation; "making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings" (Mezirow, 2000), may be further experienced when she returns from her travel. Kanning (2013) states that post trip stage may provide the space to practice these

new transformed understandings at their home context (Lean, 2012). However Belén, who returned to Argentina after her solo journey, acted and *made choices* that changed the course of her life; by choosing travelling as a lifestyle, she moved and works in Canada to afford her trips more easily (Freire, 1996; Mezirow, 1990). The same occurred for Veronica; she decided to freelance as travel-blogger and engages in feminist social activism, one of the outcomes of transformative learners (Freire, 1996; Mezirow, 2000). Therefore through this set of narratives it is clear that the “the dramatic personal changes they underwent, [...] are [not entirely] attributed to the trip—to the activities and the experiences it encompasses” (Noy, 2004, p. 87); for these travellers their transformative process began before their first solo travel, and the choices they made before, during and after the travel were a means to gain awareness of their own limiting beliefs (Pritchard et al., 2007) where travel is just a powerful piece that stimulates the transformation.

6.2 The role of Solo Travel as a reminder or confirmation

In this second set of narratives participants’ first solo and independent travel for leisure cannot significantly illustrate the process of transformation without mentioning their previous solo travel with educational purposes. It is claimed that Overseas Education or studying abroad is as well a travel modality which allows space for transformation (Kanning, 2008; Reisinger, 2013; UNWTO, 2016) by “...personal growth, increase in life skills, and knowledge...” (Stone and Petrick, 2003, p. 731). Educational travel is has proven to be actually more *out-of-school* educational because it allows as well travels for leisure and high involvement with the culture or multicultural people (Morgan, 2010). The reason behind the consideration of these educational trips is due to the relevance that participants emphasized in their lives as well as to approach in a holistic, “coherent, rational biography and depiction of their transformation” (Lean, 2012, p. 157). Furthermore, in this set of narratives the process of transformation began even before the participants even travelled, for instance, Catarina was experiencing disorienting dilemmas related to social pressures on female stereotypes (Róžańska, 2011) of success and personal freedom already at age 17 when her mother and society pushed her to pursue the “*female success*”; Jackeline experienced these dilemmas in her conservative hometown on socio-linguistic premises (Mezirow, 1991) of “Angel of home” (Novo, 2003; Ulloa Inostroza, 2012) and asymmetrical power relationships (Kroth and Cranton, 2015) throughout her adolescence and young adult life prior to any trip. And Martina also experienced her disorienting dilemmas on female personal freedom and gender roles due to her grandmothers’ traditional influence, “*that is not a lady-like*” and “needing a man” (Herrera Santi, 2000). While their international educational experience helped to unravel the transformation through making choices and acting upon these choices (Mezirow, 2000); back in their hometown, ready to

implement their own decisions, their re-entry (Grabowski, in Reisinger, 2013) or “Cross-cultural readjustment is the transition from a foreign culture back into one’s home culture. It is the experience of facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment after a significant period of time” (Adler, 1981, p. 343). They encountered their hometown social world conflicting their new transformed premises of a *female taking control over their life* (Harris and Wilson, 2007). From these conflicts participants in this section use their first solo travel experience for leisure purpose as a reminder or confirmation of their held choices in the previous transformative travel experiences. In these second international sojourn, Catarina, Jackeline and Martina reaffirm their path of female personal freedom undertaken against the discomfort pressures of their society and family (Ritteneur and Colander, 2012):

“I didn’t want to return to the reality where they expected a lot from me as no one was confident with my choices, if it would work, [...] But I didn’t care, that trip to Bolivia concretized this freedom which I have been struggling throughout my life” - Catarina

“The society has problems seeing me alone, they see you with pity, and it is very difficult... they don’t respect or understand is a choice; my solo travel was to regain energy to cope with this way of thinking” - Jackeline,

It is clear that these women indeed continued her transformative journey to build upon the premises of her previous educational journey as women may embody diverse roles in terms of their professional and home arena (Herrera Santi, 2000). Therefore, through these narratives it is exemplified that travel for transformation occurred through several travel experiences, which are considered within their biographical and coherent line through their lives (Lean, 2012).

