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AIEC's Interfaith Dynamics

Navigating Gender, Sexuality, and Environmental Complexities

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Note. Photographic collage of AIEC case study fieldwork, October to November 2023. Photos by AIEC members and the author. Collage: own work.

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Introduction

In the context of the XXV Conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25) in Chile -December 2019-, those of us who have signed this agreement have allied ourselves from the plurality of our religious and spiritual traditions to show our commitment to the care of the Earth.

Our mission is to promote a systemic, cultural, and spiritual change that translates into economic and political transformations in the face of the climate crisis generated by the way we live, produce, and consume. It is essential that our way of life develops within the limits of the planet (AIEC, as cited in ILCH, 2019, par. 9-10).

The foundational agreement of the Interreligious and Spiritual Alliance for Climate (AIEC) opens with a mission statement that explicitly acknowledges human impact on the climate. This acknowledgement aligns with international discourse, as reflected in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which defines climate change as the result of human activities altering the composition of the global atmosphere (UNFCCC, 1992, Article 1). By aligning with these global development frameworks, AIEC signals its commitment to goals that resonate with broader international efforts to address climate issues on a global scale.

Initiated with the endorsement of 21 institutions and groups in July 2019, the AIEC experienced rapid growth, surpassing 50 members within three months. The peak in membership occurred in October of the same year, and the present state of alliance involvement consists of 27 members. This diverse coalition encompasses a variety of entities such as faith actors, indigenous communities, and a secular organisation, thereby transcending denominational boundaries. Members self-identify across various affiliations, as detailed in the Appendix, including Catholic, Ecumenical Christian, Protestant, Spiritual, Bahá'í, Brahma Kumaris, Interreligious, Muslim, Secular, and Mapuche affiliations. Nonetheless, a significant Christian majority unites actors from Catholic, Ecumenical Christian, and Protestant backgrounds.

The origins of this alliance can be traced back to the Ecumenical Coalition for the Care of Creation (CECC), which primarily consists of Christian institutions. However, a pivotal decision was made to broaden the alliance's scope beyond denominational confines, driven by a unique opportunity: the COP25 event in Chile. This is also in the context of a growing global trend since the 1990s of recognizing faith actors[1] as vital allies in combating environmental crises and climate change.

More importantly, the AIEC's emergence aligned with Chile's growing international recognition for its dedication to addressing climate change (Government of Chile, 2018). This global acknowledgment bolstered the alliance's relevance, positioning it on the international stage, being showcased in international religious media such as Vatican News

[1] Faith actors, as defined in UNHCR's 2014 partnership guidance, encompass a range of entities, including faith-based organisations, local faith communities, and faith leaders (p.8).

(2019) and the *Federación Luterana Mundial de América Latina y El Caribe* [Lutheran World Federation of the Latin America and the Caribbean region] (2019). To the best of my knowledge and that of the alliance's members, the AIEC stands out as Chile's only national interreligious alliance engaged in climate change activism from a faith-based perspective. As presented in their writing, they advocate for crucial economic and political transformations.

While environmental concerns and climate change are undeniably significant, gender and sexuality issues have also gained prominence in Chile, Latin America, and globally. Despite some AIEC members working on these topics, enduring collaborative networks with other faith actors within Chile have yet to materialise. Contrary to the perception held by secular development stakeholders, who view faith actors as polarizers in gender and sexuality issues, conversations with AIEC members provide insight into their varied understandings of gender and sexuality and how they perceive and navigate these and other differences within the alliance, challenging prevailing assumptions.

Moreover, the complexity deepens as certain members articulate the interconnections between their perspectives on gender and sexuality issues and climate change mitigation. This interlinking of religion with gender, sexuality, and climate activism adds layers to the discussion. It challenges existing paradigms by highlighting the plurality and multifaceted engagement of faith-based perspectives with contemporary environmental and societal challenges, underscoring the intricate ways they intersect with and contribute to addressing pressing global issues.

This thesis examines the intersection of religion and development within the realms of environment, climate, gender, and sexuality. The objective is to explore how members of AIEC collaborate in addressing climate change and promoting environmental protection while holding diverse perspectives on sexuality and gender. The research employs desk research, participatory observation, and ten interviews with a subset of the 27 actors involved in the alliance. Participant selection prioritises those with higher influence in AIEC, engagement in gender and sexuality issues, and religious diversity, contingent upon their willingness to participate. Abortion is intentionally excluded from the analysis to avoid disruption, as the alliance's Executive Committee flagged.

Furthermore, this study is guided by the main research question: How do different faith actors in Chile collaborate to protect the environment through the AIEC while having differing views on gender and sexuality issues?

Simultaneously, three sub-questions support this main research query:

- What are the diverse positions of these actors regarding gender and sexuality issues?
- How do these actors comprehend the intersections of these positions concerning climate change, environmental protection, gender, and sexuality? How do the actors justify these intersections?
- How do these actors perceive each other's viewpoints? How do they navigate and experience these differences in their collaborative relationship to promote environmental protection?

This thesis is structured into eight chapters, outlined as follows. Chapter 1 initiates with a comprehensive literature review contextualising global, regional, and Chilean national history and debates on the involvement of faith actors in environmental, gender, and sexuality issues, providing a foundation for the case study. In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework delves into key aspects of the study of religion, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the relevance of patriarchy in perpetuating gender-based inequalities based on this research's findings. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and ethical considerations guiding data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting the case study, offering detailed insights into the AIEC. Subsequently, Chapters 5 to 7 address each research sub-question, primarily drawing from interviews and fieldwork conducted during the research. Finally, Chapter 8 synthesises the analysed results from the preceding chapters, providing a cohesive response to the main research question, along with concluding reflections and remarks.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Religion and faith actors have been an integral part of human societies throughout history, shaping and being shaped by culture, ethics, and politics. Faith actors play a significant role in global development and sustainability efforts and are becoming particularly involved in relevant global issues, including ecological and gender equality causes. This literature review explores the relationship between religion and global development, focusing on how faith actors position themselves in the public sphere on ecological, gender, and sexuality issues. It also examines how these are included in the development agenda and to what extent they collaborate or polarise efforts around environment, climate, gender, and sexuality areas. Finally, the review discusses the topic from a global perspective to a local perspective, zooming in on the regional context of Latin America and the national context of Chile, where AIEC operates.

