Negotiating gender and power during COVID-19: women and tourism in San Gil, Colombia

A Research Agenda for Gender and Tourism

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8. Negotiating gender and power during COVID-19: women and tourism in San Gil, Colombia

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1. Introduction

The comparatively high participation of women is one of the reasons that tourism has been presented as a sector with high potential to benefit them (UNWTO-UN Women, 2011). However, scholars working in the field stress that tourism is providing neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for gender equality (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Existing gender power hierarchies and dynamics are instead often reproduced in tourism spaces (Vizcaíno-Suárez & Díaz-Carrión, 2018), and sometimes intensified in ways that limit women's opportunities (Morgan & Winkler, 2019).

International evidence underlines that women in the tourism sector are more likely than men to face poorer working conditions (Guimarães & Silva, 2016), exploitation, sexual harassment and violence (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Further, women carry expectations in the home to shoulder the majority of the domestic labour, resulting in 'double working' days (Gentry, 2007). The advent of the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing gendered dimensions of inequality, through its impact on women's ability to retain and continue their paid work, the increased loads of unpaid domestic and caring work resulting from lockdown measures that most often fall to women, and the heightened risk of domestic violence against women that often accompany economic downturns and societal crises (Guterres, 2020).

San Gil – the empirical focus of this chapter – is a small city located in the centre east of Colombia in the department of Santander. The city has a warm climate and due to its geographical location, has waterfalls, wells, caves and

rivers, making it particularly attractive for adventure tourism (Pérez-Pinzón & Serrano-Ruíz, 2018). San Gil is considered one of the most dynamic tourism cities in Colombia (Forero, 2017), holding 9 per cent of the hotel capacity while only 0.2 per cent of the region's population. In 2018, San Gil received approximately 45 000 tourists (La Cometa, 2019), yet the local tourism sector is still not well documented nor researched, and there is little understanding of the situation and experiences of women tourism workers. This chapter addresses this gap, with a view to better understanding women's experience of tourism work, coupled with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

In March 2020, Colombia endorsed a strict lockdown to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. This first national measure lasted until September 2020, when a more flexible and regional approach was taken. Since then, local governments interspersed measures according to the spikes of infections, until gradually after July 2021 all restrictions were lifted. However, Colombia has had almost 5 million people infected and 126 000 deaths. The quarantines and curfews, capacity limits, social distancing and restrictions on mobility had a severe negative impact on the country's economy, especially in sectors like tourism (Alon et al., 2020), which disproportionally affected women. It has been broadly recognized that the COVID-19 crisis has also served to intensify existing gendered divides more generally (Manzo & Minello, 2020).

In this chapter, we examine how women working in tourism experienced and coped with the challenging circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic while navigating gender power relations at home and at work. This focus responds to calls for nuanced site-specific research that examines gender issues at the microscale (Boley et al., 2016), taking into account that these play out in place-specific ways (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). In addition, the chapter takes a comparative approach in its focus on women across different labour positions, to address the lack of studies in the field of gender and tourism that engage comparatively with women's lived realities across the spectrum of employment, entrepreneurship and leadership. As we shall demonstrate, women's labour positions affected how they experienced the COVID-19 crisis and its direct impacts on their work and home life, the coping mechanisms upon which they relied, and how they navigated intimate gender power relations, such as those affecting the distribution of freedoms, responsibilities and tasks in the home.

In the following section, we outline the conceptualization of gendered power that we employ in our analysis. We specifically present the articulation of the different modalities of power in 'power over', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within', which draw analytical attention to women's agency within

different sets of gender relationships (Yount et al., 2016) at work and at home, and how these experiences and practices relate to each other. We then detail the qualitative methodology employed, and introduce the 19 women we interviewed for this research. Empirical findings are then presented and discussed, illustrating the diverse ways that women working in tourism have experienced and coped with the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. The findings highlight a heterogeneous process of empowerment in the face of these circumstances. Based on the San Gil adventure tourism case, conclusions are then drawn in light of the conceptualization of gendered power and gender dynamics.

