Feminists and Catholics
Perspectives on the Abortion Debate in Bolivia

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Abstract

This thesis is analysing the abortion debate in Bolivia and questions a supposed contradiction of being simultaneously feminist and Catholic regarding opinions on abortion. By analysing texts from three important actors in the abortion debate in Bolivia, the study shows on what arguments and discourses that are used within the debate, as well as considering the interesting role of Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD - Catholics for the Right to Decide), that is a feminist organisation fighting for a complete decriminalisation of abortion in Bolivia, but are also Catholics. The two other actors analysed are Colectivo Rebeldía as a representative of the feminist movement, and the Catholic Church as the greatest abortion opponent. The thesis has a feminist perspective and use a critical discourse analysis in order to provide different perspectives on the abortion debate in Bolivia. The results indicate that the rights discourse is frequently used by all three actors, although promoting different rights. Whereas the Church promotes the foetus’ right to life, the two feminist organisations speak of rights in terms of a woman’s right to decide. The Church is using a conservative traditional language and aims to maintain status quo, whereas the feminist organisations use a variety of discourses with the objective of social transformation. Moreover, the fact that the organisation CDD is both feminist and Catholic, might not seem that contradictory when explained with the help of feminist theology.

Keywords
Abortion, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, the Catholic Church, Colectivo Rebeldía, Bolivia, rights, discourses, life, morality, Pro-Life, Pro-Choice, feminists.
## Contents

1. **Introduction** ................................................................................................................. 5  
   1.1 Background .................................................................................................................. 5  
   1.2 Aim, Research Questions and Disposition ..................................................................... 6  

2. **Theories and Concepts** ................................................................................................. 8  
   2.1 A Feminist Perspective ................................................................................................. 8  
   2.2 Gender, Power and Patriarchy ..................................................................................... 10  
   2.3 An Intersectional Approach ......................................................................................... 12  
   2.4 Scales of Justice .......................................................................................................... 14  
   2.5 Feminist Theology ....................................................................................................... 15  

3. **Prior Research** .............................................................................................................. 17  
   3.1 Abortion in Latin America .......................................................................................... 17  
   3.2 The Bolivian Context ................................................................................................... 22  

4. **Method and Implementation** ......................................................................................... 25  
   4.1 Presentation of the Actors ............................................................................................ 25  
   4.2 Presentation of the Material ......................................................................................... 27  
   4.3 Interviews and Observation ......................................................................................... 29  
   4.4 Discourse Analysis ....................................................................................................... 31  

5. **Analysis and Results** .................................................................................................. 34  
   5.1 Arguments from the Catholic Church .......................................................................... 34  
   5.2 Arguments from Colectivo Rebeldía/Campaña 28 de Septiembre ............................... 39  
   5.3 Arguments from CDD .................................................................................................. 43  
   5.4 Discussion .................................................................................................................... 49  

6. **Conclusions** ................................................................................................................ 54  

7. **Reference List** .............................................................................................................. 56  
   7.1 Books .......................................................................................................................... 56  
   7.2 Chapters from Anthologies ........................................................................................ 57  
   7.3 Articles ........................................................................................................................ 58  
   7.4 Internet Sources: ......................................................................................................... 59  
   7.5 Analysed Material ........................................................................................................ 61  
   7.6 Interviews ..................................................................................................................... 63
### List of Abbreviations

**C-28** *Campaña 28 de Septiembre*

**CC** Catholic Church

**CDA** Critical Discourse Analysis

**CDD** *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir*

**CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

**CEPAL** *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)

**CIA** The Central Intelligence Agency

**CLACAI** *Consortio Latinoamericano Contra el Aborto Inseguro*

**CM** *Coordinadora de la Mujer*

**CR** *Colectivo Rebeldía*

**UNFPA** The United Nations Population Fund
1. Introduction

Most Latin American countries have strict abortion laws and the controversial question of the right to abortion polarises societies. The struggles for the right to legal abortion in Latin American countries is an ongoing process where the feminist movements fight against strong patriarchal traditions and the powerful Catholic Church, with its great influence on moral issues. The Catholic Church is not the only actor opposing abortion, the growing Evangelical Church as well as other ‘Pro-Life’ movements, independent of the churches, are strictly against. However, the Catholic Church is the most powerful opponent and the one that will be used for this study. The impact of the Church has frequently been discussed and mentioned as the greatest obstacle for feminist movements claiming for rights. Nevertheless, not much has been said about how Catholic women themselves organise and make claims for their sexual and reproductive rights.

1.1 Background

In Bolivia, abortion is illegal and punishable in all cases except when the woman has been raped or if her life or health is in danger. Because of this, many Bolivian women are forced to perform unsafe, illegal abortions, putting their health and life in great risk. With a high number of unwanted pregnancies, due to scarce information and access to contraceptives, sexual violence and a widespread ignorance, as many as 185 abortions are carried out every day in the country (IPAS 2011: 7). Because of the strict legislation, most of these are illegal and many times executed under clandestine conditions, making abortion the third cause of maternal mortality in Bolivia. Another problem faced by the country, is a very high number of adolescent pregnancies, that could be identified as an important factor for the transmission of poverty from one generation to another (CEPAL 2016a: 55), something that could be prevented with greater access to safe and legal abortions, together with better sexual education and access to contraception.

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1 Abortion has its own chapter under the head title ‘Crimes against life and corporal integrity’, in the Bolivian Penal Code. See http://www.oas.org/juridico/spanish/gaperc_sp_docs_bol1.pdf Articles 263-269, for exact definitions.
In Bolivia’s new State Constitution, approved in October 2008 and applied from 2009, the fourth article reads: ‘The State respects and guarantees freedom of religion and spiritual beliefs, in accordance with their worldviews. The state is independent of religion’ (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: 3. My translation). However, the secularity of the State, has many times been questioned by civil society organisations and the Church is said to have strong impact on the country’s laws.

The anti-abortionists with the Catholic Church in the forefront, argue for the right to life and claim to be the voice of the innocent, unborn child, using morality and religious values to support their arguments. In contrast, feminist organisations underline the woman’s right to her own body and the importance of prioritising the rights of a real person versus the foetus, as well as arguing for equality and social justice. The debate about abortion in Bolivia, accordingly, include aspects of rights, justice, health and morality, with a diversity of actors focusing on different features. Three actors are chosen for this study of the abortion debate in Bolivia. These are: the Bolivian Catholic Church, as main opponent in the abortion debate; Colectivo Rebeldía (CR), representing the feminist movement that is ‘Pro-Choice’ regarding abortion; and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Bolivia (CDD – Catholics for the Right to Decide), who are Catholics but struggle for abortion rights referring to women’s right to decide. All three actors play significant roles in the abortion debate in Bolivia, offering a variety of perspectives to the discussion.

1.2 Aim, Research Questions and Disposition

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the abortion debate in Bolivia from a theoretical perspective, as well as to investigate the role of CDD Bolivia (from now on referred to only as CDD) as simultaneously feminists and Catholics. Documents from the three different actors will be analysed in order to highlight different perspectives and arguments. Most studies about the abortion debate in Latin America, in general, place feminists in an opposing position towards the Catholic Church, whereas this study of Bolivia, will be more nuanced by offering another perspective. Hence, this thesis has two aims. The first is to analyse the debate on abortion in Bolivia and the second is to examine the particularity of CDD being both Catholics and feminists.
Building on feminist theories in general and social constructionism in particular, this thesis will critically analyse documents and texts with a discourse analysis. The research questions used when analysing the texts, will be:

- How is abortion being debated in Bolivia? What are the main arguments and perspectives and how is language shaping social practices?
- What is the role of CDD in the debate and how can they claim to be Catholics and promote the right to abortion?

After this introductory chapter which has described the problem, outlined the aim of the thesis as well as the questions to be answered, follows the theoretical part and a discussion about prior research, that will set the frame for the succeeding parts. The methodological chapter will make clear how the collection of data was done, present the actors and the material analysed, and describe the method used for analysing the material. The analysing part of the study is aimed to deeper reflect upon arguments and discourses used in the abortion debate in Bolivia as well as explore the possible contradiction of being Catholics and feminists. The last chapter will serve as a summary with concluding thoughts as well as reflections about further studies on the field, since this is a very specific and limited thesis.
2. Theories and Concepts

Since this study is within the frames of social science, it is based on subjective and interpretive, more hermeneutic theories, rather than essentialist or positivist notions of objective truths. Throughout this qualitative study, a feminist perspective will be applied, in order to highlight gender inequalities and to keep a critical view on the patriarchal Catholic Church regarding their views on abortion. Gender, power and patriarchy are three recurrent concepts that will be discussed in relation to feminist theories and are used in the analysing part. To consider how gender intersects with ethnicity and class, is of great importance in Bolivia where poor, indigenous women are the most marginalised and lack access to safe abortions, why intersectionality will be reflected upon. Nancy Fraser’s (2008) ideas on ‘Scales of Justice’ will be used to consider problems of framing within social justice and the new transnational spaces, both for women’s struggles, but also for conservative powers. Finally, a description of feminist theology will serve as a ground for the coming analysis. The method used for the analysis, critical discourse analysis, is also a theory. However, discourse analysis will have its own section in the methodological part, why it is left out here, although it has strong connections to many of the following concepts and theories. The chapter after this one, Prior Research, with a contextualisation of Bolivia, will also serve as part of the framework in which the analysis will be carried out.

2.1 A Feminist Perspective

Feminism cannot be considered one single approach. It consists of a whole set of different ideas and perspectives and exists within different disciplines, but what unites different types of feminisms is that they counter the notion of the ‘true nature’ of sex, sexuality and gender as well as criticise ‘facts’ about the inferiority of women (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 12; Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin & Lydenberg 1999: 3). For this study, a feminist perspective will be applied when analysing the different texts further on, but it will also be present constantly throughout the study. The point of departure, will be in some of the common features that different types of feminisms share and with a focus on sexuality and reproduction, that is the central theme of this study. Feminist researchers, in one way or another, aim to question
existing ‘truths’ and explore relations between knowledge and power (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 16) and central concepts include: ‘gender’, ‘power’ and ‘patriarchy’, why these will be further explored in a separate section below. The thesis follows a constructionist line of reasoning and is, as pointed out by Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin and Lydenberg (1999: 4) like many other contemporary feminist schools influenced by Foucault and Derrida who both highlight the body as a site of disciplinary control. However, as discussed by Deveaux (1999: 239) it is important to include the control of women’s bodies and choices in a broader discussion of women’s social, economic and political subordination. In summary; ‘Feminist research is politically for women; feminist knowledge has some grounding in women’s experiences; and in how it feels to live in unjust gendered relationships’ (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 16, italics in original).

A feminist perspective in the region of Latin America, should include notions of machismo, marianismo, motherhood and religion. Motherhood is often highly acknowledged and respected in Latin America, something that has proven to be both positive and negative in feminist struggles in the region.

The concept of marianismo, originating from the Roman Catholic Church’s esteeming of Virgin Mary, means a type of idealising of femininity and includes beliefs of women’s spiritual and moral superiority to men and their important role within the family. Marianismo can therefore be seen as a way of legitimising women’s subordinate roles in both society and within the home, but an alternative way of thinking about marianismo, can instead highlight the power that comes with motherhood and see it as a basis for political participation, identity and resistance. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina is a great example of women’s symbolic power as unselfish mothers and alluding to motherhood can be a good (or the only) way to enter a women’s struggle, where future missions might be to challenge traditional constructions of femininity and motherhood (Chant 2003a: 9-12).

Although highly respected among most Latin American feminists, these types of movements, who made maternity (connected to femininity) play a central role, could be criticised for reproducing traditional gender roles (Maier 2010a: 32). Furthermore, the early second-wave feminists in Latin America, claiming for the right to their bodies, created, in Maier’s (2010a: 30) words, ‘a symbolic earthquake for mainstream Catholic culture’, where a good woman is supposed to be obedient and decent. The legacy of the Catholic Church is still very present in Latin America and the Church’s idealisation of women as mothers as well as connecting
sexual intercourse only to marriage and reproduction, makes it hard for women to live up to (Chant & Craske 2003: 135).

*Machismo*, a term very much connected to the region of Latin America, can be endlessly discussed and explored, where it is coming from and why, and the ‘correct’ use for it. That is not the main focus of this study, therefore no deeper analysis of the concept will be undertaken. However, *machismo* in the meaning of an ‘exaggerated masculinity’, male domination and control, is widespread in Latin America (Chant 2003a: 14-16) and the macho culture affects women’s lives and their rights, why it needs to be taken up for this study. Even though the term has often been used in relation to men’s competition between each other, the exclusion of men who are not men enough (homosexual men for instance) and women’s expectations and even desires of men to act in a certain way, it clearly shows on the perceptions of different gender roles and a culture that sometimes legitimises men’s control and abuse of women (ibid.).