A Historical Overview of Religion, Ethnicity, and Global Development from a Latin American Perspective

The intricate relationship between religion and global development has undergone dynamic shifts over the past century. Marshall and Van Saanen (2007) assert that despite faith actors' historical involvement in peacebuilding and humanitarian aid, their critical significance in development became apparent in the 21st century. This paradigm shift coincided with a transformation in how faith actors organised themselves, starting to consider development matters based on their faith interests, exemplified by initiatives such as the Jubilee 2000 movement, the United Religions Initiative, the World Parliament of Religions, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace (pp.3-4). Furthermore, faith actors embraced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations in 2000, participating in initiatives like the Micah Challenge, the African Monitor group, and the Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (pp. 26-29). Additionally, more recent collaborations extend to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) signed by UN member states in 2015 (Tomalin et al.,2019, pp.108-109).

This growing recognition of the impact of faith actors has given rise to a distinct academic sub-discipline—Religion and Development (RaD). Bompani (2019) traces the emergence of RaD between 2005 and 2006, marked by the establishment of study centres such as the

Birmingham-based RaD Consortium and Berkley's Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, a surge in both academic and non-academic publications, and with publishers like Routledge launching special series such as *Research in Religion in Development* (p.172).

However, the relationship between religion and development is complex, intertwined simultaneously with peace and violence, aid and destruction, and advocacy for and against human rights. Khalaf-Elledge (2020) reveals that secular-minded development practitioners still harbour reservations about engaging with religion, perceiving it as "unpredictable, uncontrollable, impulsive, operating outside of norms and civility, and capable of sabotaging development's agenda" (p.5). Additionally, according to Tomalin et al. (2019), some global development institutions are wary of religious institutions, suspecting hidden proselytism efforts, while others express concerns about supposedly inherent conservative and sectarian elements that would clash with development objectives of gender equality, peace, and inclusion (p.107).

To better understand and analyse these perceptions, it should be considered that Western secular development organisations operate under the assumption that objectivity is best guaranteed within a secular framework. This creates a biased perspective on religion in developing countries, which is "painted as regressive, subjective, unpredictable, and a unique feature of developing countries, " as noted by Khalaf-Elledge (2020, p.6).

Simultaneously, the history of development and its association with religion is closely linked to colonialism, particularly influenced by European Christian missionary interests (Tomalin et al., 2019; Khalaf-Elledge, 2020). Haustein and Tomalin (2017) assert that "Christian mission and abolitionism were at the root of modern ideas of global development, and other religions in the colonies were judged on their compatibility with this 'civilising' project'" (as cited in Tomalin et al., 2019, p.106). Also developing this point, Cavanaugh's (2009) research makes emphasis on how historically the term 'religion' was globally imposed from a Western ideological framework, depoliticizing other cultures and subjecting them to a comparative framework with Christianity. These historical dynamics are relevant for understanding the intersections between religion and development in a colonised region.

Indeed, Latin American scholars from the Modernity/Coloniality Group[2] have criticised the mainstream development discourse for perpetuating a Eurocentric pattern of power, reinforcing racial and colonial structures. Thus, it imposes hegemonic epistemes, worldviews, and philosophies, rendering others invisible in mainstream academia and education (Eschenhagen, 2019, pp.141-149). Moreover, as Quijano (2000) highlights, Eurocentrism is a form of ethnocentrism from which "intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were codified in a strong play of new categories: East-West, primitive-civilised, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern —Europe and not Europe" (p.542). These dichotomies are also embedded within development discourse and are often invoked to justify development

[2] Grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad, active primarily in the early 21st century with roots in the late 20th century, is a Latin American intellectual and political movement. It focuses on challenging and overcoming coloniality, promoting a critical and decolonizing perspective on thought and epistemology. Key figures such as Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Arturo Escobar, along with several other scholars, have significantly contributed to this movement (Pachón Soto, 2008, pp.10-16).

interventions (Kothari, 2005, p.432). Therefore, Eurocentrism's enduring influence on global development discourse requires careful acknowledgment to prevent perpetuating racial and colonial structures.

Intersections of Religion, Environment, Gender, and Sexuality in Development Discourse

In contemporary development discourse, the intersection of environmental protection and religious beliefs is often considered an area where secular and religious perspectives can converge. Conversely, discussions around sexuality and gender issues in the context of global development are frequently depicted as destined to conflict. This dichotomy is deeply rooted in religious institutions' historical and current involvement in international political debates.

The involvement of religious entities in environmental care has evolved without major controversy in the development arena. Since the 1980s, leaders and organisations representing major world religions have increasingly engaged with environmental movements and ecological issues (Chaplin, 2016). Several religious communities and interreligious networks have released notable statements[3]. Additionally, various religious traditions, such as Buddhism (Tucker & Williams, 1997), the Baha'i Faith (Dahl, 2021), Judaism (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2002), and indigenous traditions (Nelson, 2008; Watt-Cloutier, 2015), have maintained distinctive ecological thought long before these recent developments. In this context, trust has been cultivated towards religious and faith actors in environmental and climate change initiatives.

Conversely, discussions on sexuality and gender involving faith actors have generated significant controversy. For instance, the term 'gender ideology,' was coined in the 1990s by Catholic circles in response to the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights at UN conferences (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p.11). In 1992, a conservative alliance between Catholic and Muslim institutions significantly influenced the Beijing conference (Bayes & Tohidi, 2001, pp.3-4). Comparable alliances persist within conservative evangelical networks, opposing legislation on sexual diversity and reproductive rights, advocating for the 'natural family' and 'fundamental values' (Panotto, 2020). Furthermore, historically, powerful religious institutions have significantly influenced and enforced societal norms and values concerning gender and sexuality, often in a restrictive manner (Foucault, 1990). In this context, interpretations of religious texts have been used to support patriarchal thought and structures (Lerner, 1986), reinforcing conservative perspectives within faith and framing the issue as primarily religious rather than acknowledging its political or cultural dimensions.

The problem lies in the oversimplification of these narratives, categorising religions as either pro-environmental allies or anti-gender and sexuality adversaries. Such simplifications fail to acknowledge the diversity within the religious world, often focusing on hegemonized and institutionalised forms of religion, essentializing these relationships, and reducing potential stances to a binary choice in favour of or against the prescribed development discourse. Regarding environmental development, this perspective oversimplifies faith actors as collaborators, neglecting the tensions within and between

[3] Interfaith Power & Light provides a list through its website enumerating statements released by different religions and denominations: https://interfaithpowerandlight.org/242974-2/

denominations, religions, and their societal environments (Koehrsen, 2021). In the case of sexuality and gender, it can be affirmed that faith actors have inspired both patriarchal and emancipatory social changes. However, conservative faith actors tend to associate more effectively with political power circles in international and national politics than their more progressive counterparts (Khalaf-Elledge, 2021). This alignment is evident in discussions around legislation on homosexuality (Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014). Simultaneously, while mainstream efforts by faith allies challenge dominant Western development frameworks, they may inadvertently reproduce binary gender and religious-secular oppositions, limiting their transformative potential (Bartelink & Wilson, 2020).