2.   Conceptualising Gender Power Relations in Tourism

The subfield of tourism gender research is broadly concerned with women's contributions as producers and consumers of tourism (Swain & Momsen, 2002), the gender dimension of tourism development (Ferguson & Moreno, 2015), and women's participation and integration into the tourism labour market (Guimarães & Silva, 2016). In the Latin American context, tourism gender studies emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with a strong focus on the gendered impacts of tourism development in host communities (Vizcaíno-Suárez & Díaz-Carrión, 2018), and efforts to make gender and power relations visible in a region characterized by social, political and economic inequalities (Díaz-Carrión, 2012). This literature has recently been enriched with counter-hegemonic contributions, especially postcolonial approaches (Barboza, 2017).

2.1   Modalities of Power Relations and Notions of Empowerment

Theorizations of power relations within gender tourism literatures have gone beyond the traditional dominance model of *power over* (such as the structural subjugation of women within patriarchal societies) in favour of a more nuanced understanding of the modalities of power and agency, where women are able to exercize within a broader land-scape marked by gender inequality (Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997). The notion of *power to* acknowledges the capacity of a person to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over them by others, and is closely related to the concept of empowerment(e.g., Allen, 1999). We follow Fuente (2013) in making a distinction between *power to* as a capacity, and empowerment as a process of change that includes psychic, cultural, political and relational aspects. Empowerment involves a process of different

degrees of personal development through different times and phases, from growing awareness to actions aimed at removing inequities (Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017). Further, *power with* refers to collective capacities for action (Allen, 1999), while *power within* signals the internal intangible assets of self-esteem and self-confidence (Nikkhah et al., 2012). *Power within* is associated with individual capacities for self-awareness, assertiveness and reflexive analysis of experiences allowing individuals to recognize how power operates in their lives, and to gain confidence to improve their situation in the context of gender power relations (Williams et al., 1994).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the notion of empowerment is often central in efforts to examine the transformative potential of tourism as a driver for gender equality. However, the concept has been criticized because it tends to celebrate microscale expressions of agency without sufficient attention to wider structures of domination (Fuente, 2013). This is evident in the tourism literature which has shifted its focus from social justice, equity and power relations to an emphasis on the neoliberal values of individualism and competitiveness (Small et al., 2017). Instead, considering empowerment is entangled with, and tempered by, the dominant modality of *power over*, research on gender and tourism can address both aspects of domination and individual agency.

2.2   Work–Home Interactions and Labour Positions

The analysis of gender power relations in Latin America has focused on the empowerment of women through increased job opportunities offered in tourism (UNWTO, 2019). Some studies stress the empowering capacity of tourism (Chablé et al., 2007; Sánchez et al., 2019). Others have found that structures of domination prevent women from benefiting from tourism (Barkin, 2003; Belsky, 1999), particularly due to family and housekeeping expectations and demands (Morgan & Winkler, 2019). However, these studies seldom address how women navigate and negotiate interconnected power relations at work and at home. Relations between home and work have typically been addressed in terms of 'work–family conflict' (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) and the strategies that women develop to make their work in tourism compatible with their family responsibilities, especially in Latin America (Vizcaíno-Suárez et al., 2016). This notion has been criticized for focusing exclusively on women (Emslie et al., 2004), for considering the work–family conflict as an external objective and homogenous reality, detached from women's lived experiences (Grünberg & Matei, 2019) and for perpetuating the discourse that women are individually responsible for achieving a 'happy work–family balance', ignoring the broader landscapes of inequality in which they are immersed (Rottenberg,

2018). It also focuses exclusively on the heteronormative notion of family, that is, heterosexual couples with children.

To address these critiques, we draw on the analytical typology of Grünberg and Matei (2019) in considering the multifaceted and contingent relations between home and work. They identify that these are typified as separate, contrasting or complementary realms. As separate realms, rigid boundaries between home and work are drawn; each one exhibits distinct cultures and forms of social organization. As contrasting realms, home is understood in relation to workplace, and vice versa. This view looks at how the differences between the two spheres appear to be meaningful. And last, as complementary realms, they are considered to exhibit a relation of mutual enhancement and completion.