6.3 The role of Solo travel as an initiator for transformation

In this last set of narratives the first solo and independent travel for leisure purposes takes place at an early stage of the participants’ lives. Being able to travel solo for leisure at ages younger than 19 years old (María to Europe, Marcela to Canada and Tamita to Peru and Chile), travel did not emerge from disorienting dilemmas (existential crisis or traumas); women travelled solely because they had their parents’ support, the means and wanted to. Therefore as the first solo travel being so early and normal in their life, they could not consciously and critically engage in premise reflection; critically revise their own beliefs (the claimed powerful adult transformation (Mezirow, 2000)); *“I didn’t reflect on that...or at least I was not aware of it” -Tamita.* However, they indeed transformed in an unaware manner their personal dimension of meaning schemes.

In this set of narratives is important to pay attention to the difference between personal and socio-cultural transformations. Firstly because these travellers had two distinct solo leisured trips; one at a very young age and a further one at a more mature age not like the previous sets of narratives which participants engaged in their first solo travel at a mature age and a single trip helped to continue or consolidate a transformation in most of the three dimensions. All participants in this study have transformed aware or unaware their personal meaning perspectives in their first solo travel despite their age this is reflected by being solo and being challenged (Wilson, 2004; Lyons, 2012) Taylor (2000) indicates while TLT is argued an “adult learning theory” (Cranton, 1995) there is no study that links transformative process to age, (for instance in the development of critical reflection). In this category; solo travel for pleasure at a young age initiates a transformation; only in their personal dimension of frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000) namely, empowerment and enhanced capacities from being alone (Taylor, 2000). Furthermore, the sociolinguistic and epistemic transformations happened accompanied by their active role of the participants as conductors of their own transformation. Rationality, capacity to observe/ mindfulness and critical reflection the participant had on socio political and cultural issues encountered in their travels and life experiences significantly accelerated the transformation process (O’Sullivan, 1999). However, while it appears that Maria and Marcela pursue their own path already before their first travel, they mentioned they did not struggle against patriarchal premises at that stage of life. Therefore for the three of them travelling solo for the first time is not a consequence of a transformative process; they were not pursuing options to solve any disorienting dilemmas or consequence to an existential crisis. Solo travel for the first time and at an early age helps as the ignition for a personal transformation process (Robledo and Batle, 2015) since when they came back home, they all pursue their independence (i.e. by living alone and making their own choices) (Brown, in Reisinger, 2013). And this transformation is continued in further travels and quotidian experiences which emerge throughout their life timeline (Lean, 2012). On the other hand these first solo travel narratives appear to genuinely personify the TT discourse (Sampaio et al., 2014) of travel as the *provider* of the transformation:

“Travel and tourism *can shift* [emphasis added] our perspective on life and change the course of our knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviour” (Reisinger, 2013, p. xii)

For instance, while at an early age Maria and Marcela did not identify a struggle with gender premises and travelled to “feminist progressive” countries, Tamita’s education and society did not limit her in her female action field, this means that her construction of frames of reference involved aspects of higher female equality influenced as well by growing up in Buenos Aires (Belluchi, 1990). Thus it was through her travel to Colombia, Peru and other masculine dominant countries that she experienced diverse perspectives of

women's lack of personal freedom in the region (Lyons, 2012). This may suggest that while most transformative travel research has been done on western population samples; American (USA) (Kanning, 2008; 2013), German and Dutch (Methorst, 2011) French, New Zealand and Austrian (Horrocks, 2015), British (Brown, in Reisinger, 2013), Spanish (Robledo and Batle, 2015), Canadian (Zavitz and Butz, 2011), Australian (Grabowski, in Reisinger, 2013), the progressive gender equality and values in western societies may not limit western females (participants) in a greater extent than in heavily grounded patriarchal societies such as Latin America (Novo, 2003), which may explain in some extent the predominant old-worn cliché of TT.