Concerning this complexity, there have been academic efforts to contribute to peaceful coexistence. Some explore prospects for laws protecting each community's core interests and potential resolution options (Eskridge & Wilson, 2019). Others investigate how religious feminists and religious development organisations navigate the polarisation around religion and gender and contribute to depolarizing by building networks and alliances (Bartelink, 2021). However, it seems that there have been no attempts to explore precisely the possible connections between different perceptions from faith actors about environmental care and its intersections with issues of sexuality and gender.

To date, RaD scholars have treated the environmental efforts and engagements on sexuality and gender issues by faith actors as separate domains, overlooking their potential interconnectedness. This oversight gains significance, particularly in colonisation and decolonization dynamics in Latin America. For instance, the Catholic Church's integral ecology in Laudato Si' acknowledges the climate crisis and supports indigenous rights. Yet, it raises ecofeminist concerns about enforcing a gendered hierarchy and a conservative interpretation of the Church's structure, family dynamics, and nature (Coba & Moreno, 2021, p.480). Moreover, the subjugation of women and non-human nature can be perceived as intertwined with patriarchal paradigms centred on male dominance and warriorship, again establishing a connection between feminist and ecological causes (Puleo, 2002). The emergence of such connections is intricately linked to local contextual issues, a theme explored in this thesis through the lens of Chile and the specific case of AIEC.

Faith-Based Involvement in Environment, Gender, and Sexuality Development Action in post-dictatorship Chile

Faith actors' involvement in addressing environmental, gender, and sexuality issues in Latin America, particularly Chile, has evolved through a unique historical trajectory. This evolution is deeply connected to the region's colonial history, the tumultuous periods of dictatorship in the late 20th century, and the emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology (LLT).

The first part of this exploration will pivot around a central theme—the dictatorship—providing a framework to discuss the emergence and progression of LLT in Chile and the contemporary divisions and alliances within the religious landscape. As previously noted, AIEC's roots are traced to entities that, until 2019, remained integral components of the predominantly Christian network, CECC. Many of these entities have ties to LLT. Furthermore, information on other religious communities, mainly those actively involved in the AIEC, will be presented.

Additionally, an exploration into the persistence of colonialist legacy under the dictatorship regime will be presented to scrutinise its repercussions on indigenous communities, notably the Mapuche people[4]. This approach aims to provide a comprehensible and relatively holistic contextualization of the contemporary landscape, shedding light on the stances, alliances, and actions of faith actors regarding environmental, gender, and sexuality issues in—and emanating from—Chile today, especially of the Christian Catholic and Protestant communities.

In the second part, I will explore the current landscape and examine how the historical context of dictatorship, coupled with the intricacies of the transition to a democratic regime, has influenced the alliances and perspectives originating from the religious sphere in the public domain regarding environmental issues, sexuality, and gender.

Acknowledging the inherent complexity and depth of the discussed themes is crucial. While this thesis will offer insights into the interplay between faith actors and political-societal issues, it is imperative to recognize that the subjects at hand extend far beyond the scope of this text.

I. The Military Dictatorship in Chile: Examining Religious and Cultural Dynamics in Public Affairs that led to specific Positionings and Alliances towards Environment, Sexuality and Gender

A. Relating to Liberation Theology in Catholicism and Other Faith Traditions.

Memory is essential to bring it back, to recall, to bring once again to the heart, to the feelings, what was lived.

(Field notes, October 24, 2023)

One of the speakers expressed this sentiment during an event titled '*Es Tiempo de Agradecer* [It is Time to Express Gratitude],' held on October 24th in the year 2023. The event was dedicated to acknowledging and expressing gratitude to individuals from various churches and faiths who supported those persecuted during Chile's military dictatorship. Two of my interviewees, representing their faith communities in the AIEC, were integral members of this event's coordination team. Simultaneously, other members of the alliance also attended as guests.

The humanitarian contributions of different religious communities during this tumultuous chapter in our country's history were significant. However, unfortunately, this period left lasting wounds and widened gaps within Chilean traditional religious institutions.

In a concise historical overview, the *coup d'etat* on September 11th, 1973, marked the beginning of a Military Government led by Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, who assumed as head

[4] The Mapuche people frequently take prominence in studies due to their status as the largest ancestral ethnic group in the national territory.

of state until the 11th of March 1990. The presidency, previously held by socialist politician Salvador Allende Gossens, ended tragically on the day of the coup.

This pivotal moment coincided with the rise of the LLT, influenced by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America (1968). Formally emerging in 1971 with Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino Díaz's publication of *Teología de la Liberación: perspectivas* [Liberation Theology: perspectives], this theology advocated a radical option for the poor, encompassing material, cultural, social, and political aspects of poverty (Gutiérrez, 1971, pp. 353-355). This understanding extended to rights, dignity, freedom, solidarity, and justice, nurturing diverse theological expressions in subsequent decades, such as feminist, indigenous, black, and ecological theology.

The roots of LLT extend back to the 1960s when the Catholic Church actively engaged with the working-class poor in both urban and rural settings through initiatives like the worker-priest programs in Latin American countries, including Chile (Dodson, 1980, p.395). In the pre-dictatorial era of Chile, LLT found resonance in grassroots communities, encompassing rural workers, organised labour, and university students who mobilised for collective aspirations, epitomised by the 'Allendismo' (Valenzuela, 2013, p.111) — an ideological alignment inspired by Salvador Allende's political vision, even preceding his presidency.

During this time, there was a growing convergence between Marxists and Christians, leading to groups like 'Christians for Socialism.' They criticised the hierarchical Church for not explicitly supporting Allende's presidency in the 1970s, a stance vehemently rejected by Bishops who, in turn, accused these groups of dividing the Church and politicising it in favour of the political left (Cruz Contreras & Ramírez, 2015, p.20). This complex interplay of political and religious ideologies significantly influenced the societal landscape in Chile.

As the dictatorship took hold, it ruthlessly repressed religious organisations and individuals associated with these groups and LLT. Multiple parishes faced raids, troops infiltrated the East and West Vicarages in Santiago, and members of the Catholic Action Workers' Movement (MOAC) and the Catholic Youth Workers Movement (JOC) were detained. Catholic schools were invaded, and Church media outlets were forcibly shuttered.