In our comparative focus across labour positions, we seek to understand the complexity of relations between work and home for women working in tourism. We argue that different labour positions can greatly affect the way in which women experience their participation in tourism and the gender power relations they must navigate. Existing research on labour positions in relation to gender power relations in tourism has mainly focused on the gendered nature of employment (Madera et al., 2009) and entrepreneurship (Byrne et al., 2019).

However, in this chapter we focus on the role of various labour positions in how women navigate gender power across spaces of work and home. Further, we wish to understand how these intersect with other axes of potential disadvantage such as the rural–urban divide, the role of religion in perpetuating traditional gender roles, and the impact of marital status and motherhood.

3.   Methodology

3.1   In-Depth Interviews

This research put women themselves in the centre of research, employing a qualitative design using in-depth interviews to obtain first-hand subjective interpretations from women working in tourism. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions aiming to fully capture the experiences, perceptions, feelings, decisions, concerns and desired changes in the women's lives. Participating women were encouraged to use all their senses, feelings and emotions (Hunjan & Pettit, 2011) to talk about their everyday life experiences and practices.

Participants were asked about their careers in tourism, their relations and the decision-making processes at work. To link their realities at work and home, they were asked about experiences of conflict or support between work and home. Questions on women's daily routines were useful to link practices and experiences at home and at the workplace, as well as the changes in both spheres due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Follow-up questions were asked to identify situations of constraints, control, discrimination, harassment, violence, etc. Women were asked to elaborate on their experiences, actions, reactions, decisions and whether they had felt limited in their options in relation to their physical integrity, self-esteem, dignity, self-confidence, etc. Women were also invited to talk about ways to overcome difficulties or injustices and the changes in self-determination, self-confidence and their ability to make choices. In order to capture the implications of different labour positions, participant answers were differentiated according to certain social and demographic dimensions, such as family status, age, class and religion, to acknowledge intersectionality.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all the interviews were conducted over telephone by the first author in her and the participants' mother tongue, Spanish. Most of the interviews were conducted in the strictest phase of quarantine, which provided more time and availability for answering the questions. The interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes; the quotes included in the chapter have been translated into English by the first author. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms are used to assure anonymity.

The data was analysed following the substantive phases set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcripts were carefully read and organized, and a list of initial codes was generated. This process was constructed both inductively and deductively. After sorting the different codes into potential themes, relations between codes, themes and different levels of themes were considered, reviewed and refined. Considering the research question and the literature on gender power relations in tourism three main themes and seven sub-themes were identified which captured differentiated impacts of the pandemic, navigation between work and home relations and coping strategies.

3.2   Research Participants

The sample consisted of women working in the tourism industry in San Gil, Colombia. These women were recruited through snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). A balanced sample of women of different labour positions, ages, social classes, and family constellation was sought. Regarding labour positions, there were three groups – employees, entrepreneurs and self-employed –

the first group with some type of contract or labour subordination, the second owning their companies and the third as sole workers in their own informal businesses. The number of entrepreneurs was unfortunately lower than the number of employees or self-employed women. A total of 19 interviews were conducted between March and August 2020.The characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 8.1.

4.   Findings

4.1   Impact of the Pandemic on Women in Different Labour Positions

The restrictions introduced by the Colombian government in response to the pandemic had a devastating effect on the tourism sector in San Gil, much as elsewhere across the globe. Government aid packages were declared for tourism workers but have been accompanied by criticism and corruption scandals. For example, income aid was made available for three months to those who worked in tourism, provided they had an up-to-date registration in the National Tourism Registry (at 15 April, 2020), were in possession of a professional card, and not already receiving other government benefits. Due to these requirements, many tourism workers were not able to claim any support; only four of the 19 participants got financial support of approximately 150 euros since many worked informally. Another six women among the participants accessed the more general 'solidarity income' of approximately 40 euros per month, which was directed to the poorest families according to the databases of the National Planning Department. However, there were complaints about the reliability of the databases used to assign it. Despite the broad participation of women in tourism, there has been no governmental or media exposure about gender-related impacts of the pandemic at the local or national level, or differentiation by gender in terms of aid packages. Women have been invisible to the political agenda during the crisis and therefore also to targeted actions.