Throughout the study, where the main issue is the right to legal abortion, a feminist perspective will help to shed light on a social reality where gendered power relations is one of the aspects of women’s lives (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 4). Important to note though, is that conflicts between different feminisms have regularly existed and Western feminists have been criticised for their simplistic image of a Third World woman (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin & Lydenberg 1999: 5). Accordingly, it is of great importance, specifically in studying a country like Bolivia, to highlight how various categories of difference intersect and result in multiple layers of oppression. The intersectional approach will therefore complement the more general feminist perspective and a further explanation of this, follows straight after a clarification of three key concepts in this thesis.

### 2.2 Gender, Power and Patriarchy

The complex and much debated term gender was initiated as a concept to separate the biological sex from the culturally constructed gender, but later it has been argued that also sex is a social construct (Butler 1999: 9-10). Lazar (2005: 7) means that gender can be ‘understood as an ideological structure that divides people into two classes, men and women, based on a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, respectively’ and that feminist scholars have widely criticised the ‘easy mapping’ of the physiological sex on to
social gender. Gender can include studying sexuality and reproduction, the social constitution of male and female, as well as ideas and discourses connected to masculinity and femininity (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 5). This study will follow on these socially and culturally constitutions of male/masculinity and female/femininity, expectations and ideas regarding the body, sexuality and reproduction.

Chant and Craske (2003: 128) reflect upon the interrelations of gender and sexuality in Latin American societies and cite Nye (1999) in explaining the importance of Gender Studies ‘to explain social relationships – including norms governing sex and reproduction – as cultural products amenable to change’. With a constructionist approach to sexuality, that is stepping away from essentialist norms, sexuality can be seen as determined by institutions, customs and social practices. This very much relates to the body’s connection to sex and gender and Foucault’s work on how “sex” is not an origin, but an outcome of specific discursive practices’ (ibid: 129). To return to Latin America, it can be argued for two very separated stereotypes regarding images and representations of sexuality. The first is one of sexual repression, coming back to the already mentioned Catholic Church’s point of view, which connects sexuality with guilt and sin. The other is one of exoticism and sensuality, very much connected to the expressive Latin American carnivals (ibid: 131). Another observation from Chant and Craske, is the complete opposites regarding constructions of male/female sexuality in Latin America, where men’s ‘need’ for sex can give them problems in controlling themselves, whereas women with their moral superiority, can withstand and use sex only as a means for reproduction (ibid: 141-142). Language has a great importance in reinforcing and reflecting on the powerful gender messages encoded in sexuality (ibid: 143) one of the reasons why this study will use a discourse analysis.

Gender has, in Latin America as well as in other parts of the world, replaced the category of women when analysing unequal power relations. Both to highlight the diversity among women and relate gender (as a social construct) to other social categories, such as race, class and age. Also, the relational and dynamic nature of the concept in itself, allows for negotiations and discussions among men and women (Chant 2003a: 8). Analysing gender inequalities and male dominance through a feminist perspective always includes some theories of power relations. As with feminism in general, there is no single approach to the concept of power, but within all different types of feminisms, there is an aim to analyse the exercise and effects of power, as well as women’s experiences of power relations. Feminists

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2 For a more thorough background to Latin American sexuality and historic consideration see Chant and Craske (2003: 131-133).
intend to explore the relation between power and knowledge and question ‘who has the power to know what, and how power is implicated in the process of producing knowledge’ (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 13).

Kandiyoti (1999) writes about the problematics of patriarchy as a concept. From radical feminists’ notions of male dominance to a more class oriented approach and connections between patriarchy and capitalism and back to women’s subordination in general. Even though her text is about Islam and Patriarchy, the discussions are useful for this study in that it speaks of ‘systems of domination and their gendered impacts’ (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin & Lydenberg 1999: 217). Kandiyoti (1999: 223) states that a general and simplistic view on patriarchy, keeps us from revealing ‘the intimate inner workings of different gender arrangements’ and that a suggestion is to identify different systems of male dominance by analysing women’s strategies in countering them, which is part of what will be done in this thesis. Early second-wave Latin American feminists, started using the term patriarchy as a theoretical instrument to understand different forms of gender oppression and exclusion. This, after realising that there was a ‘collective masculine imaginary’ of their region, where female bodies had become symbols for both sexuality connected to erotica, and reproduction connected to maternity (Maier 2010a: 28). Images of women, are not often by or for women’s interests, but are instead, in the words of Rapp (1999: 298) ‘deeply embedded in patriarchal, cultural discourses’.

2.3 An Intersectional Approach

As described briefly earlier, feminisms have been criticised for not considering issues of other social categories than that of gender, as for instance race and class. Focusing narrowly on gender and class, means that ethnic and racial differences between women are overlooked (May 2011: 20). In Lazar’s (2005: 10) words;

‘Even though women are subordinated to men structurally in the patriarchal gender order, the overlap of the gender structure with other relations of power based on race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, culture and geography means that gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere.’

Bolivia is a country with huge inequalities and even though the Pro-Choice movements in the abortion debate, want safe and legal abortions for everyone, the most alarming problems with
unsafe abortions leading to deaths and severe complications, affect poor, rural, indigenous women in greater occurrence, than the wealthier women. In the whole region of Latin America in general, poverty is significantly greater amongst the indigenous and/or afro population and by adding gender to the analysis of inequalities in the region, it can be found that at one extreme end of the scale of wealth, are indigenous/afro descendant women and at the other extreme, white men (CEPAL 2016a: 34). Hence, this study is considering intersectionality, although it is not the main theoretical framework when analysing the texts.

The term intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and she has explained it in terms of crossroads and traffic, where a woman from a minority group must cross streets of both racism and patriarchy, thus dealing with multiple forms of oppression at the same time (Yuval-Davis 2006: 196). This has its origin in black feminist movements during the 1980s with the will to deconstruct social categories and analyse the intersectionality of different social divisions, often focused on race, class and gender (ibid: 193). Julia Roth means that the perspective of intersectionality ‘examine how various axes of stratification mutually construct one another and how inequalities are articulated through and connected with differences’ (2013: 2).

By emphasising an intersectional perspective and considering other social categories than gender, such as ethnicity and class, a deeper understanding of how they work together to create multiple forms of oppression at the same time is possible (Yuval-Davis 2006: 196). The point of intersectional analysis is, according to Yuval-Davis (2006: 205) to see that the different social divisions are constructed by each other and at the same time enmeshed, and to understand how they relate to political constructions of identities.

If there was not as much focus earlier on the diversity among women as it is today, the reason may have been both a lack of information, but also a sense of solidarity between women with a shared identity to be able to fight patriarchy united (Chant 2003a: 8). Today, with more knowledge and information, it is being understood that ignoring the differences is what creates fragmentation within feminist struggles. To unite feminists, one suggestion can be an intersectional approach that sees gender, class and race as ‘constitutive elements of a system of domination’ (Vargas 2010: 323).


2.4 Scales of Justice

Fraser’s (2008) theoretical approach builds on notions that include both the balance of conflicting claims such as those regarding redistribution or recognition, but also geography and spatial relations. Claims for justice today, are framed in different geographical scales due to globalisation and its following interconnectedness (ibid: 1-2). Earlier, claims for redistribution was based on economic inequalities within territorial states, and recognition claims concerned internal status hierarchies. This is what Fraser calls the Keynesian-Westphalian frame, where the idea of the national state and its citizens is central. However, globalisation is changing the way we argue about justice (ibid: 12). With globalisation, the world is more interconnected and decisions in one place can affect people in another place. The power of the transnational corporations, transnational organisations and transnational public opinion, is growing (ibid: 13). In her earlier work, Fraser claimed that theories of justice must be two-dimensional. If the general meaning of justice is parity of participation, injustice means a denial of participation due to economic or cultural structures; maldistribution and misrecognition. However, in the latest volume she adds a third dimension which is political, concerning representation. This third dimension specifies the reach of the other two in deciding who counts as a member, meaning who is entitled to just distribution and recognition, but also how these battles should be fought (ibid: 16-17). If the, what Fraser calls, ordinary political misrepresentation includes issues of gender quotas and electoral systems, the second level of misrepresentation can be described as ‘misframing’. The frame-setting and decisions about who counts as a member can have serious consequences and lead to great injustice (ibid: 19). Fraser speaks of competing views of the ‘what’ of justice (redistribution, recognition or representation) but also adding the ‘who’ of justice; ‘territorialized citizenries or global humanity?’ (2008: 5). Since the Keynesian-Westphalian frame is unjust and excluding in a globalising world, she suggests a transformative approach that seeks to add post-Westphalian values, promoting the all-affected principle as a better framework. Subjects of justice are, according to this principle, anyone affected by certain structures or institutions, regardless of nations or territories. Environmentalists, indigenous peoples and feminists alike, now claim their rights according to this all-affected principle (ibid: 24-25).

Fraser (2008: 112) calls for a reframing of feminism as a transnational politics of representation. Knowing now, how vulnerable women are to transnational forces, she states that they cannot challenge gender injustice if they remain within the territorial state. Important
to remember, is though that these new opportunities within the transnational spaces, also opens for conservative, Pro-Life movements and religious fundamentalisms. The timing is crucial when it comes to feminist struggles. In the issue of abortion, Fraser means that many people have been persuaded that the real harm to family life lies in extended gay- and abortion rights, in an era where the ‘welfare society’ has been changed to ‘the insecurity society’. While Evangelical (and Catholic) discourses dealing with insecurity have attracted many, feminism has in some ways failed to reach out to more people and give the correct responses (ibid: 106-111). However, new hope is coming with the reframing of feminism beyond the territorial state, under the slogan ‘women’s rights are human rights’ (ibid: 113).

2.5 Feminist Theology

This chapter ends with describing feminist theology in Latin America. This will prove an important tool in analysing especially the arguments from CDD and this thesis’ second aim.

Feminist theology, even though with roots in liberal Christianity from the West, has its own history in the region of Latin America. In the same way as western feminisms have been criticised for excluding third world women, feminist theologians from the south have distanced themselves for a development of a feminist theology fit in their own contexts (Ruether 2000; 2012). Latin American feminist theology has developed alongside the liberation theologies of the 1960s, that were primarily concerned with poverty and violence. However, pointed out by Ruether (2000), since there was a clear majority of male theologians, groups of women started questioning the complete disregard of gender and sexism. Put in other words: ‘Feminist Theology in Latin America developed as Christian women, whose critical consciousness had been awakened by Liberation Theology, began to ask gender questions’ (Ruether 2012: 186). Further, Ruether (2000; 2012) points out how the Latin American secular feminist movement grew stronger during the 1970s, but with a militant approach and filled with hostility towards the Catholic Church. The secular feminist movement started to put more emphasis on women’s reproductive rights during this decade, which was a remarkable taboo for the Catholic Church, and the Christian women within liberation theology were in this way steered away from feminism (ibid.).

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Although Fraser is using USA as an example here and the politics of former President Bush, this can be applicable to the rest of the world.
Considering what feminist theology is and has been in Latin America, the Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara (2008: 326) means that it is building on a disappointment of some ethical and theological ideas defended by the Church and ‘many groups of women looked for “a way of expressing their faith” outside the traditional boundaries of the Church’. Feminist theology is a protest against the oppression faced by women in the Bible, in theology and in the churches, according to Gebara (in Ruether (2000: 22) and accordingly, a critique towards the powerful patriarchal Church and ‘the traditional patriarchal religious power considered to be a divine right’ (Gebara 2008: 325). Within feminist theology and their criticism towards the patriarchal attitudes and ideas of the Church, there are obviously, many variations. Even if it seemed impossible in the 1970s, during the following decades, some theologians started to question the hierarchy of the Catholic Church regarding sexual ethics and women’s reproductive rights (ibid: 326).

Feminist theologians’ relationship to the Church is a complicated and unbalanced one. According to Gebara (2008:328): ‘people are subject to the power of the Church through their need for the Church as a vehicle of their faith’. Also pointed out, is the marginalisation of feminist theologians who are not being listened to by the Church authorities. Since the Church leaders seek to preserve the same patriarchal political theology, feminist theologians instead align with other groups in their dream of a new social order and the aspiration for more dignity for women (ibid: 330).
3. Prior Research

The following section will outline some of the previous research on abortion in Latin America. Not many scientific studies can be found regarding the question of abortion specifically in Bolivia, why this part takes up more generalised ideas about the region, however very specific on the abortion question. This will give an idea about what has been written before on the topic. Nevertheless, the chapter ends with an outlining of the Bolivian context regarding the situation for women in relation to their sexual and reproductive rights.