The crackdown extended to the torture, disappearance, and martyrdom of foreign missionaries, religious figures from various denominations, as well as ordinary believers and non-believers. Amidst this oppressive atmosphere, diverse religious traditions collaborated in the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (COPACHI)[5] and the Vicariate of Solidarity[6], both spearheaded by the Archdiocese of Santiago and the National Committee for Aid to Refugees (CONAR)[7] and Social Aid Foundation of Christian Churches (FASIC)[8], led by Protestant and Evangelical Churches. Nevertheless, these collaborative efforts were not without internal tensions within their communities.

[5] Established through the collaboration of the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, and Pentecostal Churches, alongside the Jewish community in Chile in 1973.
[6] Which continued the work of COPACHI after it was dissolved by direct order of Pinochet in 1975, operating until 1992.
[7] CONAR closed in August 1974, making room for the dictatorship's Military Junta-authorised FASIC in 1975.
[8] FASIC still operates, giving legal advice on migration, offering training, and providing professional and humanitarian assistance. Their current website is: www.fasic.cl

The described events intensified tensions within Chile's religious institutions, particularly between the Catholic popular Churches and their hierarchical counterparts[9]. Despite the Catholic Church's active involvement in humanitarian human rights work against the dictatorial regime, it refrained from officially opposing the dictatorship until the late 1970s and early 1980s. In a parallel narrative, the Lutheran Church in Chile faced internal strife as Bishop Helmut Frenz and other church authorities championed humanitarian actions against the dictatorship, leading to dissent among common members, notably the German-speaking population, who opposed aiding refugees and left-wing individuals (Salas, 1975).

Meanwhile, traditionally aligned with the popular class,the Evangelical Church navigated a nuanced situation. The military regime, at odds with the Catholic Church, favoured Evangelicals aligned with its anti-Marxist agenda. In 1974, the Chilean Evangelical Churches (DIECH) publicly endorsed the regime, framing it as divine intervention liberating the nation from Marxism (Puente, 1977). This support led to institutionalised ties, marked by the inauguration of the Evangelical Cathedral, the Council of Pastors, and the first Evangelical Te Deum—an exchange of recognition (Catoggio, 2011, p.32). However, dissenting voices emerged, especially from Evangelicals committed to human rights,founding the Christian Fellowship of Churches in 1981. This internal faction challenged mainstream Evangelical support for the regime, highlighting diverse perspectives within Chile's religious landscape at that time.

Simultaneously, internal divisions in the Jewish community also emerged as Chilean leadership initially supported the dictatorship—displeasing the international Jewish community— and offered limited aid to families of politically militant Jewish detainees, distinct from persecution based on their Jewish identity but linked to their left-wing political militancy (Navarro, 2018, p.6). This silence persisted until after the dictatorship, contributing to a lasting division within the community.

The Bahá'í community had established a presence in Chile as early as the 1940s. Yet, there is a dearth of information indicating a specific stance taken by the community as an institution in response to the political situation and human rights violations. Although *Bahá'í News* contains a few articles detailing their activities in Chile during the dictatorship, these writings do not directly address the political climate[10]. Notably, these articles refer to Augusto Pinochet as 'president', potentially suggesting a lack of critical engagement with the circumstances surrounding his rise to power. This silence underscores the complexity of the situation.

Insufficient information exists to comprehensively evaluate the involvement and impact of other religious traditions during the dictatorial period. At the same time, it is noteworthy that certain spiritualities, like Brahma Kumaris, only entered the country in the 1990s (https://brahmakumarisresearch.org/history).

Nevertheless, for those actively engaged, while certain tensions related to the dictatorship and the dichotomy between the popular and hierarchical church may have eased and

[9] Numerous critiques aimed at Catholic authorities found expression in covert Christian publications of the time, such as the clandestine newspapers titled 'No Podemos Callar' (*We Cannot Be Silent*) and 'Policarpo' (*Polycarp*).

[10] See Bahá'í News, issues 567 (p.13), 572 (p.16), and 683 (p.3). Available at: https://Bahá'í .works/Bahá'í_News

evolved, their lingering traces persist to this day. An example of this is precisely the event of October 24th of this year where I participated. This occasion was a civil society initiative driven by a desire to express gratitude and remembrance for religious individuals who, to this day, have not received due recognition from their religious hierarchical institutions. Furthermore, organisers of this event who are members of a religious community, conveyed that their involvement in this act generated tensions with their authorities, including Christian and non-Christian denominations.

In this context, it is worth noting that the mentioned event is not entirely disconnected from the AIEC itself. The Executive Committee of the AIEC actively participated in an event in April 2023 organised by ONAR, focusing on the Recognition of Church Institutions during the dictatorship and their role in defending human rights, as published in their Facebook profile (Alianza Interreligiosa y Espiritual por el Clima, 2023). This engagement took place as part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état.

In the following, after the coming short subtitle on indigenous communities, I will present how these divisions have materialised, especially in the Christian world, also related to the engagement with the protection of the environment and in addressing issues of sexuality and gender, as well as other general consequences of the dictatorship in these topics.

B. Exploring the Experience of Indigenous Communities, with a Focus on the Mapuche

During the dictatorship, the country's indigenous communities were significantly affected. This included a combination of wide privatisation of assets and the regime's management of disputed indigenous lands. Certainly, historical racism towards indigenous ethnicities and cultures has persisted from colonisation to the present, leading to an ongoing struggle for equitable treatment and recognition of their rights. Nonetheless, during this time, state-directed initiatives targeting these communities have resulted in a setback in efforts to restore their ancestral lands. This coincided with the rise of the Indian or Indigenous liberation theology (ILT) in Latin America during the 1980s.

The Mapuche community, known for its historical resistance and substantial presence, faced distinct challenges and heightened persecution due to their proximity to the political left[11]. The Mapuche, perceived as a threat by the dictatorship, grappled with mistreatment, torture, and violence (Morales, 1999). Pinochet's documented anti-Mapuche stance exacerbated their plight, as outlined in his book *Geopolítica* (Geopolitics) and interviews (Samaniego Mesías, 2020, p.52).

The Aymara indigenous population in the Loa River basin felt the dictatorship's impact through the introduction of a Water Code aimed at privatising water resources. This legislation led to the gradual depopulation of indigenous settlements, as mining interests acquired water rights, diverting resources from agricultural use, and causing an ethnocide of water-dependent indigenous societies (Comunidad Aymara de Quillagua, Barros, &

[11] The alignment of the Mapuche people with the left does not necessarily indicate unequivocal endorsement of left-wing principles. While certain individuals within the Mapuche community engaged in leftist militancy, the broader strategic collaboration between Mapuche communities and left-leaning governments was primarily motivated by the perceived advantage in advancing their overarching objective of reclaiming ancestral lands.