The study revealed that all interviewed women endured a loss of income due to the pandemic but experienced the COVID-19 pandemic differently relative to labour position, socioeconomic status, age, family setup and location. The women also managed their household finances and loss of income in different ways.

Table 8.1   Characteristics of San Gil research participants

ID	Pseudonym	Labour position	Age	Family setup	Location	Education level
1	Celmi	Employee	48	Single, 1 child	Urban	University
2	Daisy	Employee	25	She lives with her parents, single, 1 child	Rural	Primary school
3	Diana	Employee	25	Married, 1 child	Rural	High school
4	Ema	Employee	39	Married, 2 children	Urban	Technical college
5	Femy	Employee	40	Married, 2 children	Urban	High school
6	Gloria	Employee	44	Married, 1 child	Urban	University
7	Hilda	Employee	43	Single, 1 child	Rural	Primary school
8	Julia	Employee	25	She lives with her parents, no children	Urban	Technical college
9	Lily	Employee	53	Single, 1 child	Urban	High school
10	Maria	Employee	60	Widow, 2 children	Urban	Primary school
11	Naty	Employee	30	She lives with her father, no children	Urban	Technical college
12	Sara	Employee	38	Divorced, 2 children	Urban	High school
13	Nely	Entrepreneur	38	Married, 2 children	Urban	University
14	Nora	Entrepreneur	40	Divorced, 2 children	Urban	University
15	Alba	Entrepreneur	36	Married, 3 children	Urban	University
16	Ana	Self-employed	62	Single, 2 children	Urban	Technical college
17	Lucy	Self-employed	35	Single, 1 child	Urban	University
18	Lyda	Self-employed	55	Divorced, 2 children	Urban	Technical college
19	Rosa	Self-employed	65	Widow, 5 children	Urban	Primary school

4.1.1 Women Entrepreneurs

The interviewed women entrepreneurs had higher incomes, higher levels of existing savings, and easier access to credit than employees and the self-employed, and sometimes had income from other businesses. All entrepreneurs interviewed were managing their own companies, were included in the payroll, and enjoyed benefits such as family allowances, healthcare, retirement plan, etc. The entrepreneurs, having financial back-up resources, used the time of the pandemic to plan new projects, prepare for the reopening or dedicate themselves to leisure activities. For example, Alba, a middle-aged married formal entrepreneur and her husband, thanks to the profits of the companies they own, bought a place to let: 'We have leased a commercial space here in San Gil and with that we are practically making a living.' She also sells dollhouses and is expanding her business.

4.1.2 Employees and Self-employed

In contrast to the entrepreneurs, the vast majority of the interviewed women employees and self-employed had no other sources of income and little savings which made it difficult for them to find money for rent, food and basic necessities. Exceptions were women living on farms in rural areas, most of them employees. These women were able to subsist on farming activities, livestock and crops, as they either owned the land or could live there in exchange for their work on it. For example, Hilda, a 43-year-old employed woman, bought a farm with her husband and kept it after the divorce. Women employees who were living in rural areas expressed that their daily routines and general lifestyle hardly changed due to the pandemic. For example, Diana, a 25-year-old married employee living in a rural area considered her location a benefit:

> Here in the countryside it is different, it is better than in the city; because on the farm at least one has a bit more freedom. The pandemic has been more difficult in the city … I missed my job, but here in the countryside one does other activities.

Contrary to entrepreneurs and women living in rural areas, the main concern of other interviewed employees and self-employed women was finding resources to support themselves and their families. This was especially necessary for those on a so-called service contract. This type of contract provides only payment for activities carried out without employment benefits such as healthcare or retirement plan, and is commonly used in the tourism sector to enable companies to hire seasonally, but leaves workers in a vulnerable situation. However, most employees interviewed were resigned to this reality. Gloria, a middle-aged married employee, for instance, said that 'When the

pandemic began, they made a definitive closure for tourism activities, then I automatically accepted that I could not have more work there.'

Women who were not living in nuclear families experienced more pressure, especially when they had dependants to support. Sara, a 38-year-old divorced employee and mother of two young children, expressed how her economic situation changed:

> [The pandemic] has been a very hard blow. My work in the hotel generated the necessary income to live with my children and give them what they need. Now our only source of income is what I can do as cleaning some houses and what my children's father sends them, but almost always we have to argue with him.