While their second journey was also for pleasure, here they were able to observe engage and embody in the gendered otherness of the destination which was so distinct from their own (Picard and Giovine, 2014). There, travel took other roles, (i.e. as a consequence in the case of Southeast Asia for Maria) which suggests that solo travel's role depend as well on the needs of the participants in the transformative process according to their stages of life. Consecutive travels played extremely important roles to change the course of their lives as well as to retake, intermittently and broader transformational process. Similar to the previous sections, these travellers transformed their personal or psychological premises in their frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000), such as socio-cultural power-relation premises of "jealousy = love" (López Mondéjar, 2001) by Marcela or in the case of Tamita "A woman enjoys of equality in every county". Tamita's consecutive solo journeys helped to ignite and conduct the transformation of perspectives towards limiting gendered roles and premises women embrace in Latin America; women as housewives and passive agents (Lerner, 1986; Pachón, 2007; Makaran, 2013) into a more tolerant and inclusive way to experience patriarchy (Herrera Santi, 2000). Marcela's second journey is very powerful, engaging with an Estonian couple undoubtedly helped her reflect on the socio-linguistic conceptualization of romantic relationships framed and imposed by the Mexican culture (Reyes Aguinaga, 1998) and parents (Mezirow, 1991). While Tamita's and Marcela's disorienting dilemmas occurred during these solo trips; Maria's occurred from quotidian life (crisis of her relationship rupture and loss of job), where it is clear the Maria demonstrates an indeed transformed premise perspectives only once she encountered an existential crisis at a mature age which led to other solo travel just like Veronica, Belén and Alondra. This may suggest the possible correlation between age and transformation Taylor (2000) suggests. As well as Belén and Alondra, Maria shows that her solo trip to Southeast Asia resulted as a step that continued this transformation process; by her *kinship* or pursuit to transform (Taylor 2000) by seeking professional therapy to concretize this process out of her travelling solo experience.

6.4 Features of the travel and travellers' skills

As discussed in previous chapters, TT literature has focused their attention to the particularities of the travel to foster transformation (Morgan, 2010; Lyons, 2010; Reisinger, 2013). Firstly and according to this field, the features of the trip (lengthy, solo, culturally diverse and implicate challenges and constraints) are confirmed compared to the characteristics of these participants' trips. The length of the solo and independent trip for leisure; the time spent at the destinations is long from at least 3 months to 1 year to a maximum of 4 years travelling to different destinations (Kanning, 2008; Kanning, 2013; UNWTO, 2016) however, the shorter trips held a tremendous content on socio-political issues or spiritual doctrines which with the active engagement of the travellers held a powerful stimulator of reflection and therefore for change (Mezirow, 1990). A second aspect of the trips is that the destinations are either 1) culturally different from their country of origin (i.e. Europe or Muslim countries vs. Latin America) (Morgan, 2010; Lyons, 2010) or 2) a culturally diverse meeting-point destination for locals and travellers (i.e. multicultural capitals or destinations, like La Paz or Buenos Aires), in other words where the participants can meet people from different cultural backgrounds or diverse points of views (Morgan, 2010). The third aspect is the challenges that being solo in a foreign country portrays, involving feelings of vulnerability and fear (Wilson, 2004; Harris and Wilson, 2007; Heimtun, 2012). According to Camus, (in Lyons, 2010) "What gives value to travel is fear [...] at a certain moment, when we are so far from our own country we are seized by a vague fear, and an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits [...] At the moment we are feverish but also porous, so that the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depths of our being. We come across a cascade of light, and there is eternity..." (p. 286) While these illustrate proper characteristics for adventure, backpacking or alternative solo travel, it is certain there are other types of travel that foster other processes and types of transformation like spiritual, and yoga tourism (Heintzman, in Reisinger, 2013).

Furthermore, participants in this qualitative study showed an active role in the engagement of their own transformative processes. At an early age resistance towards following feminine expectations and preordained life paths established by their patriarchal societies (Harris and Wilson, 2007); by rebelling against authority, for instance working, leaving their parents' home and travelling solo all at an early age. A couple of participants who did not openly show a strong disagreement at an early stage of life demonstrated affective discomfort towards these social premises which manifested in time and at an advanced age: "*from the bottom of my heart I knew I didn't want that*"-Catarina. This indicates that indifferent from the diverse levels of patriarchal culture and home education, they resisted -aware or unaware- to hegemonic patriarchal premises (Harris and Wilson, 2007).