3.1 Abortion in Latin America

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region with great diversity, but some common features are shared, that have affected women’s lives in different ways, why this section, building on general ideas about the question of abortion in Latin America, can still be suited as a background to the key issue in this study. A history of colonisation, inequitable land distribution and subordination towards the colonising countries have contributed to the region’s position as having the most unequal income distribution in the world (Lebon 2010: 4). This has led to the creation of a small, but growing middle class, a majority of low-income poor and a very small but very wealthy and politically powerful elite (ibid.) that do not prioritise the needs of the (poor) women (see Kulczycki 2011: 206).

The abortion question is the most contested one of all gender issues, hence the one in Latin America with most opponents, including the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Church means that abortion is murder of an innocent life and the majority of Latin Americans are Catholics, public opinion on the polarised question is accordingly mostly against. The bishops are in general powerful on moral issues in Latin America which makes their influence on public policy, especially in gender issues, very large (Htun 2003: 33-35). Chant (2003b: 79) reflects on the Church’s influence on law in Latin American countries and notes their strong influence on the grassroot level which adds to the general opposition. Most people regard abortion as assassination or at least a ‘grave moral transgression’(ibid.) and studies from Mexico tell that the general idea is that abortion is not acceptable if it is done only because of
a woman’s personal plans (ibid.). Even if the Church has started to support women’s rights more within the family and in society, they have not changed their mind regarding issues of divorce and abortion and they still see abortion as a murder of an innocent human life (Htun 2003: 33). As stated in a report by the Latin American Consortium against Insecure Abortion (CLACAI 2015: 7-8, my translation): ‘The influence of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the perception of abortion also determines the social stigma of a procedure that in other latitudes is considered as another reproductive option’.

The most notable opponent to family planning and abortion in the region, is the Roman Catholic Church and their influence on both laws and general opinion, is large (Chant 2003b: 79). Maier (2010b: 349) points to the religious fundamentalisms and their human rights discourses that puts the embryo’s right to life above that of the woman’s, as the clearest backlash to women’s reproductive rights. Furthermore, the powerful Vatican and their strict opposition to the legalisation of abortion, have a strong voice in the public debates against reproductive rights (ibid.). Another perspective is to view this ‘foetal rights discourse’ as a control of reproduction and the lives of pregnant women (Deveaux 1999: 237). In a CEPAL report (2016b) that is promoting women’s autonomy for a sustainable development, it is clearly stated that physical autonomy is crucial. That is, to decide freely over your reproductive and sexual life and the right to health.

Some important international happenings, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, from 1979), the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 and the Fourth World Women’s Conference in Beijing 1995, have generated in more pressure from the international arena in promoting women’s rights. In a time where security was no longer the only prioritised issue, with the end of the Cold War, more focus was directed towards women’s rights as human rights.

Something that has been used by Latin American women’s rights activists criticising national laws (Reuterswärd et al. 2011: 807; Lebon 2010: 10). However, pointed out by Morgan and Roberts (2012: 245), this rights-based approach to reproductive health in international discourse since the Cairo Conference, ‘created an opening for competition between the ‘right-to-life’ of the unborn and the ‘reproductive rights’ of women’.

Although there have been many reforms in favour of women’s rights and gender equality (regarding marriage, divorce, domestic violence, political and labour participation) in Latin American countries, not as much has happened regarding abortion (Reuterswärd et al. 2011: 808). Morgan and Roberts point out that the complete banning of abortion in countries such as
Nicaragua (2006) and El Salvador (1998) ‘have been led in the name of the rights of the unborn, where the foetus is cast as a rights-bearing citizen’ (2012: 242). Also, Kulczycki (2011) mentions the efforts done by feminist groups and abortion activists, but states that due to religion and custom, the question of abortion has not been one to speak about. The Catholic Church has fought hard to keep abortion illegal in Latin America and Kulczycki means that the issue is so important for the Church since their teachings of traditional family structures have been challenged by, for instance, divorce laws (2011: 214). Maier (2010a: 39) holds that a resuming of the earlier feminist methodologies of popular education and small group consciousness raising to examine women’s shared knowledge, could be useful so as to build bridges between civil society and feminist politicians. This would raise women’s voices and help defend gender policies in current times with the ‘aggressively antifeminist posture of religious fundamentalisms’ (ibid.).

Whereas ‘feminists and liberals see abortion as a question of liberty, privacy and public health; social conservatives maintain that prohibitions on abortion are necessary to protect human life, defend human rights, and uphold moral and family values’ (Htun 2003: 142). The issue of rights come up again. Instead of liberal thoughts of individual rights and a woman’s right to decide over her own body, anti-abortionists frame the question in terms of human rights, meaning the rights of an innocent life (ibid: 152). Htun means that these strategies can have stronger meaning in societies with fresh memories of authoritarian and totalitarian rule (ibid.).

Friedman (2009) means that despite the growing reproductive rights movement across Latin America, the left-wing parties have been reluctant to support the feminist demand for reproductive rights, due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church on public opinion against abortion. Htun (2003: 143) states that many parties in Latin America deliberately avoid the abortion issue in fear of the Church and anti-abortion movements. However, things have started to happen, the public debate is on, and Bergallo and Ramón-Michel (2016) analyse constitutional reforms that has led to ‘a liberalising shift’ in the question of abortion (more on these reforms in the following part about Bolivia).

The opposing abortion law reforms of 2006 in Nicaragua and Colombia are being analysed by Reuterswärd et al. (2011). In Nicaragua, the Church and the State formed a strong alliance to ban abortion. The authors mean that due to the elections, the political parties needed the support from the Church who has traditionally been very strong in the country, with considerable resources and influence over the media that reached out to the public
In Colombia, before the presidential elections of 2006, the abortion issue had become a ‘hot topic of debate’ (ibid: 815) and the campaign in favour of liberalisation of the law successfully framed abortion as a public health and human rights issue, moving away from religious or moral discourses. The new discourses on abortion together with favourable media attention, contributed to the majority of the population’s opinion as pro in the liberalisation of abortion law, and the politicians followed. The liberalisation was finally possible thanks to the Constitutional Court’s emphasis on international human rights arguments as well as their independence towards the Church (Reuterswärd et al. 2011).

Morgan and Roberts (2012: 248) tribute the Colombian success in framing unsafe abortion as a health problem, making partial legalisation possible. Htun (2003: 39-43) argues that feminism has revolutionised the way we think about abortion as women’s choice and opportunity, but in the global South (including Latin America) it has been more successful and less polarising to frame it as a question of health. Kulczycki sees the benefits of a growing awareness and public debate on abortion, where public health arguments are being emphasised and abortion becomes ‘an issue of maternal mortality, not just maternal morality’ (2011: 215).

As much as transnational social movements and new political opportunities in transnational spaces, as described with the words of Fraser (2008) earlier, conservative issue networks have also emerged (Htun 2003: 16). Instead of being influenced by global norms of gender equality, global social networks of anti-abortion groups came together during the UN conferences and inspired Latin American anti-abortion activists (ibid.). When civil society organisations are divided according to class, race or ethnicity, they do not easily succeed in uniting to fight for reform. The abortion question also becomes one of class, when rich women have the availability to safe abortions in private clinics, even though it is illegal, which gives them no incentives to fight against the Catholic Church in the polarised question of abortion in Latin America (Morgan & Roberts 2014; Htun 2003).

Important to note though, is that even if abortion is legally restricted in most Latin American countries, it is being practiced, in high numbers. Often in unsafe environments, putting women at great risk, but also with high costs economically, both for the women, their families and to health-care systems and societies (Kulczycki 2011: 199). The Catholic Church and their resistance to abortion has influenced populations of Latin American countries very much. Kulczycki notes that the few studies that can be found regarding abortion opinion in
Latin America, generally shows on a support to abortion in a few circumstances, such as rape. However, most respondents opposed abortion for social or economic reasons (2011: 200). The Church, in the words of Gutiérrez (2010: 114), is a masculine and patriarchal institution that seeks to limit women’s autonomy. Women are connected with maternity and hence become an instrument of ‘God’s will and their role is to preserve moral values, family and health’ (ibid.). The current situation in Latin America and the Caribbean is one where a very high amount of unauthorised, unsafe abortions are being practiced, the region with the highest rates in the world, with deaths and severe complications for the women as a result (Chant 2003b: 79). The illegality and penalisation surrounding the practice of abortion hence, expose women to social, juridical, medical and psychological risks (CLACAI 2015: 20).

Abortion rates are high in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, as noted by Kulczycki (2011). Explanations to the high number of abortions could include low rates of modern contraceptive use, the number is as low as 34% in Bolivia (ibid: 202), which leads to as many as 58% of the pregnancies being unintended in the region (ibid.). With large problems of violence against women in the region (sexual violence often lead to unwanted pregnancies) and high gender inequality in general, there is a need for cultural changes and an adjustment of traditional gender roles and family laws, according to Kulczycki (2011: 202-206). Violent structures, both within the family and on the part of government agencies ‘constitute enormous barriers to the construction of a female subject with rights’ (Chant 2003b: 83). Todd-Peters (2014), even though discussing the view on abortion in the United States, might have some arguments that can be applied to the Latin American context as well. She points out paternalistic ideas about women being less rational than men and therefore need protection from themselves, but how this is only a way of controlling women who are not seen as full moral agents; ‘Humane social policy on abortion must reflect respect for women and recognition of their capacity to make essential decisions about their bodies, their lives, and their futures’ (ibid: 138). Further, problems with access to family planning services, especially for the marginalised and poor, are great in a country like Bolivia, which may lead to a higher proportion of maternal deaths due to unsafe abortions, than in other countries of the region, where unsafe practices of abortion are less common (Kulczycki 2011: 204-206).

Vargas (2010: 323-324) writes about the body as a political site full of stigmas and searching for rights and even though the body is always present, it has not been fully recognised in the political arena. To deny people’s sexual and reproductive rights is a way of disciplining the body and feminist activists struggle for the right to choose and ‘the decriminalisation of
abortion is emblematic in this search for autonomy and freedom’ (ibid: 324). Similarly, Gutiérrez (2010: 128) speaks of the female body as a ‘space of intersection of multiple power mechanisms’ and that women’s bodies must be characterised by autonomous decisions taken by the women themselves.

3.2 The Bolivian Context

The review of prior research so far gives a thorough background to the topic of abortion in Latin America. However, to contextualise further and start focusing on this study’s narrower orientation, the following part will outline some important data regarding the abortion question and women’s situation in Bolivia.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2017) state that ‘every individual has the right to make their own choices about their sexual and reproductive health, including family planning’. Article 66 from Bolivia’s State Constitution, is said to guarantee women and men’s exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: 16). Despite this, women’s lives and bodies are being controlled and the right to decide if or when to have children, is taken away through poor access to contraception and education, and of course, the criminalisation of abortion.

Bolivia’s new Constitution from 2009 has a stronger focus on human rights in general (economic, social and cultural) and in ‘underprivileged groups’ (women, children, elderly etc.) in particular (Schilling-Vacaflor 2011: 10). The Coordinadora de la mujer (CM, women’s coordinator, my translation) in Bolivia, which is a network of 21 different NGOs that work together to promote women’s rights in different ways⁴ recognises this more favourable situation, where women have stronger possibilities in changing their lives and where structural transformations are leading to better equality in many ways, thanks to different women’s movements struggles over the years. However, there is a long way to go to completely deconstruct patriarchal structures that generate women’s exclusion and discrimination (CM 2014: 7).

With the new Constitution came more political rights for women together with a higher political participation thanks to the normative of gender parity, but according to the

⁴ For more information on their work, visit: [http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/web/index.php/qsomos/mostrar/id/1](http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/web/index.php/qsomos/mostrar/id/1)
Coordinadora, there is a great contradiction ‘between a set of rights that has formal recognition and the impossibility of its full exercise’ (CM 2015: 17-18, my translation). Their study speaks of a formal equality that does not fit with reality, where inequality is widespread both within the family, in politics and within justice, but also in culture, working conditions and all social relations, something that proves on this contradiction between law and culture; ‘While laws influence the deconstruction of culturally rooted normative structures, cultures are deeply resistant to their deconstruction and deny the effective extension of women’s rights’ (CM 2015: 24, my translation). Another manifestation of the patriarchal order in Bolivia, according to the Coordinadora, is the widespread violence against women, recognised also from last section about the whole region. Within this patriarchal logic, women’s fundamental rights to take control over their own bodies, their sexualities and their reproduction, are being denied (CM 2014: 101).