Many of the employees and self-employed women mentioned they became increasingly dependent on financial support from relatives such as parents or children, depending on their age. For example, Julia, a 25-year-old single employee who lives with her parents, said 'my father is a rancher and he takes care of most of the household expenses.' She is an example of young women who live with their parents and consider their income as an extra contribution to the household and for their personal expenses. In the case of Daisy (25, single mother living with her parents and brothers), only her father and brother kept their jobs: 'I am not earning the same, so right now I am not contributing to the groceries or services; then my brother and dad have to do that.' At the other end of the spectrum, older participants generally received financial support from their children, as in the case of Maria, a 60-year-old widow with two adult children: 'My children help me monthly for my expenses.'

In most families where men were present, it was the man who continued to receive some form of income, also in families where the husband and wife both worked full-time in tourism. For instance, Gloria (44, a married employee with one child), said that although she and her husband both worked in activities related to tourism, only her husband had kept his job. Femy (40, employee married with two children) had the same experience: 'Thank God my husband has had something to do.'

As these findings show, women working in tourism in San Gil were affected differently according to their labour position, age, economic status, location and family setup. Overall, employed or self-employed, middle-aged women, especially single mothers (which account for almost half of the participants in this study) in urban areas, have borne the brunt of the financial impacts of the pandemic.

4.2   Navigating Work–Home Relations

Looking to work–home relations, we found other aspects of impact and vulnerability across the labour positions. The changes due to the pandemic generated renegotiations of work–home relations and responsibilities for most of the participants, mainly evidenced in the use of time, domestic tasks and sources of household income. Although the majority of the interviewed women stated they were satisfied with the new distribution of tasks and income, the renegotiation occurred in two main ways. In some cases, the participants spoke explicitly of negotiation processes within their homes, either with their parents, children or partners and used terms such as equity, equality and teamwork. In other cases, most commonly for employed and self-employed married women, the (re)distribution reinforced traditional gender roles.

4.2.1   *Being Confined to the Home*

Lockdown measures in response to COVID-19 meant that the vast majority of the women interviewed could not continue their work, or had to reduce time spent on work. There were clear differences in how women used the increased time spent at home. Mainly entrepreneurs and women with external economic support were able to use available extra time for self-development, such as thinking about future projects, or learning new skills. For example, Alba, a 36-year-old entrepreneur, shared that together with her husband she had been planning an ambitious new project:

> In this time … we are working with the Vice Ministry of Tourism and the Vice Ministry of Sport so that in 2023 we can create the rafting world championship here in San Gil.

Ana (self-employed tour-guide) used the lockdown to study English to be able to get a certificate as a professional guide: 'We are on standby due to the pandemic, we will see when that can be solved but in the meantime we have to study.' The entrepreneurs and self-employed women were already accustomed to using the off-season time to prepare for the next season, and could fall back on this pattern of activity. Alba explained:

> Normally … we have strong times of the year such as December and January, Easter, July holidays, October recess and holidays … In low season, one dedicates the time to improving equipment, maintaining equipment, making location improvements; all this matters.

However, employees with financial constraints were more focused on trying to survive while hoping things would return to normal. For them the pandemic

was much less an opportunity for self-development, but some valued the extra time to spend with their families.

Family structure and age of the participants often affected what activities could be carried out during confinement. For instance, middle-aged women with small or school-age children had to meet the new challenge of virtual education and spent more time with their children. This was also the case for entrepreneur Nely, a 38-year-old married bakery owner, who shared how her routine changed:

> My son no longer goes to school, so since then everything has changed, because my son is at home, so I have to help him with his homework and everything related to school.

4.2.2 Household Chores

More time spent together at home during the pandemic often led to a change in the distribution of household chores. Particularly the employees who could not continue work outside the home, ended up being responsible for the tasks in the home instead, as the family fell back on traditional gender norms. For example, Femy (40-year-old married employee) explained:

> With the pandemic I have taken away my sons' chores because before my children were practically the ones who did everything at home. Since I am at home I have reduced their household chores.