However, these beliefs remained embedded in their sociocultural, personal and epistemic meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1991), shown through their disorienting dilemmas of marriage, career and motherhood (Herrera Santi, 2000). As a researcher, this particular study shows that a potential transformational learning process would eventually be experienced by women who show in some level or who express discomfort by the social limitations and seek for that personal-freedom where travel takes place as a means in that process. Accordingly, the fact of engaging in solo travel is already an indicator of an initiated transformation of female roles, since the patriarchy still promotes women as an “Angel of Home”(Novo, 2003) and female solo travel implying a social discourse that is still in construction (Lerner, 1986). Another feature of these travellers is their eagerness of involvement with the local culture or with the culturally diverse people or travellers (Noy, 2003); being and living the experiences from a closer and intimate contact, exposing to different ways of thinking providing a deeper understanding and reflection towards a transformative learning perspective (Taylor, 2000). Participants demonstrated high levels of critical reflection which clearly accelerated the transformational process like in the case of Catarina, Maria, Veronica and Jackeline.

“Evidently travel is extremely important, and also is the capacity you have to see, that women are censured in their social, cultural, political, occupational action field...and that we all have the right to do what we want”-Veronica

They all cultivated critical reflection throughout several stages of their lives, for instance Catarina, Marcela and Martina, critically reflected on the premises their parents taught them at a very early age. However other acquired it through time and travel too. Critical reflection “involves the assessment of the assumption implicit in beliefs, including beliefs about how to solve problems” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7). Other skills in the participants and which appeared consistent were their readiness and willingness to change; by the pursuit of the next steps which played an active role in this transformation process for instance by “studying particular topics (e.g. [...] [religion, socio-political,]development and languages) had led to an interest in particular destinations and experiences, along with meaning-making. For many, travel had become an important part of their education, whether formally or informally” (Lean, 2012, p. 158). making solo and independent travelling the discovery of limiting social premises and behaviour patterns stimulated exploring new options to take (Not the transformation itself) for instance by looking for therapy: constellations, yoga, meditation and other alternative means to transform (Reisinger, 2013).

6.5 Dealing with gendered paradigms post-trip

While “...travellers may physically return to their place of origin (though not always), the context to which they return, along with their perspective, will have altered to some degree, even if not perceivable” (Lean, 2012, p. 167) TT research has found that transformed travellers had either troublesome or a smooth transition returning home (Kanning, 2013). “All travel experiences become, in varying degrees, incorporated into a person’s worldview, thus far outlasting physically demarcated journeys” (Kanning, 2013, p. 128) Participants in this study repeatedly expressed opinions and feelings of nuisance from the social pressure that gender roles bring to their lives (Eccles, 2011) once they returned home. “The destinations, or ‘homes’ returned to, were not viewed as solely physical landscapes but were identified as a milieu composed of social relationships, careers, societal and family roles, and responsibilities left behind [...] Societal benchmarks, or life stages, are viewed as being set by individual cultures in terms of what is and isn’t socially acceptable at corresponding points in a person’s life” (Kanning, 2013, p. 128). Motherhood and family-making brought for most of them troublesome especially increasing for the ones over 30 years old. Participants agree their Latin American societies signalize women who don’t have kids or don’t wish to have them conceptualizing them as being discriminated or excluded (Chen, 2013), this involves not only the external society but their close nucleus; being judged by their own family and friends:

“My friends know me, they know how I live and how I think and despite this they still insist that I should have a child, they say —but you are reaching your 40s, you should at least think about it, it is the most beautiful thing— [...] I don’t understand why people are so obsessed with the topic, this topic gets me... is horrible...they pressure me and In this moment I have two or three years to have them [children]...In the end I don’t know if I want them because I want to or because people expect me to have them”— Veronica