To shift focus now to the specific issue of abortion in Bolivia, it can be established that resistance is strong. In a national poll issued by the Coordinadora, it was found that the majority of the women inquired where against abortion in all circumstances, except for when the woman’s life is at risk (CM 2014: 91). With one of the highest rates on maternal mortality in Latin America, and with clandestine abortions being the third most common cause of maternal death, the State of Bolivia is facing a severe public health problem, according to the survey study (ibid.). Although a problem throughout the whole region, numbers show on huge differences; while the risk of dying from a pregnancy in, for instance Uruguay is 1 in 873, in Bolivia the same number is 1 in 50 (Chant 2003b: 80, this has changed since it is an old reference, but still showing on high regional differences). With numbers indicating 185 abortions (most of them unsafe) per day in the country (CM 2014: 91), it may seem perplex with such high numbers being against it. Chant (2003b: 79) means that the perception of abortion varies and many people consider ‘traditional’ (herbs or other traditional medicines) methods of abortion (common in Bolivia) less objectionable, than the ‘modern’ surgical intervention. However, through a feminist perspective, as expressed by the Coordinadora, the criminalisation of abortion takes away women’s autonomy towards their own bodies, who are instead controlled by the State, religion, culture, laws etc. and at the same time as controlling, it is disciplining women’s bodies and putting them at great risk with clandestine abortions (CM 2014: 91). Concluding their section on abortion, the Coordinadora notes that opinions are highly diversified, something that could indicate a process of change regarding attitudes towards the issue (CM 2014: 100).
Speaking of change, the Bergallo and Ramón-Michel (2016) article mentioned in previous section, takes up constitutional developments regarding abortion law in Latin America and highlight the roles of the Criminal Courts and their ways of problematising the protection of unborn life, in the countries examined. In their example about Bolivia, they reflect upon the judges of the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal of Bolivia, who ‘recognised an imperfect right to life of the unborn’ (ibid: 229). This was in conjunction with the Sentencia 206/2014, the resolution that made abortion in the case of a rape legal with the only requirement of presenting a denunciation. By discussing both different concepts of life and death within indigenous tradition, as well as focusing on international human rights law, the judges contradicted the recognition of an absolute right to life from conception, as well as determining that ‘the duty to protect human life is gradual and that the level of protection rises as resemblance to a born human being increases’ (ibid.). With reference to the earlier mentioned new Bolivian Constitution of 2009, where gender equality was now stated as a constitutional value, the judges of the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal of Bolivia, showed their commitment to gender equality and social justice (ibid: 230).

Chant (2003b: 80) states that even though the Catholic Church in Bolivia have had strong influence on public policy regarding family planning, the rising concern of women’s health and the high numbers of maternal mortality the last couple of decades, has led to State initiatives concerning information, family planning and reproductive health. Because of their strong emphasis on women in their population policy, Chant (2003b: 81) notes that Bolivia is currently very close to the recommendations from the Cairo Conference (See Chant 2003b: 77). However, as in the rest of the Latin American region, the question is if the language of ‘rights’ and ‘gender equality’ have really translated into practice (ibid: 83).

The abortion debate in Bolivia is currently louder than perhaps ever before. The National Pact for the Decriminalisation of Abortion5 has recently put forward a proposal for law reform, and although not a complete legalisation, there are now discussions in the Legislative Assembly of Bolivia regarding a proposal that extends abortion rights in some circumstances. Whereas this might be a step in the right direction and will lead to more women being able to have legal and safe abortions, Tania Nava (director of CDD) and many others from the pact mean that the partial legalisation only reinforces the illegality (CDD 2017c).

5 Pacto Nacional por la Despenalización del Aborto, see http://catolicasbolivia.org/noticias/pronunciamiento/ for more information.
4. Method and Implementation

Bolivia is a country with strict abortion laws, strong Catholic influences and a diversified social movement, which makes it an interesting choice of country for this study. It is also the country I had the opportunity to go to, for a semester of internship with the organisation CDD. Observation work and interviews with CDD staff is part of the data collected for the study. However, the main objects for analysis will be documents from the three different actors; Colectivo Rebeldía, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir and the Catholic Church, in order to present a theoretical discussion about the abortion debate in Bolivia as well as the interesting role of CDD. A qualitative textual analysis will therefore be applied to the documents, and the method for that will be critical discourse analysis. After a description and motivation of the actors chosen as well as a presentation of the material that has been analysed, follows an explanation on the interviews and observation work. Finally, the critical discourse analysis will be systematically accounted for, before the analysing chapter of this thesis starts.

4.1 Presentation of the Actors

The Catholic Church in Bolivia is strong. Even though more than half of the population is of indigenous origin with their own traditions and customs, the majority of the population (76.8%) consider themselves Catholics (CIA 2017). It is problematic to describe the Catholic Church as one actor (as compared to the organisations CR and CDD) in the debate regarding abortion. However, this study seeks to analyse arguments and claims from the Church, that has the strongest and clearest position against abortion in the country. The Bolivian Catholic Church builds a lot on the traditional discourses from the Vatican and puts great importance to what is said by Pope Francisco, aiming for a universal Catholic Church.

Colectivo Rebeldía is a feminist NGO, situated in the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, but working both locally and nationally for women’s rights and social justice. They are striving for women’s complete autonomy; social, political, economic and of course, physical, which means they support the decriminalisation of abortion (CR 2012a). The organisation was established in 1995 as a group of ‘militant feminist women’ in the search for dignity and for
women’s lives to be lived fully (CR 2012b). The organisation is fighting for women’s rights in general and put most of their efforts regarding the specific abortion issue in the *Campaña 28 de Septiembre* (C-28), which also includes other organisations and activists, but is administered by CR in Bolivia. Something that will be noted in the material analysed for this study, as some of it comes from the campaign, but is investigated by activists from CR. However, it would be suitable with some short description of the campaign as well, since they constitute an important part of the analysing material. *Campaña 28 de Septiembre* sees legal and safe abortion as a reproductive right, part of the human rights, that should be within the frames of a secular state (C-28 2015a) The campaign is a regional initiative and dates back to 1990, but the Bolivian branch started in 1996 (C-28 2015b).

CDD Bolivia is part of a Latin American network, striving for women’s sexual and reproductive rights with a focus on the decriminalisation of abortion and women’s right to decide over their own bodies (CDD 2017a). The Latin American Network of CDD was founded in Uruguay in 1994, inspired by the United States based Catholics for a Free Choice, and is the only network in Latin America with a Catholic feminist perspective (Navarro & Mejía 2010: 307-308). The members are pronounced Catholics, but are committed to social justice and to change cultural and religious patterns that oppress women, since the bishops’ claims and the practice of ‘normal’ Catholics differ a lot (ibid.). The network has been successful in offering an alternative to the conservative and sexist discourse of Church leaders, showing on a greater variety among Catholics, speaking with a feminist Catholic voice (Navarro & Mejía 2010: 312). CDD Mexico played an important role when decriminalisation was accomplished in Mexico City in 2007 (ibid: 314).

In Bolivia, CDD just celebrated 20 years and although not a large organisation (the office in La Paz employs a handful of activists), they are one of the most eminent within feminist movements in Bolivia and are very active in the debate on abortion. The organisation is working on a local, national and regional level with policy makers and other local organisations and calls for the total decriminalisation of abortion in Bolivia, building on values such as gender equality, respect, no discrimination, dignity, secularity and liberty. (CDD 2017b). Obviously, a variety of other feminist organisations exist in the country,
however not many have such direct discourses on abortion as CDD and CR, due to financial issues and security, why these are the ones chosen.

4.2 Presentation of the Material

For this study, documents from the three actors recently described, will be analysed for a deeper understanding of their arguments and standpoints in the abortion debate in Bolivia. A lot of focus will be on the role of CDD as an actor who is on both sides at the same time, being simultaneously Catholic and Pro-Choice in the abortion debate. The analysis starts with a deeper look into the Bolivian Catholic Church and their ideas about the right to life and different expressions about abortion, by analysing six different text documents. I will refer to the documents as CC1-CC6 to easier keep them separated and the analysed material has its own section in the reference list. Through the Bolivian Catholic Church’s webpage two documents were found that clearly treat the issue of abortion. The first one (CC1 2014) is a report produced after the Bishop’s Conference of Bolivia in 2014 and it includes focus areas and guidelines for anyone working within the Church community. Although, only a few pages cover ideas on family and how to promote life, the document has served to give a thorough background on Catholic ideas.

Second, (CC2 2012) is another document from the webpage named ‘Called to be Promoters of Life’ (my translation). This document was published during Easter in 2012 as a reminder of ‘God’s power to give life’ and it also treats preoccupations regarding sexual and reproductive rights. CC3 (2017) and CC4 (2017) are both from March this year and reject the new proposals for law reform regarding partial abortion presented that same month. One is from the association called Bolivian Conference of the Religious (CC3 2017) and the other declaration comes from the Bolivian Catholic University San Pablo (CC4 2017). Both these declarations clearly show on the Catholic community’s rejection to abortion. The last two documents are newspaper articles from the online official journal of the Bolivian Catholic Church, Iglesia Viva. ‘Abortion for Rape’ (CC5 2017) tells the story of a 13-year-old girl who was raped by her own uncle and got pregnant. The Church clearly rejects the terrible

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6 It is problematic to find sponsors that support women’s reproductive rights, in particular after the reinstatement by President Trump of ‘The Global Gag Rule’, that eliminates US funding to any organisation working with or spreading information about abortion.

7 www.iglesia.org.bo

8 www.iglesiaviva.net
violation of the girl, but also condemns her right to an abortion, since it would kill an innocent life. The second article, ‘Authentic Feminism vs Abortion’ (CC6 2017) is supporting what they call ‘the legitimate feminism’ that fights for rights in the social and economic spheres, with emphasis on work rights and conditions. However, they state that ‘there is also an unjust and wrong type of feminism that claims for false rights, among which a woman’s reproductive right to an abortion, stands out’. As noted, these six different documents are from different sources and of different character. Nonetheless, they all have very clear statements regarding the question of abortion and they all have many arguments in common, why I think they give a clear image of how the Church argues in this debate.

After having analysed the Church, I move on to the feminist organisation Colectivo Rebeldía (CR) and their engagement in Campaña 28 de Septiembre. From this movement, four documents will be analysed and also here, to make it easier, I number the four different documents, CR1-CR4. The main points will be taken from investigations and other text documents, published in the name of the campaign (Campaña 28 de Septiembre) but issued by people from CR. The first one (CR1 2012) is an investigation carried out by CR named ‘Although You do not Want to See it, Abortion Exists’ (my translation), which is a participative study about unwanted pregnancies in three different indigenous communities in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Second (CR2 2012) is a proposal of decriminalisation of abortion in Bolivia, with arguments connected to law, in favour of the ‘voluntary interruption of pregnancy in Bolivia’. CR 3 (2015) is considering how the latest law reform regarding abortion, the resolution 206/2014, that legalises an abortion in the case of a rape with the only requirement of presenting a denunciation, is being applied. They are studying public health centres and look at sociocultural as well as religious and institutional obstacles for the application of the law. Finally, CR4 (2016) is a collection of stories from indigenous women about abortion, which might not say much about CRs arguments, but it shows on their standpoint and what they find to be suiting examples, since the campaign have chosen what stories to publish.

The third actor to be analysed in the abortion debate in Bolivia and my key actor for this study’s second aim, is CDD. Three documents have been chosen, together with the two interviews, which are clearly demonstrating CDDs standpoint regarding abortion and women’s right to decide. The first is an investigation called ‘The Silence Spiral’ (CDD1 2014), which studies how the important public opinion can be controlled by people’s fear of social isolation, especially in sensitive issues such as abortion. Second, ‘Between Discourse,
Practice and Women’s Right to Decide’ (CDD2 2016, my translation), is another investigation, done on behalf of CDD, examining how people working within the health sector, approach sexual and reproductive rights. The third text document (CDD3 2013) to be analysed is ‘From Faith’ (my translation). This is a document showing on CDDs ways of working for sexual and reproductive rights, but from their Catholic standpoint.

Finally, to support the documents and clarify the arguments from CDD, which is my main actor in this study, the two interviews will be used. Important to note though for this analysis, is that all the material is in Spanish and I have translated myself, which could mean misunderstandings or misinterpretations from my side, since Spanish is only my third language. However, I am hoping to give a clear overview of the abortion debate in Bolivia and to contribute with an interesting critical discourse analysis and considerations about feminism and Catholicism, that could hopefully conduce to increased interest in the question of abortion rights and to further investigation of the issue.

Due to time and space limitations, as well as access to material, these are the documents chosen for the study. I realise more documents could have given a broader overview and that other documents could have provided further perspectives, but since my aim is to describe the current debate and different arguments as well as to deeper analyse the role of CDD, I consider the number of documents enough.