Rowlands, 2008, pp. 26-27). At the same time, for the broader indigenous population in the north of Chile[12], the authoritarian regime's reinforcement of border control in remote areas[13] resulted in increased state and military presence, along with the persecution of indigenous leaders associated with leftist politics (Gundermann Kroll, Vergara del Solar, & González Cortés, 2019, p.110).

The Rapa Nui people experienced a multifaceted impact, encompassing repression, changes in power dynamics, and the continuation of specific Rapanui empowerment policies initiated during the previous Allende period, although they often favoured specific families (Foester & Montecino, 2017).

In this context, during the 1980s and 1990s, certain Catholic sectors responded to regional challenges by developing ILT, emphasising dialogue with 'Indian enclaves' and resisting the repression of 'pagan behaviours', which created tension with Protestant groups that had long been evangelising indigenous communities with a contrasting theological vision that unequivocally rejected indigenous spirituality (Samaniego Mesías, 2020, p.17). This new form of LLT forged a specific alliance with indigenous communities in Chile and Latin America, backed by a sector of the Catholic Church. This collaboration not only marked a distinction from traditional Protestant denominations but also illuminated internal divisions within Catholic traditions. These divisions were discernible in varying perspectives regarding the incorporation of indigenous religious practices, with certain factions advocating for inclusion and others adopting a contrary stance.

However, while various Latin American countries experienced a resurgence of indigenous identity through regional, national, and transnational social movements, garnering public support and policy outcomes, the scenario differed in Argentina, Chile, and Peru, where challenges persisted at the local and regional levels (Rice & Van Cott, 2006, p.710). In Chile, these difficulties could be attributed partly to enduring connections with the political left and indigenous movements until the 1990s (Rice & Van Cott, 2006, p.713), with the political elites still channelling indigenous demands. In fact, in the inaugural presidential elections following the dictatorship in 1989, various indigenous organisations endorsed the *Acuerdo de Nueva Imperial* [Nueva Imperial Agreement]. They pledged support for the centre-left candidate, Patricio Aylwin Azócar, with the understanding that he would commit to indigenous causes. This commitment included constitutional recognition, the establishment of a National Corporation of Indigenous Development, and the creation of a Special Commission to assess and implement proposals from indigenous organisations (Fundación Patricio Aylwin, 1989).

Nevertheless, despite the formal respect of this agreement and other developments, a few years later, especially since 1997, the state continued to respond to Mapuche indigenous demands beyond welfare policies—specifically those on political, territorial, and autonomous rights—through repression and criminalization (Correa & Mella, 2010; Mella, 2007; Toledo, 2007; Tricot, 2013, as cited in Aguas & Nahuelpan, 2018, p.110). In this context, a faction of the Mapuche people developed a clear self-determination project with

[12] Aymara, Atacameños, Diaguitas and Quechuas.
[13] Until then, areas in the far north of the country were characterised by an absence of state control.

an anti-capitalist orientation and the use of political violence as a strategic element to rebuild their territory or *Wallmapu*[14] (Pairicán Padilla, 2013).

At the same time, even after the regime, the neoliberal framework established during the dictatorship in the style of the Chicago Boys[15] continued. As Richards (2013) notes, these reforms sustained a Chilean-Mapuche interest divide. They disproportionately favoured *colonos* (Chilean and European settlers), local elites, and major timber corporations in the Mapuche-populated Araucanía region, subjecting them to the environmental consequences of this development model (p.2). Moreover, she also notes that indeed, in Latin America, neoliberal governments enacted multicultural reforms with limited measures, construing demands for radical redistribution, autonomous territory, and self-determination as counterproductive for multicultural society (Hale, 2002; Richards, 2004, as cited in Richards, 2013, p. 11).

These conditions resulted in a disenchantment among the indigenous population, particularly the Mapuche, with the Chilean left and political parties and processes. However, it has not completely severed historical ties with the left. Moreover, a faction of right-wing politicians persists in openly delegitimizing their struggle for justice (Alvarado Lincopi, 2021, par. 3), mobilising racism (Nahuelpan et al., 2020, par. 7), and proposing further restrictions on the advancement of their rights, in violation of the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples, the American Convention on Human Rights, the Constitution, and Chile's Indigenous Law (Aylwin Oyarzún, 2023). To an extent, this continuous hostility from the right has reinforced the Mapuche mobilised for their community rights to generally find affinity with the left, highlighting the enduring political and ideological divide.

II. Transition to Democracy and Contemporary Religious and Faith-Based Engagement in Environment, Sexuality, and Gender

As outlined in the preceding section, the experiences during the dictatorship served to either establish or intensify divisions among religious groups regarding left and right political perspectives. In this context, religious stances concerning their engagement in political matters were also shaped. In the case of Catholicism, this means divisions emerged between those who adhere to and those who diverge from LLT. This segment aims to elucidate how these historical events and the occurrences during the democratic transition have evolved, influencing the alliances and perspectives emerging from the religious realm in the public sphere concerning environmental issues, sexuality, and gender.

For this purpose, it may be most effective to structure the discussion into segments focusing on the processes that shaped the approach to environmental issues and those influencing the approach to gender and sexuality issues. These areas follow distinct lines

[14] Term in Mapudungun, used by various indigenous groups, movements, and social-political sectors, to designate the territory historically inhabited by the Mapuche in the Southern Cone of South America, encompassing both Argentinian and Chilean regions.

[15] A cohort of Chilean economists, educated at the University of Chicago who prominently endorsed monetarism and advocated for free-market principles. They significantly influenced Chilean political and policymaking processes throughout Pinochet's dictatorship, beginning in 1974 (Brender, 2010).

and necessitate different details. Nevertheless, the conclusion will also provide an exploration of the points where these two themes intersect.

A. Environmental Issues

Regarding the involvement of faith actors in environmental action, while their participation in global environmental initiatives began as early as the 1960s and already gained significant momentum by the early 1980s, Latin America witnessed a delayed onset, with initiatives emerging only in the late 1980s. Kerber (2018) points out that this comparative delay can be attributed to prioritising civil and political rights over economic, social, and cultural rights, including environmental and ecological concerns, during and immediately after authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in Latin America (p.23). Nonetheless, he emphasises that the escalating environmental degradation and climate change-related hazards spurred increased advocacy by faith-based organisations and indigenous peoples' movements (p.27).

The latter has materialised also in the rise of the ILT. In a different work, Kerber (2010) acknowledges the rising political significance of this theology in the 1990s and how it preceded the emergence of Leonardo Boff's ecological theology and eco-feminist theology represented by figures like Ivone Gebara. These movements expanded the discourse, addressing the relationship of poverty not only with the environment beyond human life, as proposed by Boff, but also with the body, encompassing aspects such as land, race, and military violence, as highlighted by Gebara (p.51).