“They tell me — But you don’t know the beauty of being a mother — [she says] and you don’t know the beauty of being almost 40 and still feel free, be independent and not needing a child to feel complete, you don’t know that, you know what I mean?, that pressure exists, like if you are not a woman just because you don’t have kids, I am a woman, because I was born a woman and there is nothing that complements me, not even a child”— Alondra

It is clear that these social pressures produce feelings of frustration and confusion between some of the participants (Burges and Borgida, 1999). As they made clear their anguish or the constant tension this topic brings to their lives. For few participants, motherhood social pressures do not represent a significant issue, these are certainly younger women than 30 years old, and thus they do not share greatest concern as the older respondents. However all of the concerned about issues of personal freedom and self-determination, as a right for any women to embody and perform:

“I think above all that we can be free if we want, but this society dictates that you must take care...of your little flower, your purity, they teach us fear, “is extremely dangerous shouldn’t go alone, you better go with man to protect you”, I think in Europe and North America women have more freedom for example, on sex; a woman can live their freedom and therefore she won’t be a prostitute something that itself is considered here. From my travels I am more tolerant, I have no judgments and I live it, I do what I please without asking permission. But without living debauchery, live experiences, discover the world in that sense ...”— Marcela

While many of the participants took a smooth arrival transition (Kanning, 2013), few participants showed high resistance, like Jackeline in her conservative village. Leans’ (2012) research findings on longitudinal transformative travel, finds that *returnees* who do not receive support in their changed lifestyle or paradigms, “...acted to erode, or alter, thinking and practices experienced during travel that simply could not be maintained in the context of ‘home’ and the expectations (and sanctions) applied by various social groups (p. 168), therefore Jackeline and Catalina chose to solo travel once more in order to regain strength to complete their own paths. However, most of the participants engaged in Social Action (Freire, 1996) or their careers were related to wellness, wellbeing and education for future generations as a means to concretize their process.

6.5.1 Social action

“Ultimately, we have to consider how we translate essentially individual and often transitory experiences into transformative action at a societal and global level” (Pritchard and Morgan in Reisinger, 2013, p. 12), While this research’s argument is founded in travel and transformation, this transformation “enables us to see how dependency producing and oppressive institutionalized social practices, norms and cultural codes must be changed through social action (Mezirow, 1994, p. 152). Most women participating in this study seem to have engaged in a career path or social activism related to improving the social world around them where their travel experience played a significant role (UNWTO; 2016). For instance, Tamita argues how travelling experiences stimulated questioning not only gender roles, but broader issues of global concern (Freire, 1996):

“Before travelling I didn’t reflected on that [role of women]... or at least I was not aware of it, the quotidian makes the reflection on the role of women not to be questioned, however my travel experiences influenced my role as a woman because I lived them, every experience is lived and gradually one is transforming, making up my mind on the role of a woman... the socioeconomic life in Latin America, child labour, are all topics that stroke us everywhere... — Tamita

Transformative experiences and the participants’ active engagement in them “...offer broader philosophical understanding of how we know our multiple, entwined worlds and produce specific, attainable transformative acts, whether through education or activism...” (Pritchard and Morgan in Reisinger, 2013, p. 3). For instance most of them, like Alondra and

Veronica have claimed to become feminists. Some like Belén, Catarina and Tamita engage in movements of feminism, for instance against female violence. Participants concerned with education for future generations, such as Tamita who works with disabled children and aims to empower them, Marcela works in government education with poor communities and Catarina, who changed her career path after her trip to Bolivia:

“my professional role is extremely important, because ... I love my job, I work with children, and I feel that the passion through how I live, what I do and travel is transmitted to these children and I think that although it is very small it helps to shape human beings who seek freedom and happiness, not the status quo of Chilean society, not to the need to generate large sums of money and social recognition, but what you touch, see, breathe does not have a price, it has a value and that is to be alive, and I'm lucky to work with children who perceive that and I hope that tomorrow they will be free and fulfill their dreams, [...] because we need a much happier, kinder, solidary world...”