4.3 Interviews and Observation

Through one semester of internship with the organisation CDD, where I was part of the team and participated in meetings, workshops, events and demonstrations, I had a good chance to observe their work as well as the works and efforts in general by the social movement in Bolivia in favour of women’s sexual and reproductive rights. By taking notes, having conversations and participating in the activities, I obtained a good picture of the current situation in the country regarding the abortion debate. The months in Bolivia will, accordingly, serve as a necessary background for further studies within this area and although I might not refer to what I have observed during my time in the country in this thesis, it has helped me in working with other material used for the study. For a deeper understanding of theories used, as well as previous research on the area and the textual analyses of different
documents, the background information I collected during the internship has served well. Although, important to consider is how much of an open mind I was able to have, analysing the documents, with an already clear image of the situation and very much from one side or one perspective.

This study is analysing the abortion debate in Bolivia, from a feminist perspective. One purpose is to highlight something that has not been discussed much earlier; feminist Catholics. As noted in the last chapter, much of the previous research is analysing feminist movements’ struggles against the Catholic Church and position the two actors in complete opposition to each other. In this study, I am aiming to nuance the discussion about the abortion debate by adding an important actor that is both Catholic and feminist – CDD. To complement the documents analysed from CDD Bolivia, two interviews were held with women working there. The Bolivian part of the Latin American Network of CDD is relatively small and has currently not more than two solid positions on a permanent basis; the director or manager Tania Nava and the head of the department for advocacy Paula Estenssoro.

Therefore, choosing the two interviewees was not complicated. The interviews had a semi structural character, where I asked for exhaustive responses where the interviewees could speak freely about the topics. Some improvised supplementary questions were asked and the interviews in that way, took form more of a conversation than a strictly controlled interview. Following Gustavsson (2004: 238-239), what differentiates an interview with a conversation is what type of data is being collected – interviews seek to find objective and more official information and conversations are more subjective and hence, private. It is about subjective realities and people’s personal experiences of the reality, which was exactly the aim of the interviews I conducted (I will still call them interviews in this study but point out here that they were of a conversational character).

The interviews were recorded (with permission from the interviewed) and later on transcribed, in order to create texts that could be analysed. However, since the interviews are not my key material and will only be used for complementing comments and not analysed in detail, the transcriptions were not of the most detailed character. Following Aspers (2007: 149), the interviews were written down, word for word, but without pointing out every single pause, affirmative words or noise (such as humming, ‘yes’, ‘oh’, ‘ah’, ‘ok’, ‘mm’) and other sounds or gestures (laughing, nodding etc.) if they were not interpreted as significant for the content. To structure up the transcribed interviews, I listened to them twice and read them a couple of
times in order to categorise different arguments that could be connected to arguments from the text material from CDD.

4.4 Discourse Analysis

The technique that will be used to analyse the presented material is discourse analysis. Since it is not only a systematisation or categorisation of the texts that will be done, but more of a critical review of the texts, a discourse analysis is suitable (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 211). There are many different approaches to discourse analysis and many ways to do it. Common features with all types of discourse analysis is an aim to highlight power relations and to show aspects of social life that are usually taken for granted, as well as an understanding of language as constructing reality (ibid: 212). A discourse is a way of talking about and understanding the world and how we express ourselves is not a neutral reflection of our world, identities and social relations, but rather, in the words of Jørgensen & Philips (2002: 1); ‘play an active role in creating and changing them’.

Discourse analysis includes both theories and methods and it builds on social constructionism, why it fits well in to this study with a feminist perspective. It has an anti-essentialist approach and points out that ‘our knowledge of the world should not be treated as objective truth’ (ibid: 5). Language is contributing to the construction of reality, objects gain meaning through discourse and our definitions of different types of individuals, place persons in different positions with specific expectations (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 9; Hjälmeskog 1999: 311).

For this study, Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be applied, and central to that approach is ‘that discourse is an important form of social practice which both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations including power relations, and at the same time is also shaped by other social practices and structures’ (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 65). Fairclough’s model is a combination of textual analysis and social analysis, and any use of language is, for him, three-dimensional; it is a text, a discursive practice and a social practice (ibid: 68). The analytical framework, then, means a focus on (1) linguistic features, where vocabulary and sentences are analysed; (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text, where an analysis of how authors of texts, as well as receivers, build on already existing discourses when producing or consuming and interpreting a text. Finally,
an analysis of (3) the wider social practice’ consequence for the broader social practice is considered – since it is the discursive practice that makes it possible for texts to shape social practice and vice versa (ibid: 69). The analysis that will soon be presented, has been customised to fit this particular study, since there is no fixed procedure or guidelines (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 76). Therefore, focus here will be on identifying main arguments and discourses used from the three different actors, by analysing words and sentences, as well as their impact on social practices.

Fairclough’s theory holds that a text which is mixing many different discourses, in other words, a text that has a high level of interdiscursivity, can be associated with change of the social order, whereas a text drawing on the same or very similar discourses (low level of interdiscursivity), wishes to reproduce the traditional order, or status quo (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 82-83). Some of his tools for analysing texts that will be used here are: interactional control (who sets the conversational agenda), ethos (how identities are constructed through language and body aspects) and word analysis (ibid: 83). Fairclough is considering social struggle and conflict in connection to discursive orders (ibid: 74), but this study will complement with Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory that emphasise the discursive struggle (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 6). The aim of their discourse analysis is to ‘map out the process in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the process by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalised that we think of them as natural’ (ibid: 25-26). This struggle of discourses will serve well for the following analysis.

Finally, to critically analyse the texts from a feminist perspective, Lazar’s (2005) writings on feminist critical discourse analysis will serve as an addition to Fairclough’s model. She states that power and ideology within discourse work to sustain a (hierarchically) gendered social order and that a feminist critique of discourse, is aiming for the achievement of a just social order (ibid: 1, 5). It is accordingly, an examination of how power and dominance are discursively produced and resisted, through textual representations of gendered social practices (ibid: 10). Lazar (2005: 11) states that ‘Every act of meaning-making through spoken and written language use…contributes to the reproduction and maintenance of the social order, and also in the sense of resisting and transforming that order’, which is connected to critical discourse analysis in general. However, feminist CDA adds to this by focusing on ‘how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are (re)produced,
negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people’s social and personal identities in texts and talks’ (ibid.).

My idea here is to deconstruct discourses for an understanding of what meaning (Hjälmeskog 1999: 322-323) is given to words and sentences in the texts from different perspectives, to be able to see links between language use and social practice (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 69).
5. Analysis and Results

The three different actors chosen for this study, will be separately analysed with Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, where a lot of emphasis will be put on meanings and values connected to different words and sentences. First, the documents from the Catholic Church will be thoroughly investigated, with a feminist critical discourse analysis in mind, to ‘critique discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order’ (Lazar 2005: 5), even though the connections will be further accounted for in the coming discussion. After the Church, a closer look on how the feminist organisation Colectivo Rebeldía express themselves in text will be taken, followed by an analysis of text documents, supported with the interviews, from CDD. When the three different actors have been analysed and the results presented, a discussion about the results follows. The separating of the three actors is done in order to have a clear structure and the comparison of the three will be developed in the final discussion. However, within the analyses of the actors, there will be a mix of the three dimensions analysed; discursive practice, textual characteristics and social practice, since they all interconnect, but a summery at the end of every section, will help to give some structure to the analysis.

5.1 Arguments from the Catholic Church

As mentioned earlier, the six text documents connected to the Catholic Church, although from different sources, are all very similar in their discourses and choice of words. When analysing the texts from the Catholic Church, it is not difficult to see that they want to keep it traditional. The discourses found in these texts are all of traditional conservative nature and have a very educative or disciplinary tone, which can be noted in sentences like ‘the Christian family, based on the union of a man and a woman, as a transmitter of life and human and Christian values’ (CC1 2014: 43); ‘real meaning of human rights’ (CC2 2012: 2); ‘abortion is a crime that attacks human life’ (CC4 2017) or ‘abortion is not fair as it condemns to death the little girl or the little boy that is in the mother’s womb and that is obviously completely innocent and defenceless’ (CC5 2017: 2).
Another finding here is the self-appointed superiority from the church’s side, they claim to know what is right and what is wrong: ‘together we defend the gift of life’ (CC3 2017). They are using their power and strength to maintain an order where abortion is strictly prohibited and by producing these types of texts, they make it look like the most obvious thing in the world. They speak from God and that is hard to resist. The discursive practice, that is how texts are produced and consumed (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 81), is in this way, reproducing the established order where the social practice of abortion, is a crime. The material produced, with an ample consumption (Catholicism is widespread in Bolivia), has real consequences, as a discursive production of dominance (see Lazar 2005) in the Bolivian society. Since the texts analysed are from different sources, they are produced and consumed in varying ways, however with similar outcomes. The two documents from the Church’s website (CC1 2014; CC2 2012) are more of the character that they are aimed for people already within the Church community, people who are working within the Church. Although, in the next lead, this information or argumentation goes out to the public. The two statements (CC3 2017; CC4 2017) against the law reform proposal are direct and concrete and produced from reputable actors (University and the religious association), with very clear statements, easy for many people to take on. Finally, the two articles from the journal of the Church (CC5 2017; CC6 2017), with a very argumentative approach, are produced to reach out to as many as possible. All documents are coming from powerful sources, economically and with a huge public support and have the possibility to reach out to many Bolivians, with a persuasive and professional argumentation, maintaining the social order and opinions regarding the social practice of abortion as a sin.

The linguistic characteristics of a text helps to cast light on how discourses are activated textually (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 83). By using Fairclough’s tools for an analysis of the texts (who sets the agenda, identity construction and word analysis), the aim is to show my idea of how the Catholic Church views reality, by analysing their argumentation in the abortion debate in Bolivia. The educative and traditional discourses outlined in the texts, are all very connected to a clear strong actor setting the agenda (interactional control) and are using common key words and concepts that are regularly repeated. Life (right to life, defend life, the gift of life) is their number one key word, and together with other traditional words and concepts such as; human(e), family, values, God, fidelity, dignity, love, forgiveness, ethics and morality, it is very much connected to Christianity, or religion in general (even though some of these words can also be connected to human rights discourses, which we will
discover further on). Other key words for describing their resistance to abortion and their anger towards the Pro-Choice movements are; concern/preoccupation and threat ‘towards the family, that is the fundamental pillar for a society’s development’ (CC4 2017). When mentioning the foetus, it is always done in connection to words like vulnerable/defenceless/innocent, hence constructing an identity (ethos) and women are attributed primarily as mothers which is reproducing existing gender relations. Although not much is written about women and their roles, since the focus of the Church seems to be at defending the life within the woman. There are a few exceptions though, that will now be looked upon.

The declaration from the university states that abortion seriously harms women and results in ‘existential crisis’ and ‘psychological traumas’ (CC4 2014). The ‘authentic feminism’ article that states that ‘abortion laws are clearly anti-feminist’ (CC6 2017: 1), is concerned with abortion laws and the machista mentality, as they mean that sexual relations today are many times only in search for pleasure and pregnancies are unwelcomed. If a woman gets pregnant by mistake, the machista men force the woman to have an abortion, which benefits the man who gets freed from his father obligations, but leaves the woman with ‘a filicide crime on her conscience’. Noted as well, is that apart from physical damage for the woman after an abortion, there is also the so-called ‘post abortion syndrome’, which is sometimes so severe, that it leads to suicide (CC6 2017). Their evidence of liberal abortion laws being antifeminist, is found in the example of China, where women many times have selective abortions in order to avoid daughters in their strict one child policy. The consequence of this is ‘a serious demographic misbalance, where many men find it hard to find a wife’ (ibid.). The document from the bishop’s conference also shows concern on women’s exclusion and states that a ‘revalorisation of the secular, and especially, the woman’, needs to be done in order to show ‘commitment to the poor and excluded in society’, following Pope Francisco’s exhortation about a renewed Church in the contemporary world, marked by the joy of finding God (CC1 2014: 8).

The examples illustrate how the Church wants to show their concern for women and they do it by expressing pity for the women who have been forced to have an abortion. Women who have not had the opportunity to choose themselves. They are concerned by the women’s psychological and physical state after an abortion. They are even mentioning the machista mentality as a threat to women’s own choices. This is not about a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion, but about women’s will to keep their babies, since it is assumed that a
woman’s natural role is being a mother. It is interesting to choose China as an example of a country with liberal abortion laws, and the biggest problem for the Church when daughters are unwanted, seems to be the difficulties for men to find wives. So, from the bishops’ conference, they seem to have realised that women are not valued as high as men. Their way of expressing themselves regarding what difficulties they are facing, can be closer looked to as well:

‘Difficulties: The loss of the meaning of life as a gift from God and the loss of identity and mission of the family, caused by foreign cultural currents, brought about by social media, that promotes genetic manipulation, the liberalisation of abortion and the granting of same sex unions the same status and rights of matrimony as between male and female. In that sense, we recognise the initiatives and spaces of awareness making, on the part of the Church, about the value and defence of life and families, as insufficient, many times wasting our means and potentialities’ (CC1 2014: 17, my translation).