In the Chilean context, however, ILT related movements in the Mapuche community did not gain comparable momentum, unlike certain northern indigenous identities that experienced increased ethnopolitical engagement. The latter is exemplified by the Aymara-Quechua theology[16], which constitutes a prominent aspect of ILT in the country. The difference may be attributed to the Mapuches' readiness to combat and assert their rights against the neoliberal framework and the perpetuation of colonial heritage. Additionally, it is important to note that the Catholic Church, in a broader sense, does not take a definite stance on the *Wallmapu* conflict. During his 2018 visit to Chile and Temuco, Pope Francis explicitly refrained from adopting a specific position, presenting evidence from both sides instead (Espinoza, 2018).

Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples and environmental movements have also cultivated strategic alliances. These have provided environmentalists with additional conceptual support for conservation efforts, and positioned indigenous movements as global ecological advocates, contributing to the defence of their territories (Ulloa, 2008, pp.316-317). Nevertheless, discussions of environmental justice in academia and policymaking often reflect Western liberal perspectives, highlighting the necessity for ongoing decolonization efforts incorporating indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in addressing these issues (Parsons et al., 2021). Thus, while this collaboration has proven fruitful in diplomatic spaces, it has yet to catalyse a more profound paradigm shift.

[16] As Kerber points out, within Indian theology, one can clearly identify at least Aymara-Quechua, Mayan and Guarani theology (2010, pp.50-51).

B. Gender and Sexuality Issues

Regarding gender and sexuality issues, the past of authoritarian governments and military dictatorships also seems to have had an impact on the strategies adopted by religious actors around these issues. In this regard, there is considerable research on religious actors at the more conservative end who have incorporated resistance to the advancement of sexual and reproductive rights –mostly Catholic and Evangelical denominations– especially against abortion and LGBTIQA+ rights, into their agendas. Vaggione and Machado (2020) have found that the struggle to achieve democratic stability and uphold its principles in the region has allowed, or perhaps even encouraged, conservative religious sectors to make use of democratic channels to gain influence in society and politics, mainly through creating civil society organisations, confessional political parties, and public officials (p.9). Moreover, the Latin American legislative approach to homosexuality, undergoing a reversed process compared to northern countries by progressing to reduce homophobia in the law before major shifts in public attitudes, has fueled a backlash against LGBTQA+ rights, with evangelicals playing a leading role (Corrales, 2019, p.190).

It should be noted that during the Chilean transition to democracy, the Catholic Church had a significant agency as a political mediator. While actively advocating for human rights and social justice in this process, the Catholic Church expressed concerns about eroding social norms and formed alliances in matters related to morality, sexuality, and the family with political forces that had previously supported the military dictatorship (Veit Strassner, 2006, pp.87-89). This alliance highlighted the divisions between the grassroots church[17], which had suffered persecution during the dictatorship, and sectors of the Chilean ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Church, despite the decline of the Catholic population over the years, retains substantial influence by leveraging its mediating image, notably exerting pressure on the state agenda regarding issues conflicting with its values, including reproductive and sexual rights or women's autonomy (Puraye, 2021, p.2).

Moreover, it should be noted that this transition coincided with the global shift from the second to the third wave of feminism, which is generally considered to have begun in the early 1990s. While the second wave focused on a shared "woman" identity to challenge patriarchy, the third wave rejected universal categories, redefining femininity through individuality and hybridity (Llewellyn, 2015, pp.51-57). As articulated by Heywood and Drake (1997), the third wave conceptualises the feminist movement as a hybrid manifestation encompassing "all the contradictory definitions and differences within feminism" (p.3). This development arguably introduced, and continues to introduce, greater instability in the traditional values upheld during that period.

Women's political movements also faced challenges collaborating among anti-dictatorship activists and grassroots groups in the Catholic Church. The demand for women's rights conflicted with the Church's doctrine (Guzmán, Seibert & Staab, 2010, p.974), particularly in the 1980s when women's organisations increasingly politicised in questioning gender norms, many of them transitioning from feminine to feminist identities[18] (Puraye, 2021,

[17] The leadership of Pope John Paul II since 1978 progressively made the Catholic Church more conservative and militant on family and sexual morality, legitimising rightwing eliticised clergy and organisations with a clear stance against LT in Chile (Blofield, 2001, as cited in Blofield, 2013, From Feminists and the Catholic Church on a Global Level section).

[18] Moving beyond a women's specific perspective and equality goals, to explicitly questioning power dynamics between men and women.

p.5). This politicisation drew inspiration from Western feminist waves of the 1970s but faced unique challenges in Chile due to the absence of robust left-wing parties and a weakened state. These left feminist movements mainly relied on foreign financing, as the weakened left prioritised stability and inclined towards elite conservatism (Blofield, 2013, From Feminists and the Catholic Church on a Global Level section). Consequently, feminist movements were arguably one of the weakest, struggling to build significant alliances.

Despite the latter, particularly from the late 1980s to the 2010s, academic studies have examined how leadership styles of existing and emerging women's movements in Chile and Latin America influence local, regional, and global development agendas (Cosgrove, 2010; Jaquette, 1994; Jelin, 1990; Nash & Safa, 1986; Stephen, 1997). Furthermore, the emergence of women's movements remains a noteworthy phenomenon in recent years. Examples include the Yeguada Latinoamericana project, initiated in 2017, and the globally recognized group LasTesis[19], which first performed in 2019. Additionally, groups focusing on environmental conservation with international influence, such as Tremendas, established in 2018, and Latinas for Climate, founded in 2020, highlight contemporary women's initiatives' diverse and impactful nature.

In Latin American theology, feminist and eco-feminist movements emerged alongside LLT and participated in shared struggles with secular feminism and the political left (Vera Gajardo & Valderrama Cayumán, 2017, pp. 5-6). However, according to these same authors, by the early 2000s these movements evolved into distinct entities, distancing themselves from mainstream LT and leftist movements due to inherent androcentrism and the dismissal of gender-related issues as secondary or potentially neocolonial, allegedly representing foreign white women's interests[20] (pp. 9-11). It is true that Indigenous women in Chile and elsewhere hesitate to emphasise gender struggles, as elites manipulate their cultures to depict them as static and oppressive, legitimising the denial of collective rights and autonomy (Richards, 2016, pp.235-236). Nevertheless, Latin American Feminist Theology (LFT) has included, to some extent, indigenous theologies (Ress, 2012, p.75). In the case of Chile, LFT groups have incorporated religious pluralism by including the study of other religions like Buddhism and indigenous religiosities, as well as of spiritual practices like meditation, circular dances, Bach flowers, and Tai-Chi (Vera Gajardo & Valderrama Cayumán, 2017, pp.21-22).