While these participants aim to transcend through their daily contributions through education, others for instance are working with wellbeing and wellness, such as conferences for mediation and bringing balance to people's lives such as Maria, or Veronica who engages in projects to empower young women to take the reins of their lives through travelling experiences. Recognizing the influence that travelling in the transformation through the active interest of the travellers, these travellers are concerned in changing perspectives on gendered roles of women through their contributions to social justice and activism (Ateljevic et al., in World Tourism Organization, 2016).

6.6 Conclusion:

Latin American women have been engaging in solo independent and cross-cultural travel as active independent travellers. Naught Latin or Western literature have explored their experiences, their patterns, motivations, traveller profile or identified them as independent travellers. While solo travel has been promoted to foster "...an immense potential to set new paradigms of thinking, [and] to encourage social and cultural changes..." (UNWTO, 2016, p. 8), most Transformative Tourism studies have been focusing on the features of travel as a potential *provider* of transformation; this approach has placed the trip as an initiator of a transformative process (Robledo and Batle, 2015; Reisinger, 2013) and therefore travel is often considered an isolated event in the life of the traveller (Lean, 2012). This research intended to address these both gaps; non-western feminist travelling experiences and Transformative Tourism's approach. The main aim of this research was to understand the role that solo travel plays within Latin American female solo travellers' transformative processes by exploring the life narratives of the participants; this aim is reflected in the main research question:

How do the experiences of female Latin American travellers participating in extended cross-cultural solo and independent sojourns for leisure purposes play a contributing role in their transformation of gendered perspectives (female roles: family and motherhood and personal freedom and self-determination) in Latin American societies?

In pursuance to answer this question, this research focused on the life and travel narratives of Spanish-speaking Latin American female participants who experienced gender perspective transformations aided by their engagement in solo and independent travel for leisure. This study was also based in the review of existing literature on the context of female Western and Latin travel experiences, gender and patriarchal societies and transformative tourism, as well as on theory regarding transformations of adult learning which led to the following set of research questions:

1. What is the basic profile of the Latin American solo female traveller?
2. How do the TLT triggers that contribute to changing perspectives take place in their transformative process?
3. How do these triggers relate to first and consecutive solo travels?
4. Are there features of travel and travellers' skills that allow women to engage with transformative processes as active agents? If so, which ones?
5. What are some of the socio-linguistic premises or paradigms regarding women's roles and personal freedom that participants currently hold?
6. What are some of the outcomes of social action that emerge from the transformation process?

These answers to these questions were discussed in the first sections of this chapter. The results have answered the identified sub-questions. The basic online survey shows that the female Latin American traveller who engage in solo and independent travel for leisure is generally a single relatively young (26-35 years old) and well educated woman (Bachelor or MSc), the main nationalities conform Mexican (34.13%), Argentinean (16.67%), Colombians (12.70%) and Peruvians and Chileans (each with 11.90%).

The findings of this qualitative study points out that 8 out of the 9 participants have initiated a transformative process triggered by disorienting dilemmas prior to their first solo travel for leisure or educational purposes, indicating that the first solo and independent travel for both purposes represented *a space* to challenge one's own capacities and ideas of one-self within breaking the barriers of fear from patriarchal-induced premises of womanhood as "Angels of home (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012), powerless and vulnerable (Ramos Escaldón et al., 2006; Makaran, 2013). Challenges and fear, for instance by being alone, fend for one self and being exposed to "danger" (inbred by family, culture and media (Staples and Frost, 1988; Mezirow, 2000)) sets this solo travel as the *initiator* of a perspective transformation (Robledo and Batle, 2015), emerged from the actual travel experience, which has been the discourse in Transformative Tourism (Reisinger, 2013; UNWTO, 2016); however, this research suggests that this so-called *transformation attributed to travel* has occurred only on the psychological realms of meaning schemes; the one's which relate to one's believes about one-self and capacities (Mezirow, 1991). And this transformation has been powerfully steered by the *active* participation and pursuit of the traveller (Ross, 2010); by their engagement, interest and reflection to guide, hinder or extend a continuing broader life transformative process entailing further liminal and quotidian experiences (Lean, 2012). In the same personal dimension, consecutive solo trips again provided the *space* to discover new skills or re-discover old skills, enhance feelings of self-determination, empowerment and self-control (Heimtun, 2012; Harris and Wilson, 2007) or as a *reminder* of the acquired learnings from the transformation in previous trips and life experiences. Furthermore, in the socio-cultural and epistemological dimensions of frames of reference (Mezirow, 2011), solo travel do not always initiate a transformation from the actual travel experiences. The transformation of the socio-cultural perspectives (social norms of behaviour, ideologies, cultural gendered cannons, or traditions; "women need a man"(Novo, 2003), "angels of home" (Ulloa Inostroza, 2012) and "women as vulnerable and pure" (Pachón, 2007)) and epistemic perspectives (related to how is knowledge constructed; "family, culture and media" (Stapler and Frost, 1988)) were conducted before, during and after their first leisured solo travel experiences, being travel a very powerful step in this broader process (Lean, 2012). In addition, consecutive solo travels took other roles, which suggests that solo travel's role depend as well on the needs of the participants in the transformative process according to their stages of life. Moreover,