Here, they are admitting and mourning their incapacity of resisting new and modern influences, a very clear example of how the Church wants to keep it traditional and struggle against social change. They are blaming foreign cultures and social media, and this accusatory discourse is common in the documents, also showing on their supremacy and who sets the agenda in the texts. The ‘authentic feminism’ article ends with a strong attack on doctors who perform abortions. These ‘aborting doctors, earn their livelihood taking out defenceless little children’ and ‘their hands are blood stained and they have prostituted their noble profession of curing the sick and saving lives’. The doctors ‘have turned into child slaughterers’ (CC6 2017: 2). The article also condemns anyone who promotes or approves laws that decriminalise abortion, that is; legislators, rulers, judges and anyone who supports abortion campaigns. Instead, they call for more help to parents to ‘feed and educate their children and always treat them with love’ (ibid.). Another example that includes discourses that are both accusatory and disciplinary, is coming from the ‘life promoting’ document;

‘It is necessary to denounce everything that degrades the human being and that opposes the rebirth of forgiveness, happiness, peace and the feast that our Lord brings us…The Yes to life from God…encourages and strengthens us to fight for the defending of life in fulness, from fecundation until the natural death. Due to that, the Church firmly rejects laws that oppose life, that is born out of the love of God’ (CC2 2012: 1, my translation).

The religious’ conference declaration against the new law reform proposals starts soft and loving, but ends in accusation and wrath:
The Bolivian Conference of the Religious wants to touch the heart of all Bolivian citizens so that together we defend the gift of life. Let us be the voices of so many defenceless and vulnerable human beings, of whom it is wanted to deprive the sacred GIFT OF LIFE and we unite all samples and demonstrations of REPUDIATION against the proposals that ATTACK life, dignity and the rights of all human beings’ (CC3 2017, my translation).

In the question regarding abortion in Bolivia, the Church has a strong emphasis on the foetus and its rights, the woman’s rights are not mentioned. All texts have a clear rights discourse and speak about the fundamental right to life. Life starts from fecundation, in the words of the Church and therefore abortion is a threat to the human life. Something that the declaration from the university seeks to avoid by stating: ‘The Bolivian Catholic University “San Pablo” show their commitment in educating men and women in the responsibility to respect and protect life in whatever stage of development’ (CC4 2017).

The rights discourse is noted in expressions like ‘[the new abortion law reform proposals] attack life, dignity and the rights of all human being’ (CC3 2017), ‘we are worried about projects that elaborate regarding sexual and reproductive rights…These so called rights are hiding intentions that are against the recognition of the authentic right to life’ (CC2 2012: 2) and ‘the promotion and defending of the life in all its stages, from fecundation until the natural death, has always been the commitment in pastoral activity’ (CC1 2014: 16). To support the rights discourse, the Church often refers to national laws and the State Constitution that sees life as a fundamental right. The ‘abortion for rape’ article, also cites the Bolivian State Constitution, in order to argue against the 13-year-old girl’s right to abortion and for the life of the foetus; ‘every girl, boy and teenager have the right to their full development’ (CC5 2017) and one cannot help but asking: where is the teenagers right to her full development if she is being forced to carry and give birth to a child that is the product of a rape by her own uncle?

To sum up this part, the Church’s arguments are built on a language with a traditional and conservative tone. They present themselves in a superior way, knowing right from wrong, in an effort to educate or even discipline. The outstanding discourse is by no doubt, ‘the right to life’ discourse, which is almost the only one present in all their arguments. Hence, the low level of interdiscursivity, confirms their will to maintain status quo and the existing (unjust) gendered order. Abortion is described as an attack on life or an assassination of an innocent person that is deprived of its right to life. Some concern is shown for women and their physical and mental health after an abortion, who are then described as victims in a machista
culture. The analysis now continues with the opposite side, represented by Colectivo Rebeldía.

5.2 Arguments from Colectivo Rebeldía/Campaña 28 de Septiembre

If the Bolivian Catholic Church is very monotonous in their discourse on the right to life and use repetitive arguments within that frame, the feminist organisation Colectivo Rebeldía (CR) is much more versatile in its arguments on abortion. They are using discourses on public health, rights, social justice, secularity and plurality, as well as freedom and women’s autonomy, which will be accounted for in this section.

Even though the Church and Colectivo Rebeldía are in complete opposition towards each other in the debate on abortion, they have arguments in common, only using them in different ways. The rights discourse is very prominent in CRs arguments, but instead of speaking about the foetus’ right to life, they highlight women’s right to life and to decide over their own bodies. Connections are often drawn to international human rights, and similar to the Church, CR are concerned about women’s health and the machista mentality, although in other ways than the Church. The language in the texts analysed from CR, similarly to the Church, sometimes have an informative and/or an accusing tone, but in this case the accusations are pointed towards the patriarchal system and religious fundamentalisms; ‘The laws that control and punish (women’s) decisions, are tools of the patriarchal power, that seeks to reproduce its order’ (CR4 2016: 8) and ‘Our legislation is still entrapped under the power of the Vatican and fundamental anti-rights groups’ (CR1 2012: 9). Accordingly, the similarities end here, which will be clear in this analysis.

If the Church wants to keep it traditional and has a conservative and disciplinary point of departure, CR struggle for social change and a grand transformation of society, mentality and laws, which is constantly present in all documents analysed. They want ‘change from below’ (CR1 2012: 13) and the following citations show on this transformative discourse as well as the wrath towards the patriarchal system they wish to transform; ‘Legal and safe abortion…cannot remain trapped in the tyranny of patriarchal power and clothed with the mantles of hypocrisy, insecurity and clandestinity’ (CR2 2012: 19) and ‘They (women
throughout history) have challenged the patriarchal codes that establish that women are not capable of responsible decision making’ (CR4 2016: 7). They wish for change since ‘the woman’s body is the first territory that is affected by the patriarchy’ (CR1 2012: 22). Following Lazar (2005), they are contesting the traditional gender roles and resisting the dominance of the Church.

Strong words are often used, to really highlight inequalities in Bolivian society and the patriarchal order that deprive women of their rights. ‘Dehumanisation’, ‘fundamentalism’, ‘imposed maternity’, ‘women as reproductive objects’, ‘judge’, ‘discriminate’, ‘violate’, ‘conservative attitudes’, ‘patriarchal mental structure’, ‘tyranny’, ‘hypocrisy’, ‘stigmatisation’ and ‘criminalisation’, are some of the words used for blaming the current patriarchal order in the country. In a way, the texts are constructing female identities (ethos) as victims under an unequal social order, criticising the institutional obstacles that prevent women from living their lives fully, exercising all their human rights. At the same time, they want to empower women and ‘join forces’ to transform the current patriarchal power (CR1 2012: 10) and ‘defend women’s dignity (ibid. 8), thus creating a strong and worthy female identity. Patriarchal values and attitudes are criticised and ‘the culture of domination over women’s bodies (CR3 2015:66) that has become ‘naturalised’ in Bolivian societies, are said to be hidden behind more visible forms of violence against women and even feminicides (CR1 2012: 19). Over and over, the patriarchal system is being blamed for women’s subordinate roles in society: ‘The patriarchal system is a hierarchical social structure that is based on ideas, prejudices, symbols etc., and that places the masculine gender in a dominant position towards the feminine gender’ (CR1 2012: 18).

The informative character of the documents from CR, means they are setting the agenda (interactional control), showing on how the reality looks like. However, since they often use the method of participatory studies, the voices of the women themselves (many times showing strong opposition to abortion) are heard. The texts though want to communicate appalling stories from women’s lives (CR 1 2012; CR4 2016) and even though the women themselves might be against abortion, their stories show on the women’s (grim) experiences with living in a patriarchal social order. The participatory investigation from three indigenous communities (CR1 2012: 9), for instance, aims at putting forward evidence that women in Bolivia ‘are in a trap’. Recurrent is also information such as; ‘Restrictive laws do not prevent women from aborting’ (CR4 2016: 7); ‘It does not stop women from aborting, rather it forces them to do it in unsafe and clandestine conditions, which costs the life of women, of poor women to be
exact’ (CR2 2012: 17) and this emphasis on poor women is going to be returned to further on. The investigation regarding the resolution about legal abortion in the case of rape (CR3 2015: 14), states that Bolivia has the second highest rates of maternal mortality in the region and they frequently call for a more visible debate on abortion, since ‘silence won’t stop women from dying from abortions’ (CR1 2012: 12). They also mean that the widespread ignorance regarding abortion and current laws ‘reflects the institutionalised patriarchal positions and beliefs’ (CR3 2015: 38).

The rights discourse in CRs documents is strongly emphasising women’s rights and especially women’s right to decide over their own body. If the discursive practice is transformative, it is in a will to inform, to show what the reality looks like, to claim for rights as women, human beings and citizens; ‘This inalienable right of women to freely decide on maternity, implicitly implies the right to the voluntary termination of pregnancy (CR2 2012: 10) and ‘The decision not to be a mother is nothing but the practicing of a fundamental right for women’ (CR2 2012: 15). An attempt to legitimise the prioritisation of the woman’s rights before the rights of the unborn and as a critique towards the discourses of the Church, CR shifts focus to the ‘human dignity of the woman, her fully developed personality, her life, her physical, psychological and sexual integrity, in front of the abstract right to life of the foetus (CR2 2012: 11) and; ‘To protect life…should be understood in terms of human dignity and the entirety of human being and not as protecting a mere biological fact’ (CR2 2012: 12).

By providing arguments for a state separated from the Church, they might arouse reactions, but by using the human rights discourse and many of the words we recognise from the Church’s documents in combination, it could be argued that they are saved from making too many enemies. The texts are full of words like ‘dignity’, ‘humane’ and ‘respect’, but it is also very clear that the Church needs to stay out of the ruling of the country; ‘churches cannot turn into a crime, what they consider a sin’ and ‘a real democracy requires secularity as a fundamental principal in the practicing of rights’ (CR1 2012: 17). This criticising of laws influenced by the Church is frequent in a country that, according to CR ‘has not become completely independent from the religion’ (CR1 2012: 21); ‘Neither the immorality nor the ethical reproach of a conduct is sufficient by itself to criminalise conduct’ (CR2 2012: 7) and ‘The churches, especially the Catholic, have strong ties to decision makers. Even though officially secular, the State is not freed from religious influence’ (CR1 2012: 16).

As well as a State separated from the Church, the different documents often mention the State’s recognition of plurality in the Constitution, something that should respect different
religions and *cosmovisiones* (worldviews), independent of religion. CR are highlighting that many indigenous communities have a different view on abortion, to that of the Catholic Church; ‘From our ancestors, we know [how to abort] and we practice’ (CR4 2016: 21).

Abortion is often mentioned as a severe public health problem that causes the death of many women every year and it gets connected to the struggle for social justice when stating that the poor women are the worst affected; ‘The ones that really risk their lives with clandestine abortions: indigenous women, peasant women, women from peri-urban neighbourhoods, definitely, women with low income, are the ones who suffer most from the consequences of criminalisation’ (CR1 2012:11). With high rates of maternal mortality, CR calls for ‘Real justice and equity between men and women’ and ‘dignity for everybody’ (CR1 2012: 10). However, they see institutional obstacles in the way towards a decriminalisation of abortion. Because even in the cases where abortion is currently legal (rape), they find that women are being denied health services due to ‘Prejudices and conservative attitudes within the health sector’ (CR3 2015: 61).

When it comes to how women are described, these texts really highlight the problematics of speaking of women only as mothers; ‘Not everyone desires to be a mother’ (CR4 2016: 58) and ‘Consider maternity not as a relentless destiny for the woman, but rather as a life option’ (CR2 2012: 13). They state that ‘all women who dare to subvert or disobey the patriarchal order, are stigmatised and criminalised’ (CR2 2012: 3) and calls for a ‘social decriminalisation of abortion’ (CR3 2015: 70). In this way, following Fairclough’s theory, their discourses are shaped by the current social order, in the way of resisting it, and also try to shape social practices with information and by contesting the existing gender roles. Women have three specific roles in current Bolivian society, according to the feminist organisation (CR1 2012: 18); ‘sexual object, wife and mother’ and a general consideration is that woman is the same as mother and that there is a social pressure to fulfil their reproductive duties, if not, they are looked upon as bad women or even monsters (CR1 2012). Women who abort are categorised as ‘criminal’ and ‘sinners’ (CR4 2016: 8), and when taken decisions regarding abortion, it is done without listening to the women themselves, why CR calls for greater autonomy and freedom for women; ‘It is “natural” for women that other persons, generally men, take decisions for them: the father, the partner, the doctor, and even the sons, are called to be in charge of women’s bodies, while the women themselves feel incapable of making a decision’ (CR1 2012: 32). The power and dominance of the patriarchal mentality is here being strongly resisted, following Lazar (2005).
As contrasting the Church’s arguments on abortion being murder, CR question; ‘What is dying? A life project, a woman’s dreams, a girl’s dreams’ (CR1 2012:58) and wish for respect ‘when choosing what is not convenient, what we consider better for our lives’ (CR1 2012: 76). The search for autonomy is even clearer when considering the following citation: ‘The voluntary interruption of an unwanted pregnancy is a reproductive right to protect her health within the frames of her free and autonomous choice, to grant her life, her wellbeing and her human dignity, regardless of religious believes’ (CR3 2015: 16).