At the same time, collaboration between secular or political feminism and theological or religious feminism was very limited in the 1980s and 1990s, as feminists rejected religion, and theologians demanded broader connections to global economic liberation (Aquino & Támez, 1998, p.81). According to Vera Gajardo and Valderrama Cayumán, these tensions and distrust have persisted in Chile until today (pp.17-18). In addition, ecofeminism is criticised by both secular and religious feminists for its excessive focus on ecology, insufficient feminist emphasis, and the perceived support of dualist patriarchal constructions by linking women with nature (Ress, 2012, p.144). Consequently, feminists,

[19] Which gained international attention with their anthem 'Un Violador en tu Camino' (A Rapist in Your Path), also known as 'El Violador eres Tu' (The Rapist is You) against sexual violence towards women (Timmers, 2019).

[20] This perspective is likely rooted in the onset of the new feminist wave in the Western hemisphere during the 1970s, coupled with a more direct influence of ideas from prominent Western feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether.

and especially ecofeminists, have generally been marginalised, even within the margins of theology and politics.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The Religious and the Secular

To grasp the intricacies of the AIEC alliance, dedicated to collaborating with climate policy bodies at the national and international levels, it is essential to consider the historical context of colonial and international politics. This exploration not only highlights the socially constructed nature of defining secular and religious but also underscores the inadequacy of traditional definitions, which often overlook the rich tapestry of syncretism, indigenous perspectives on life and the world, and their unique ways of culturally understanding and materialising the diverse religious traditions that inhabit it.

Building on Smith's insights, it is worth noting that religion "is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define" (1998, p.281). Simultaneously, from a decolonial perspective, it is essential to acknowledge the historical imposition of the term 'religion' from the Christian West, and hence, as intrinsically linked to politics as a creation of Western modernity (Cavanaugh, 1995, p.411).

From a realist standpoint, Wilson (2012) contends that our comprehension of 'religious' and 'secular' is not fixed; rather, it is socially negotiated and influenced by various contextual factors. Expanding on this, Wilson (2020) underscores the significance of referring to the 'place' of religion as opposed to its 'role,' acknowledging the dynamic and complex nature of the relationship between religion and secularism in different settings. This perspective recognizes that religion is socially constructed and embedded within a broader social, cultural, and historical framework, shaping and being shaped by the world we inhabit. Therefore, religion and the secular are socially constructed and contested concepts, assuming a void meaning when removed from social discourse.

In international relations, Hurd (2008) notes that the negotiation of these concepts is influenced by Western European and Christian-driven modernity where two dominant secular traditions coexist: laicism (French) and Judeo-Christian (U.S. American) secularism. In these traditions, either a complete absence of religion or only a version of Judeo-Christian hegemonic discourse on traditional values is considered acceptable in the public realm of politics. Furthermore, Hurd highlights that the failure to recognise secularism as socially constructed hinders the understanding of the power of religion in world politics (2008, p. 154). Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to address this gap by contributing to a better understanding of the existing presence of religion in the political sphere and exploring its potential implications.

Sexuality, Gender, and Patriarchy

The concepts of gender and sexuality, like religion, have historical roots in Western colonisation. Thomas (2007) argues that these concepts, far from being natural categories, were deliberately constructed to legitimise slavery and colonialism. He contends that a hegemonic view of culture and history emerged, positioning Europe and North America as the epitomes of human civilization, with Africa and non-Western regions relegated to the

margins as symbols of sexual savagery (p.156). Indeed, this was also the case in the colonisation of the Americas, as commented by Boag (2011).

Moreover, Thomas underscores a contemporary issue within academic discourse. Despite acknowledging sexuality as a socially constructed phenomenon, discussions often unintentionally uphold Western constructions, perpetuating neo-colonial perspectives and hindering a comprehensive understanding of diverse cultural histories of sex and sexuality (2007, p.146). Thus, a critical reassessment of these constructs and a challenge to prevailing paradigms within academia are imperative, fostering an environment where alternative perspectives from diverse cultural contexts are not summarily dismissed or even labelled as savagery.

In the Latin American context, anthropologist Rita Segato delves into gender and sexual differences within the patriarchal order and its connections with colonialism. She explores the historical construction of men and women as foundational to her analysis, tracing their divergent evolutionary paths within institutional history. This history is characterised by the establishment of rigid gender roles aimed at securing heterosexual dominance in sexual exchange and species reproduction (Segato, 2018, p.65). It is crucial to note that this thesis adopts the same historical perspective rather than an essentialist one.

Simultaneously, Segato conceptualises patriarchy in this historical context as a political system of power and expropriation that is inherently violent, stemming from the imposition of a moral mandate. This mandate seeks to diminish and confine women to a subordinate position, allowing men to compete as equals[21] (Segato, 2003, p.145). This assertion is grounded in the idea that male status relies on the capacity to showcase potency – encompassing sexual, warlike, political, economic, intellectual, and moral dimensions – where masculinity and potency are synonymous. Importantly, this potency must be constructed, demonstrated, and displayed at the expense of femininity and women, portraying them as symbols of fear, obedience, service, and subjectivity (Segato, 2018, pp.44-45).

Segato differentiates between low-intensity patriarchy, which represents that of various pre-colonial peoples, and categorises high-intensity patriarchy that of the Western colonial project (Segato, 2013, pp.69-99). She argues that the patriarchal model imposed during colonisation, guided by modern humanism, creates a universal binary paradigm that came to replace the other models. This paradigm contrasts the 'One' universal subject (male, white, property owner, literate, and *pater-familias*) with the now minoritized 'Other,' encompassing women, those with non-heteronormative practices, race, and those who are labelled as primitive (Segato, 2018, p.66). Instead of different histories for different peoples, this paradigm proposes a universal line of development and categorization. However, considering the above, adopting a multi-historical perspective is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of gender, sex, and patriarchy.

[21] Equality in terms of their demonstrated capacity for domination over those who occupy the weakest position in the status relation (Segato, 2003, p.14).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Case Study Research Design

Guided by Yin's (2014) definition, a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p.16), the AIEC emerges as an apt case study. Chosen for its relevance to religious studies, especially RaD, the AIEC provides a unique lens for examining how faith communities and faith-based organisations engage with the mainstream development agenda within the Chilean socio-cultural context.

Centred on the AIEC's focal point on climate change, an increasingly accepted domain for religious activism, this study endeavours to unravel the perspectives of its members concerning gender, sexuality, and their participation in this specific area of development. The aim is to illuminate the nature and scope of their engagement with these issues and the challenges encountered within their religious and interreligious community. The investigation also delves into whether faith actors inevitably polarise sexuality and gender issues and examines how these entities navigate their differences on these crucial topics. Additionally, the study adapted these criteria to those organisations willing to participate since their involvement is voluntary.