travellers are not passive individuals who flow in the forces of travelling and life experiences. Transformation in this research has been analysed through the adult learning theory of TLT; a theory that studies the profound and internal process of change in established sociocultural, personal and epistemic premises of adults allowing "...to see how dependency producing and oppressive institutionalized social practices, norms and cultural codes..." (Mezirow, 1994, p. 152) are. This underpins these adult travellers as active agents which conduct or steer their own processes. Their engagement in any dimension of transformative process is extremely relevant to initiate, continue or hinder their *life* transformative process within and out of solo travel experiences. This active engagement is found in their involvement (Horrocks, 2015) in the content of the travel experiences (socio-political or gender issues and multicultural perspectives), their personal skills of critical reflection on these experiences and their own infancy-constructed premises, and seeking with their own interest to continue a transformation path (Lean, 2012) with the use of religions or therapies for instance. Additionally, this research suggests an age factor to perform a transformation within this type of travel (Taylor, 2000) since most women who travelled solo at a younger age (under 19) did not appear to develop critical reflection as other adult travellers. Moreover, in this research social action and coping with the society back home was found consistent to the existing TT literature, underpinning that travellers who engage in transformative processes often use travel as a force and space to "...re-invent themselves and the world; [...] travel [among others] in order to volunteer and make a difference..." (UNWTO, 2016). Furthermore, "The role that images, metaphors, myths, and narratives have played in shaping tourism and tourist practices has long been acknowledged and scrutinised" (Selwyn, 1996 in Sampaio, et al., 2012, p. 96) Transformative Tourism has been shaped by the discourse of change as "Anyone can be transformed by physical travel" (Lean, 2012, p. 157), and "thus introduced as an important and, indeed, intrinsic part of the tourist experience: either the tourist experience changes the tourist or it is not a tourist experience at all "(Sampaio, et al., 2012, p. 94). However, through the scope of TLT, the individual is placed in a central role as an active agent or conductor of its own process where travel is an extremely significant piece in their life puzzle, where travel's features and personal skills are equally relevant to achieve or conduct a transformative process.

6.6.1 Limitations,

Limitations through this master thesis were encountered in time constraints. This research has been assigned to finalize in 6 months not only due to the MLE curricula but through the financial sponsorship aid. This limited the research on a complex subject that by choice has been conducted. Another limitation is that the complex nature of transformation (Kanning, 2013) has been approached through the retrospective of the participants (Taylor, 2000), in other words, their perspective on their own transformation process. In which a longitudinal study would have been more appropriate in the pursuit of transformation-temporality in their life stories (interviews before, during and after the trip) where the research may be able to engage further as an observer of the participant's experience.