These changes were less pronounced for women like Hilda, a single mother of 43, in a rural location, who shared that she got extra help from her daughter who had to stay at home: 'Now I don't get up so early because my daughter is here with me so she gets up and helps me clean and cook.'

Several women (mainly employees and self-employed) used the word 'collaboration' or 'help' to refer to the household chores that men perform. This may indicate that they see household chores as their responsibility to which their partners or the men of the house collaborate when the women lack time due to their work outside the home. When the women returned home due to the pandemic, they returned to 'normal', which is for them to carry out housework. Likewise, the women's income as economic contribution to the home is also termed 'collaboration'. For instance, Ema, a married employee said: 'Thank God I have my job; at the moment I am using that to help with the cost of groceries.'

In a second group of especially, but not exclusively, entrepreneurs, the distribution of tasks at home was allocated in a more equitable way. Alba and her husband used to employ a maid, and when she no longer could come due to the COVID-19 restrictions, they distributed the tasks among all family members: 'Now that we no longer have a person to help us around the house, we distribute the housework; we begin to teach the children that it is important to help with the housework.'

Similarly, Gloria, a 44-year-old married employee with one child, shared:

> Here is teamwork … We are training our children to be like that so that they get used to it. While I do one thing they must do another and my husband has cooked all the time … and I take care of the part of the organization of the house.

4.3   Networks

The networks that the interviewed women have woven in their work and their extended families have been fundamental to cope not only with the changes of the pandemic but also to balance their family and work demands. All the participants spoke positively about their work relationships, although the employees put more emphasis on collegiality than self-employed and entrepreneurs. For example, Daisy, a 25-year-old employee, mentioned that 'I started to work and two months later I got pregnant. I didn't expect it, but my colleagues encouraged and supported me, so I felt better.' Ema, whose daughter has health problems, said that her co-workers and her work in general 'have been essential in many situations, especially in my daughter's illness, to attend medical appointments to other cities and pay expenses'. Some women shared that they often turned to female colleagues for support with personal or work-related challenges.

The relationship with female relatives was mentioned as important, especially in interviews with employed or self-employed women. Mothers, daughters, sisters, sisters-in-law, cousins and aunts support each other; especially in caring arrangements such as childcare. Daisy said: 'My mother is the one who takes care of my daughter so that I can go to work, if I hadn't someone I trust, I couldn't work.' She expressed that the support of her mother has been essential for her during the pandemic. Lucy (35, a single mother, self-employed) mainly relied on her mother: 'We always support each other when, for example, I have to go on a trip, my daughter can stay with my mother.'In addition to this type of help, Nely found that 'Emotional support and advice are important to maintain balance in my life.'

4.4   Coping with the Pandemic

Although individual circumstances and experiences varied, the coping strategies of the interviewed women followed similar patterns. Resourcefulness, flexibility, optimism and learning were common to almost all. However, how these women from San Gil talked about their faith and themselves highlighted differences between entrepreneurs on the one hand, and employees and self-employed women, on the other.

4.4.1   *Resourcefulness and Flexibility*

Many of the participants, across labour positions, appeared to be used to working in an unstable sector. The following quote from Alba illustrates this: 'We still have many times that we do not have tourists, so that is (constantly) happening during all these years ... there are times where there is no income.'

Although the pandemic did catch women off-guard, some had savings because they were used to relying on peak season earnings. They were aware that the sector is unstable and that a person who works in tourism in San Gil has to learn to distribute the money throughout the year. As a result, women are flexible and grab the opportunity to do a wide range of jobs. For instance, 30-year-old single employee Naty said: 'I am a very active person. If you say to me: can you help me by distributing chocolate, I say ok ... if I don't know, I find the way, I find out and I do it.' Thus, it seems that the instability of the sector requires women to have, or develop, both flexibility and ingenuity.

4.4.2   *Optimism and Learning*

Despite the difficulties that the participants have faced during the pandemic, almost all emphasized positive aspects and lessons learned. Whenever they mentioned something negative, it was followed by a positive sentiment: 'but the good thing is…' or 'despite that…', etc. The possibility to spend more time with their family was most mentioned as positive. Employee Celmi said 'I am a single mother … and until now we have spent more time together thanks to the pandemic.'