In sum, Colectivo Rebeldía are using a variety of discourses (high level of interdiscursivity), including rights, public health, social justice, secularity, plurality, women’s autonomy and freedom and their overall tone is very connected to a wish for transformation. However, also the feminist organisation, like the Church, has an accusing tone and an emphasis on information spreading, only directed in another way. Women’s autonomy is highly prioritised in their texts and the greatest obstacle to that is according to them, the patriarchal system.

5.3 Arguments from CDD

So far, the arguments from the Church have been put at one end. They are Pro-Life and speak of every human being’s right to life, from fecundation until a natural death. The arguments from the Pro-Choice side, including the feminist organisation Colectivo Rebeldía and the campaign for decriminalisation of abortion, Campaña 28 de Septiembre, put their emphasis on women’s right over their own body. CDD is an organisation that are both Catholic and feminist, how does that work in the polarised abortion debate in Bolivia? How can CDD struggle for decriminalisation of abortion and still claim to be Catholic? That is what will be explored now, when analysing the text documents from CDD, with supporting arguments from the two interviews.

CDD, on the same side as CR in the abortion debate, share many arguments with their activist colleagues, such as discourses on public health, social justice, rights and the importance of a secular State. They see abortion as ‘a problem of public health, of social justice and a question of human rights’ (CDD1 2014: 14). They also undertake the role of informants by spreading numbers and evidence on women’s subordinate role in Bolivian society. However, CDD, even though at first-hand a feminist organisation, still hold on to their Catholic values and are ‘women who, by being feminists, did not want to stop being Catholics’ (CDD3 2013: 11).
They want to demonstrate a more diverse view on Catholicism and that it works to be a Catholic feminist, although criticising what they consider wrong with the Church, such as the Catholic sexual morality with its logic of sin and guilt. Also, criticising ‘the patriarchal and conservative values that characterise the ecclesiastical hierarchy’ (CDD3 2013: 11). Or, as Tania Nava (2017) puts it: ‘We are part of the Church, but what we are against is the rigidity of the Catholic hierarchy in talking about women's rights’. Even though criticising both the Church and the patriarchy, they seem slightly more careful and the same level of accusing or blaming cannot be found in the text documents analysed from CDD. However, similar to CR, there is a strong will to change, although many times connected to the religious views, here pointed out by Paula Estenssoro (2017): ‘Reclaim the meaning of Christian teachings, the God of love, the God of forgiveness, an understanding God, the God of solidarity, and NOT the punishing God or the bad God’.

Precisely this, the emphasis on religious values, is what differentiates CDD from other feminist organisations, why a lot of attention will be directed to this fact. Nava (2017) sees the need to ‘incorporate theological elements’ in the frame of the decriminalisation of abortion and Estenssoro (2017) states: ‘Many organisations are feminists, but they are anti-religion or they do not have a direct position in regard to religious issues. Instead, the difference is that we are feminists, but we do it as well from a feminist theology’. This will be returned to in the discussion part below.

CDDs role compared to other organisations and their strategies for political incidence have been described by other activists in the ‘From Faith’ publication (CDD3 2013):

‘With an argumentation that is challenging the Catholic Church from inside, they put up a fight with a community of which they are part…they do not stop being Catholics, rather they find the arguments from their own faith to talk about the right to decide. The contribution of CDD is great, since their demands are not labelled exclusively “feminist”’ (CDD3 2013: 12, my translation).

Found in the texts, as well as the interviews, are words such as; ‘faith’, ‘ethics’, ‘rights’, ‘dignity’, ‘morality’, ‘life’ and ‘secular state’, which indicate a milder tone than CRs texts. However, CDD also criticise ‘fundamentalisms’ and the ‘violation of women’s rights’. Their will to show another way of thinking about Catholicism, can be analysed as them wanting to set the agenda and tell people that their beliefs are wrong, here expressed by Estenssoro (2017): ‘To show that what people believe, from Catholic teachings, is not quite like that’, or:
‘Perceptions, positions and attitudes of the Bolivian population on abortion are based above all on religious dogmas, blame and stigmatising stereotypes with negative emotional load and there is a great lack of real and unbiased information on the legislation in Bolivia, as well as the causes and consequences of abortion, the reasons and results of decriminalisation in other countries, for example’ (CDD1 2014: 61, my translation).

Nevertheless, they do it by demonstrating facts and numbers about women dying and with their investigation ‘The Silence Spiral’ (CDD1 2014), they show that abortion is such a common practice in Bolivia today and obviously, Catholic women also do abort, but there is a lot of fear connected to the subject and people might ‘adopt a public posture against abortion in order to avoid being stigmatised or socially isolated’ (CDD1 2014: 61). Accordingly, what people express in public life is not corresponding with their private life actions and the high number of abortions together with a low number of denunciations, ‘reveals a double standard that reinforces the existing silence chains, that spiral that maintains the validity of a totally inapplicable legislation, far from reality, of the experiences and the feelings of the women’ (CDD1 2014: 14).

The rights discourse is definitely the one seen most frequently in all three actors. CDD has their focus on sexual and reproductive rights and of course, the right to decide which is part of their name (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir – Catholics for the Right to Decide). They call sexual and reproductive rights the most human of all human rights, since they directly affect our lives and they take place in the most intimate territory, the human body (CDD2 2016: 11). They also point out the important impact on the wellbeing and empowerment of women and girls; ‘[the sexual and reproductive rights] have a direct connection to their social development as well as their participation in public, economic and political life’ (CDD2 2016: 11). CDD also makes clear that criminalising abortion violates other rights, such as the right to freedom, health, non-violence and personal autonomy (CDD3 2013: 38). International human rights treaties are often referred to, as well as national laws (Article 66 granting sexual and reproductive rights, for instance). The 2014 declaration from the High Court, regarding legal abortion in the case of rape, which prioritises the woman’s life in front of the embryo is mentioned a lot, both in the interviews and the texts:

‘The progressive right to life is considered, where the development of the embryo cannot be given the same status as that of the full and developed life of the mother, that is to say that the mother has a greater priority in the protection of her life, in front of the embryo in process of developing’ (CDD2 2016: 15, my translation).
CDD then states that it is a contradiction when people consider it ok to abort in case of rape, for instance, if they still mean that life starts at conception (CDD1 2014: 36). With this step towards partial legalisation, CDD means that the foetus’ right to life is not anymore a valid argument. ‘The right to life’ discourse is frequently used from both sides in the debate about abortion in Bolivia (CDD1 2014: 17) and the director of CDD, Tania Nava (2017), states that the right to life, is still the strongest argument for them, why it is fundamental to speak about. Although, they speak about the woman’s right to her own life, put out by former CDD worker Paulo Bustillos; ‘When we speak about abortion, we speak about life. It is about promoting a better life for women’ (CDD3 2013: 24). Estenssoro sees the need to shift focus in the discussion:

‘We need to respond with human rights, because the anti-rights groups use the human rights…and when they want to go into issues of religion or morality, we need to say: “we are not discussing anybody’s religion here, we are discussing public policy”. And that has nothing to do with religion’ (Estenssoro 2017, my translation).

This means, that at the same time, CDD wants to show other sides of their religion and even ground their arguments in faith, but they also clearly want to separate religious values from human rights and public policy, something that might appear slightly confusing. They mean that even if the position of the Catholic Church today is strictly against abortion, it has not always been like that. Or at least that there is not only one Catholic opinion and no consensus (CDD3 2013: 40-41). Nava (2017) questions; ‘Who is first, the egg or the hen?’ She mentions Saint Tomás de Aquino who, many centuries ago, ‘established that, the debate was logical, that of course, we should respect the hen right?’ that is, ‘to value, the woman's life more’. She continues:

‘Then, we enter by a logic of valuation towards women, to their decision making, that's why we also call ourselves CDD, because we focus, above all, on that innate capacity, that we women have, to decide about our bodies, about our lives and that nothing influences that’ (Nava 2017, my translation).

As Nava states here, the right to decide should not be influenced by anything and many times, as they discuss what that right means, they do not involve religious values. Rather, they mention the right to decide ‘as a human right and a life option’ (CDD3 2013: 35) or with the meaning; ‘to decide freely if they choose to become mothers or not, when and with who, as well as terminating an unwanted pregnancy’ (CDD2 2016: 12). It might become clearer, this
absence/presence of faith in the right to decide, in a statement by former CDD director, Teresa Lanza:

‘Our fundamental objective was to put the decriminalisation of abortion in the public agenda. It was and it is necessary to debate this problem from different aspects. We did it from the faith, as Catholic women. We cannot think about faith or profess it outside the framework of rights. Quite the opposite, it is our faith that gives us the energy to undertake the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights. It is our faith, grounded in freedom of conscience, which guides us in the struggle for the right to decide’ (CDD3 2013: 11, my translation).

Following Fairclough’s analysing model, CDD many times build on existing discourses, both from Catholicism and feminism, when producing text documents, in an effort to shape the social practice of abortion as a woman’s right. Although clearly declared Catholics, CDD embraces a strong discourse on the importance of a secular State, not meaning that people need to abandon their beliefs or world views, rather; ‘The ambition of the secular State is for everyone to live together with their own world views and carry out their own life projects’ (CDD3 2013: 16). However, there are different thoughts on how the secular State works in practice; ‘The State Constitution establishes that we are a secular State, even though no real understanding of the practice of secularity, exists’ (Nava 2017) or ‘Normative progress does not necessarily imply progress in practice’ (CDD2 2016: 20). Something that could be explained by how strongly rooted the Catholic values are;

[One thing is the historical connection between the Catholic Church and the State, but] ‘the power that the Catholic Church has in the social imaginary in general, especially in the minds and hearts of its worshippers, is another thing. Changing those minds and hearts, is harder than to change the legislation’ (CDD3 2013: 34, my translation).

This is something that also worries Nava (2017, my translation);

In society still, the two major churches, that are the Catholic and the Evangelical, have a lot of weight. Well, really, they mobilise a lot of people, so, even if they do not make decisions within the government, the government is still careful not to break the balance with society. So, by being progressive and by, for example recognising a decriminalisation of abortion, is being weighed against the possible social chaos that could occur with the mobilisation of people done by the Church. Obviously, they would prefer to tone down their progressive posture to keep a social calm. That is logical.

Nevertheless, CDD continues their struggle to resist the power of the Church and to try to convince decision makers that ‘the religion is a private concern, but public policies should
consider human rights’ as states by Nava (2017). Or as her colleague puts it: ‘a secular state is important so that public policy does not respond to the dogmas or teachings of the fundamentalists’ (Estenssoro 2017).

Finally, considering arguments regarding public health, justice and a deconstruction of patriarchy, this last section, before a short summary, will highlight some of the recurring statements. As noted earlier, there has been some normative progress, although in CDDs eyes, that has not been enough; ‘given that in practice there are still prejudices, conservative approaches, machismo and inequality in accessing sexual and reproductive health services (CDD2 2016: 26). Their investigation of medical staff (CDD2 2016) is similar to the one from Colectivo Rebeldía (CR3 2015), where attitudes within the health sector have been examined, concluding that the existing laws are not always followed in practice. The investigation shows evidence of doctors who try to make women and girls go on with their pregnancies, since ‘the doctors’ roles are to save lives’ (CDD2 2016: 22). There are often religious reasons behind the doctors’ arguments, but also the concern for women, very much reflecting one of the texts (CC6 2017) from the Church, when a doctor speaks about the ‘double harm’ for women who have been raped and also consider an abortion (CDD2 2016: 21). CDDs answer to that can be found in the following citation:

‘Another recurring factor is the manipulation of guilt and forgiveness, the latter as a faculty reserved exclusively by religious authorities, that gives rise to stories of life-long trauma and even suicide as a result of abortion that, in the absence of reliable information, are transmitted as rumours or myths’ (CDD1 2014: 61, my translation).