6.6.2 Suggestions for further research:

TT as a growing field in travel and tourism inquiry frames travel as a centre axis or *provider* of transformation, while it is scientifically proven that transformation is *fostered* in travel and tourism, the suggestion is to use an adequate and careful language to place the power of travel as a *stimulator* to transform an individual, setting clearly the freedom and agency a traveller as well as "to recognise the relationship of physical travel, and the transformations that take place, with other mobilities experienced before, during and after travel. This includes acknowledging the continual alteration of individuals, societies and cultures through these forces". (Lean, 2012, p. 152) Additionally, the incipient knowledge on the travel patterns of Latin American women as independent travellers has a vast space to initiate research commencing by:

- A proper and complete demographic study and the statistical data related to Latin American women's engagement in travel for leisure.
- Broaden the analysis of the empowerment, emotional and personal development travelling experiences play in the emancipation of socio-cultural paradigms.
- Further research on how travellers cope with their transformations in their societies after their transformations or upon returning home.
- In which way socio cultural paradigms may affect the development of these women in relation to fear to travel and their mobilities?
- What are the actual transformative differences in gendered perspectives between pre and post travel in these women?
- Transformative tourism can be explored in the sense to approach women as active agents in their own transformative process.

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ANNEX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction	
<p>Key Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you • Your name • Purpose • Confidentiality • Duration • How interview will be conducted • Opportunity for questions • Signature of consent 	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.</p> <p>I am Erika Hernando; I am doing this research within a Master degree in Leisure and Environment in the Netherlands.</p> <p>I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in cross-cultural independent and solo travel for leisure purposes.</p> <p>Specifically on the way these experiences influenced your opinions and perceptions on expectations and gender roles in our societies.</p> <p>The idea of this research came from the awareness of the lack of academic attention to Latin women as consumers of tourism and even more as solo travelers. Throughout social networks I constantly see Latinas travelling solo in destination far away from home and awakening to new ways of living and thinking. I wonder why Latinas are not studied in this experience and how these experiences change us.</p> <p>You have been chosen as a participant of this interview due to your experience as a solo traveler and to the cross-cultural nature of your travel experiences. At the same time the nature of this research selects participants who have been transformed out of these experiences, this means that you are reflective of yourself and your society; you have developed some degree of emotional intelligence and communicative skills.</p> <p>Due to ethical concerns, I need you to accept an informed consent, this is a way to evidence that you have accepted to take part in this study, and you will do this orally after I explain how the interview will be conducted. Once I explain the process I ask you: Are you willing to participate in this interview? If you indeed are willing... You will say your name and answer, "yes I am willing to participate in this study".</p> <p>The interview should take less than an hour. Please make sure you have this time available and that you are located in a quiet and semi-private space where we won't be interrupted or disturbed, I also want to remind us to turn our mobiles off for the same purpose.</p> <p>I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Because we're on tape, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss your comments.</p> <p>During the interview you are able to answer with confidence and trust that anything you say is not judged or put in evidence. Please feel free to say as much as you think appropriate to answer the questions in the way that everything you answer is valuable, accepted and is based fully in your own experience. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.</p>

	<p>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Unless you decide otherwise.</p> <p>Are there any questions about what I have just explained? Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p>
QUESTIONS	
2) Establish interviewer as learner and trust:	Tell me a about your-self, your name, age, perhaps a bit of your life story for instance where are you from, where did you grow up and how was your family and educational environment?
<p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask factual before opinion • Use probes as Needed <p>Look for the triggers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -disorienting dilemma -critical reflection -reflective discourse -context, 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where have you travelled solo for leisure? When and why? 2. What does it mean for you to travel alone? 3. Tell me about your experiences traveling alone, in the context of situations where you found differences in treatment to and the role of women in society. 4. How do you think this experience have influenced your views on the role of women? 5. How do you think your education and culture influenced these experiences? 6. How do you feel when you look back and you realize your perception has changed?
<p>Closing Key Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional comments • Next steps • Thank you 	<p>Is there anything more you would like to add?</p> <p>Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me, and to inform this research. I will revise the information you just shared and perhaps if something is not clear to me I would like to contact you and verify if I understood what you wanted to share. If that is ok with you.</p> <p>If that is the case after this I will be analyzing the information and I will have the results by the end of August this year.</p> <p>I'll be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested just let me know.</p> <p>Thank you for your time, take care and all the best.</p>