Most interviewed women pointed out that the pandemic generated useful life lessons. For instance, that it is possible to live well with less income. As Julia (employee) stated: 'Although my income has decreased ... and my father's as

well with what we have, that is enough.' Alba (entrepreneur) also mentioned the positive side of being distracted and not wanting to consume so much:

> In this pandemic, we learned to be a little more thrifty, because since we have no income then we start to see things from a different way … The pandemic has been very positive on understanding that … even if one does not want to be in the circle of our economy, one is there; because you want to buy and buy things.

However, while for some women (mainly entrepreneurs) optimism was related to a sense of keeping control of the situation, for others (mainly employees and self-employed), it was rather about acceptance. They tried to stay calm and positive in the face of an external event over which they felt little control.

4.4.3   Faith

Religious beliefs played a significant role in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic. The vast majority of those interviewed were Catholic and most of them framed the challenges of the pandemic in relation to their beliefs, which provided emotional strength, as Alba expressed:

> I have God in my heart and my joy and happiness lies in that. If I have him, I have everything. He gives me everything, he provides everything to me (…) My husband and I live 100 percent off tourism and I can say that every day God has given us what we have needed.

The entrepreneurs used more expressions of gratitude while self-employed and employees were more likely to use words like 'I beg or ask God'. For example, Nora, a middle-aged divorced entrepreneur, repeats throughout the interview her gratitude to God:

> I have to thank God for all the blessings he has given me. I go back and repeat it: Thank God. Thanks to him I have two wonderful daughters, I have a roof to sleep under, a plate of food every day at my table, many privileges that unfortunately many people do not have at the moment.

Differently, Rosa, an older self-employed widow, begged for the crisis to end quickly: 'I beg with the power of God, the Holy Virgin and the Holy Spirit eliminate this pandemic soon.'

4.4.4   Self-perception

The participants expressed different ideas about what the pandemic crisis has meant for them. Especially the employees, who lost their main source of income, have experienced it as an economic and personal crisis in their lives.

They hope it ends soon so that their life can go back to the way it was before. For example, Lyda (55-year-old divorced, self-employed tour guide): 'This was not expected by absolutely anyone and it changed our lives… we must be patient and hope that it will end soon so that we return to our life as it was before.'

Others, especially, but not exclusively, entrepreneurs, considered the crisis as one more obstacle to overcome in their lives. For instance, Nora, a middle-aged divorced entrepreneur expressed:

> We have been able to reinvent ourselves, get ahead. It has not been easy indeed but as good Santanderians we carry in our blood a race of vigorous, enterprising, hardworking people and for us it is easy to be exigent and get ahead regardless of the situations we are going through, not only in our department but in our country in the entire world.

The way women talked about the pandemic was closely linked to their self-perception. The group of mainly entrepreneurs who referred to the pandemic as one more obstacle to overcome also described themselves as leaders, strong and who throughout their lives have been able to overcome difficulties and solve problems.

In general terms, entrepreneurs expressed more confidence in their capabilities than employees. They were more likely to individualize their situation and hold themselves solely responsible for their results. For instance, Nora characterized herself as 'vigorous, enterprising, and hardworking' and related it directly to her response to the pandemic: 'For us it is easy to be strict and get ahead regardless of the situations.' The entrepreneurs manifested a greater sense of control over the crisis and placed a role of leadership in their hands. Alba talked about herself as a leader: 'I think that I am a very entrepreneurial woman in the sense that I am always looking for leadership of the processes.' She considered herself as an example to follow: 'It seems to me that this is healthy, because it is that one is an example to follow, an example of growth.' Many families depend on her and her company: 'We want to transcend in the tourism, we in our jobs always want to move tourism forward, so it seems to me that I am a woman who can be an example for many.' She responded accordingly in the pandemic, and tried to initiate new projects. Likewise, they considered their companies not only as generating profits but also helping other people as Alba explained to 'create with them [employees] a bond of growth, transformation, emotional support … I see the company as a way to help many people.'