The health aspect, as a very strong argument, becomes clear when stating; ‘the female population of the country face serious problems, such as maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancies and abortions performed in clandestine contexts’ (CDD1 2014: 8), or in the words of Nava (2017): ‘Women are dying and we do not think that that is the plan of God’. A critical discourse towards the patriarchal structures is articulated through a reflection of the current situation in the country: ‘Currently, policies and national health programs maintain a stereotyped vision of women’s roles and their needs in this area’ (CDD1 2014: 12); ‘It is difficult in a country where machismo still exists, the patriarchy is rooted in women and men, note, not only in men!’ (Nava 2017) or; ‘the tutelage of women, done by both the State and the churches’ (CDD3 2013: 29). Just as CR, CDD are contesting the existing gender roles and
relations in the country. The obstacles for women to practice their rights fully are, according to CDD, found in this patriarchal system;

‘We have not yet been able to dismantle the patriarchal framework that characterises our societies and therefore there are social, economic, political, and cultural structures that prevent women and men – but especially women – to freely practice their sexual and reproductive rights, and with greater force, their right to decide’ (CDD 2013: 9, my translation).

The strong influence of religion in Bolivia, has according to Estenssoro (2017), led to a ‘naturalisation and obligation towards maternity’, which in turn has caused the widespread ‘social criminalisation in regard to abortion’. Nava reflects upon socio-economic arguments and shows on the organisation’s high level of interdiscursivity, meaning an urge to transform the social order;

‘Abortion is a social justice problem, above all in the case of Bolivia, because it is evident, it becomes much more present, the fact that women without economic resources, are the ones that jeopardise their lives…but also from human rights…that as well, complement the social justice argument…since human rights are for everyone…and public health as well’ (Nava 2017, my translation).

A summary of CDDs arguments includes their strong discourses on rights (sexual and reproductive rights and the right to decide) as well as public health, social justice and the importance of a secular State in public policies. Their texts are also very informative with numbers and explanations of the current normative and include a whole lot of critique against the Church and the patriarchal society in general. However, with a less harsh tone in comparison to CR. The most distinguishing in CDDs character is their emphasis on Catholic values, giving arguments, pro-abortion ‘from faith’, but at the same time criticising the hierarchical Church and their patriarchal views on women. It is a complicated relationship, for sure and the answer two the question ‘how can they be both Catholic and feminists?’ could not be completely found in their material. Therefore, a better explanation will be given, with the assistance of theories and concepts, in the following discussion.

5.4 Discussion
It is now time for a discussion about the analysis and its findings regarding arguments and discourses used within the abortion debate in Bolivia and the issue of the contradiction of
being Catholic and feminist simultaneously. This part will connect the theoretical framework to the analysing part, to better understand the results and what can be suggested by them.

First of all, as mentioned from the start, this study is of the subjective and interpretive character, which means that I, as a researcher, have my own prejudices, standpoints and opinions, which obviously colours my interpretation of the texts analysed. As long as I am being clear with my own feminist point of departure as well as assuring that these are my findings, they can still be valid as an academic study with significant results.

After having analysed the three actors, the Bolivian Catholic Church, Colectivo Rebeldía and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, with a critical discourse analysis, using a feminist perspective, it is clear to say that the Church is the one actor who is interested in maintaining the status quo. Following Fairclough’s ideas on interdiscursivity, it is evident that the two feminist organisations (CR and CDD) strive for social change and transformation by using a variety of discourses, whereas the Church sticks almost exclusively, to one; the right to life. By applying a feminist perspective and a feminist critical discourse analysis of the Church, the study shows that the conservative Church is eager to reproduce the social order to sustain the hierarchical gender roles and connect sexuality with guilt and sin. They wish to keep the image of women as mothers, reflecting a logic of marianismo, earlier described. Gendered relations of power are reproduced when the Church accuses women for murder, when having an abortion and no consideration whatsoever is given to the responsibility of men. They refuse to see the reality (women’s experiences), where many Catholic women have abortions every day and the fact that it is illegal, kills many of these women, and instead they hold on to ‘life as a gift from God’. In this way, women’s bodies become a site of disciplinary control, as discussed in the theoretical part of this study. Why is that? As Kulczycki (2011: 214) noted, it is important not to forget that the issue of abortion, might be the last one for the Church to fight for, when divorce laws together with a greater acceptance of same-sex partnerships are in their view, destroying traditional family values.

The power to produce knowledge, often discussed within different feminisms, is clearly owned by the Church. Through their different channels, they reach out, and their arguments are already so deeply rooted, that they are easy to consume by the Bolivian majority. In turn, the feminist organisations’ counterarguments are seen as radical and an attack on life (that is a gift from God). This is evident in the two different investigations (CR3 2015; CDD2 2016) regarding attitudes within the Bolivian health sector. Even though the feminist organisations are frequent in their public health discourses, showing that unsafe abortions kill hundreds of
women every year, in practice many people still hold on to the Church’s discourse on the right to life. For me, as a non-Catholic, northern European woman, it is obvious that all the different arguments coming from the feminist side, weigh much more than the one argument from the Church. I do not understand this, because of my outsider position and lack of experience of living in that type of culture, but I do understand that Catholicism is very deeply rooted in the Bolivian society, why abortion is such a polemic issue.

Strongly rooted is therefore also the cultural and social constructions of female and femininity that is connected to expectations of women to act in certain ways, and to become mothers, and language is important in reinforcing these roles. While both the feminist organisations highlight women’s subordinate roles in society and call for greater autonomy and women’s right to decide and take control over their bodies as a strategy to counter male dominance, the Church continues to reinforce patriarchy by using traditional and conservative discourses. The macho culture is widespread in Bolivia, legitimising men’s control over women, something that CR and CDD try to antagonise by informing about women’s experiences of these unjust power relations. However, the Church seems to understand what is going on, with new attention drawn to the issue of abortion with the latest law reform proposal, and counter that with their own concerns for women’s subordinate role in a machista culture (that they are a great part of). The Church is professional and powerful in their communication and probably understands that in order to attract more people and keep their members intact, in times of increased focus on women’s rights, they communicate that they care. They even state that the abortion rights would be anti-feminist, as if they are holding up a new, more feminist approach, which is an interesting turn.

When it comes to intersectionality and to consider multiple forms of oppression at the same time, the only one of the three actors that entirely works that way, is CR. They are many times mentioning the problematics of poor rural women’s lack of access to health services and that they are the ones to the greatest extent that die or have severe complications after unsafe abortions. CR is out in the field, they speak with indigenous communities and make participatory investigations (CR1 2012), where the investigadoras are also indigenous and move away from simple observations to make the participants ‘agents of change’. CDD has some socio-economic considerations and fight for social justice, but they work in a different way, more indirectly. Like Paula Estenssoro (2017) mentioned in the interview; ‘So, we do not work directly in sexual health services or reproductive health, but we do work with
advocacy to promote public policies to make these services truly effective and accessible for the majority of women’.

Their strategies of political incidence are meant to affect all women. They struggle for a complete decriminalisation of abortion and that would include all Bolivian women’s right to legal and safe abortions. However, they might be stuck in what Chant (2003a) described regarding earlier feminists who wanted to use their shared identity as women to fight patriarchy, and sometimes miss out on the different lived experiences by different women, at least from reading theses texts. The Church has always showed concern for the poor and the weak and they attract many of these women who might find comfort in faith. However, they do not precisely speak of women’s multiple oppressions and are rather narrow minded, strongly rejecting homosexual partnerships and women’s right to decide in the case of abortion. After all, they are a colonial legacy.

Fraser’s (2008) ideas on justice in the current interconnected world, are definitely applicable to the issue of abortion. Decisions in one place affect people in other places and there is a strong power in transnational public opinion. Feminist organisations, including CR and CDD, often refer to international treaties on human rights and speak about abortion rights in other countries, though referring to global humanity more than territorialised citizenries in the question of ‘who’ of justice. Nevertheless, feminist organisations have failed to attract many women in Bolivia, who instead turn to the Churches, why the role of CDD (as in between) is important. The Catholic Church in turn, is a very powerful transnational force, influencing transnational public opinion and spreading their conservative discourses on the right to life. Furthermore, with the all-affected principle, more attention to women’s health and rights would be taken in Bolivian law.

The right to life discourse has gained more attention with the last couple of decades’ shift of focus towards rights, as Morgan and Roberts (2012) noted. The increased focus on rights has led to a competition including aspects of values and morality in the question of who’s rights? The most common discourse from all three actors is the rights discourse. The feminist organisations promote women’s right to decide and point to both national and international normative on human rights as well as sexual and reproductive rights. The Church speaks for the innocent child and means that the right to life (that starts from fecundation) is fundamental, also referring to human rights. The two opposing sides are accordingly, in a discursive battle, where they want to give different meanings to rights and aim to cement that meaning in order to make it naturalised, according to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory (see
Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). With the strong public opinion against abortion rights in Bolivia, it seems like the Church has been the one most successful in making the right to life (for the foetus) conventional. However, public opinion may take longer to change than legislation and with the High Court’s declaration in the resolution from 2014, that is prioritising the life of the woman, things have started to change. The feminist organisations do what they can to influence decision makers, but also the public, by adding health aspects when speaking of rights and present evidence from a reality where hundreds of women die every year after having an unsafe abortion.

The supposed contradiction of being Catholic and claim for the right to abortion does not actually have to be a contradiction. The answer to this thesis’ second question, could not be found directly in the material analysed. The arguments from CDD highlight their strong emphasis on every woman’s right to her own body and they mean that their struggle is grounded in their Catholic faith, but it still does not explain how they can be Catholics and feminists. That can though be explained with feminist theology. Estenssoro mentioned this in the interview and by learning more about what feminist theology means in Latin America, it became clear. CDD are passionate about women’s rights and find it important to fight for every woman’s dignity and autonomy, but they do not want to dispose their faith because of that. By calling themselves Catholics does not mean that they agree with everything that comes from the Church, rather, they find it important to stand up against the patriarchal traditions that legitimise men’s control over women. For them it is not a contradiction, it is obvious that it is possible to be both feminist and Catholic, since they believe that religion is something very personal and it is wrong for the powerful Church to decide on how people should act.
6. Conclusions

The question of the right to abortion really is one of a polarising character, charged with values, morality and different perceptions about when life starts and measurements of who’s life is worth more. The aim of this thesis has been to provide a thorough discussion of the abortion debate in Bolivia, however not in a simplistic descriptive way, rather a more profound analysis of different arguments used. This has been done with a deeper look into the language used in text documents from the three different actors with a critical discourse analysis, distinguishing words and sentences with different meanings. The two interviews have served as complementing material regarding the organisation CDD, which has been given special emphasis, due to their interesting role as both Catholics and feminists.

So, the first question I intended to answer was:

- How is abortion being debated in Bolivia? What are the main arguments and perspectives and how is language shaping social practices?

The analysis of the three actors chosen as representatives of different sides in the abortion debate in Bolivia, has given a clear view on different perspectives in discussions about abortion. Whereas the Church maintains a traditional standpoint, arguing for the right to life and life seen as a gift from God, intending to sustain an order where abortion is seen as murder, the two feminist organisations (although in slightly different ways) strive for change of the order by highlighting the importance of women’s rights and social justice. The second question asked was:

- What is the role of CDD in the debate and how can they claim to be Catholics and promote the right to abortion?

By showing on CDDs less radical arguments, grounded in Catholic values, it can be assumed that their discourses attract more of the Bolivian population, which could explain their large and respected role in civil society. The fact that they are pronounced Catholics and at the same time feminists might confuse many regarding the question of abortion and women’s right to decide. However, it can be explained by feminist theology and their will to criticise
what they consider wrong within their Church. They also have a strong emphasis on 
everyone’s right to believe in whatever religion (or non at all) they want and that is something 
very personal, whereas public policies should exist for everyone’s best. They refuse to stop 
being Catholic, they still believe in God, but a good and loving God that is not punishing 
women. Their conviction is also highly feminist, as they highlight the injustices with a law 
that can only penalise women.

This thesis has specifically analysed three actors within the abortion debate in Bolivia and 
even though they have been chosen with attention to their important roles, I realise different 
results could have been found with different actors. Also, another researcher would probably 
not have had the exact same findings as I did, but my hope is that the thesis has offered an 
interesting entry to the issue of abortion in Bolivia as well as an in-depth analysis of 
discourses used within the debate. Further research on this area could include State actors as 
well as the Bolivian public, however that has not been possible for a dissertation on this level.

The debate goes on and many interesting things are happening in the country regarding 
abortion rights, as I write. Restrictive laws, that only affect one part of the population, in this 
case women, are discriminating and used in a way to control. It would be desirable with a 
world where everyone has the right to believe in what they want, as long as it does not affect 
other people’s lives. We are not there yet.
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7.6 Interviews