This is related to self-awareness, self-esteem and identity. Those women with a positive self-perception of their own capabilities talked more about new possibilities. It seems clear that when assigning meaning to the changed pandemic circumstances, the women interviewed made use of elements such as previous experiences of problem solving, which made some see it as another challenge among many others, while for others it was a very difficult crisis.

5.   Discussion

This chapter has offered insights into how women working in tourism in San Gil experienced and coped with the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants experienced a loss of income but navigated and negotiated differently in their heterogeneous realities based on their labour position, socioeconomic status, age, family setup and location. In general, employees and the self-employed were worse affected compared to entrepreneurs.

When we look at how their various responses are related to empowerment processes, the emotional strength that many women expressed suggests that they could rely on 'power within', and their control over the situation points at 'power to' when facing difficulties. Nevertheless, we could identify two groups. For the first group of women, mainly consisting of entrepreneurs, we could relate professional achievements, self-confidence and a feeling of control over the crisis to fair processes of renegotiation. Within the home this concerned the distribution of time dedicated to the career and household tasks, as well as the responsibility for family income. In Grünberg and Matei's (2019) terms, work and home were experienced as complementary realms. Moreover, the comparatively higher self-confidence of entrepreneurs may be related to positive characteristics associated with entrepreneurship (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). Running a business successfully can be an important source of empowerment for women, which can be enhanced by 'succeeding' in an area that many still consider masculine (Ahl, 2007). However, these characteristics are also aligned with discourses that encourage citizens to be autonomous, positioning them as unconstrained by external forces transferring responsibility almost exclusively to the individual (Rottenberg, 2018).

For the second group, consisting mainly of employees and self-employed women, expressions of self-esteem, self-confidence and positive perception of their own career appeared much lower. In this group most women took a more passive position and were hoping for the pandemic to end soon. Their rene-

gotiations tended to be tacit and generally resulted in traditional distributions of tasks within the home. In these cases, male work was privileged, and work and home were played out as contrasting and separate realms, accentuating traditional gender roles.

Our findings also support Grünberg and Matei's (2019) argument about the importance of using multifaceted and contingent notions of these relations and of addressing family types other than heterosexual couples with children. In our study, less than half of the interviewees have such a family setup. Therefore, the theorizations focused on this type of family fall short to understand and analyse the realities of most of our participants.

Our study strongly supports the claims for the need to perform intersectional analyses. We found that the labour position intersected with age, family setup and the rural–urban divide to generate differentiated experiences. Employed or self-employed middle-aged single mothers in urban areas were the most vulnerable in terms of existing resources to cope with loss of income. Younger and older women, even before the pandemic, had been receiving financial support from parents, siblings and children, which made it easier to adjust and to cope with the loss of income. Women living in rural areas had an advantage over women living in the cities in terms of freedom and access to housing and food. Our results also reveal the important, although differentiated roles of religion in experiences of and coping with the crisis.

Network management illustrated how participants turn to other women to cope with challenges of work and family demands, which is closely associated with the concept of 'power with'. Mutual support went both ways from home to work and vice versa. The work-to-home support network was naturally much more evident among employees than among the self-employed and employers. Although 'power with' is generally understood in terms of collectively achieving ends, this study found that camaraderie and mutual support – without collective action – have positively impacted the lives of the participants, thus mutual support could be considered as an end in itself.

6.   Conclusion

This chapter's results show that very few of the women we interviewed mentioned structural factors that limit their possibilities. Explicit exemplifications of 'power over' were scarce in the interviews and most participants individualized their own situation. However, our data shows that in most cases there

are subtle mechanisms and tacit agreements about how women and men are expected to behave. This resulted in a greater burden of the household falling to women and male work being privileged. Nevertheless, evidencing structural 'power over' relationships through interviews is difficult.

Future studies are necessary to explore more detailed mechanisms of 'power over'. The study also calls for more research on site-specific gender and tourism in San Gil and Colombia. Despite the increase in literature that makes visible the different realities of women in tourism in the world, in Colombia, and in Latin America in general, they remain scarce. Research on the mechanisms of gender power relations and intersectional analysis may support tailoring interventions and help to cope with future crises.

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