Data Collection

This research employed a multifaceted strategy, incorporating participant observation during AIEC's general assemblies, active participation in an alliance-organised event, and attendance at an external event with alliance members. Additionally, the method of document analysis was applied to extract insights from relevant materials.

The investigative journey began with initial contact in December 2022 and progressed through the approval process within the alliance, culminating in unanimous approval during their general meeting in March 2023. Investigation activities concluded in January 2024. For a more detailed chronological overview of the activities carried out during this time, see Appendix B.

It is essential to note that this collaboration was facilitated by a prior association with the alliance through previous work experience at Otros Cruces, whose representative serves as AIEC's general coordinator.

Lastly, it is important to explicitly state that, initially conducted in Spanish, the interviews have been translated and edited to ensure a comprehensive presentation of findings for an English-speaking audience. This process involves omitting speech errors, repetitions, and filler words while preserving the integrity of participants' insights. Furthermore, interviews were analyzed using NVIVO software.

I. Interviews

I conducted interviews with ten AIEC organisations and communities, namely: the *Asamblea Espiritual Nacional de los Bahá'ís de Chile* [National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahá'ís of Chile], Brahma Kumaris Chile, Caritas Chile, *Movimiento Laudato Sí' Chile*

[Laudato Sí' Movement Chile], Mujeres Iglesia[22], Otros Cruces[23], *Pastoral Mapuche de Santiago* [Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago], *Sociedad Misionera de San Columbano Chile* [Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile], World Vision Chile, and *Centro Ecuménico Diego de Medellín* [Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín]. The participant selection aimed to ensure a relevant and diverse sample, emphasising active participation in the alliance and religious diversity. It is noteworthy that the majority of interviewees were women, comprising eight women and two men.

While the interviews do not cover all diverse denominations within the alliance, this is attributable to the organisations' varying levels of participation and those expressing consent to be interviewed. Notably, representatives from five of these actors currently form the Executive Committee of the alliance. This committee includes two representatives from Brahma Kumaris Chile[24] and one member each from Caritas Chile, Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín, National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahá'ís of Chile, and Otros Cruces. The latter serves as the main coordinator of the alliance. This team is crucial in coordinating and planning activities, managing financial matters, and shaping communication strategies. Since the establishment of AIEC, three institutions—National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahá'ís of Chile, Brahma Kumaris Chile, and Otros Cruces—have consistently maintained a presence in the committee, highlighting their enduring commitment to the alliance.

Additionally, it is noteworthy to highlight the unique case of Otros Cruces as the sole secular organisation within the alliance. from its non-confessional approach, Otros Cruces actively explores the intersections of religion and politics in the public sphere. It also strives to connect faith-based organisations, religious communities, spiritual spaces, and political and civil society actors, as its official website outlines (https://otroscruces.org/). Therefore, although not strictly an actor of faith, incorporating it into this research also enables us to explore the porous divisions between the religious and the secular in the public and political arena and question the traditional Western categorical division between them.

Regarding the Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago, it has been actively participating since the early beginnings of AIEC (since November 2019, as per the register). It has significantly contributed by incorporating Mapuche cosmovision and rituals into AIEC activities, despite being primarily Catholic. While not highly active in general meetings, Mujeres Iglesia network has offered guidance for alliance events and has maintained a consistent presence. Although less active, the Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile has been part of the alliance since its foundation and willingly participated in the interview. World Vision Chile and the Laudato Sí' Movement Chile are new members who joined in 2023, actively participating in general meetings and AIEC activities.

The use of a semi-structured interview model allowed for tailoring questions based on respondents' backgrounds, facilitating adaptable and in-depth exploration while prioritising participant comfort. As noted by Galletta (2013), this methodology enables researchers to concentrate on specific questions and encourages participants to share new

[22] They are known as Mujeres Iglesia network, which can be translated as 'Church Women.' However, it is important to note that there is no officially recognized translation for their name.
[23] Otros Cruces, which translates to 'Other Crossings' in English, also lacks a formal translation.
[24] Only one representative was interviewed.

insights, facilitating a profound understanding of complex topics. Moreover, following the arguments of Blee and Taylor (2002), through this approach, researchers can gain insight into the individual and collective visions, imaginings, hopes, expectations, critique of the present, and projection of the future on which the possibility of collective action rests and through which social movements form, endure or disband (p. 95). This approach is particularly valuable for studying an interreligious alliance, offering deep information about the nature of their collaboration and resulting actions.

II. Participant Observation

Participant observation was employed during AIEC general coordination online Zoom meetings, providing an immersive insight into the alliance's interactions and dynamics. Over the entire research period spanning from April to December, I participated in six online general meetings, taking on the role of an observer to comprehend their collaboration and dialogue. Furthermore, I attended an in-person end-of-year meeting at the Methodist Church of Santiago. While refraining from formal voting due to non-membership, I actively contributed insights and general opinions, offering practical suggestions for implementing agreed-upon actions. This approach enabled a thorough analysis of the alliance's operations, revealing decision-making processes and varying engagement levels. Early on, this space also allowed me to introduce myself and my research, fostering trust and familiarity with the representatives present in these meetings.

Additionally, two significant events were attended: (1) an event organised by the alliance at the Presidential Palace for Chilean commissioners heading to COP28, and (2) another coordinated by two representatives outside the alliance, commemorating human rights defenders during the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990). These were strategically chosen to capture diverse interactions, comprehensively exploring the alliance's and its members' social and political engagement.

Lastly, I participated in a meeting alongside four executive committee members of AIEC. The primary purpose of this meeting was to articulate the overarching findings derived from my research and engage in deliberations regarding the nature of work that would be mutually beneficial for them to receive in exchange for my thesis research. This opportunity also allowed me to hear their perspectives on my reflections and to refine my insights.

Indeed, participatory observation, as highlighted by Balsiger and Lambelet (2014), offers a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of social movements by capturing not only public actions but also behind-the-scenes decision-making processes, ongoing debates, tactical evolution, and unspoken or unconscious aspects that influence movement dynamics (pp.149-150). This approach significantly complements the semi-structured interview data by illuminating the real-life context and dynamics within the AIEC.

III. Document Analysis

A meticulous examination of pertinent documents, encompassing official non-published materials from the alliance, its member organisations, and communities, complements the interview and observation data. Indeed, document analysis is often employed in conjunction with other qualitative research methods, proving particularly advantageous in qualitative case studies for its capacity to generate intricate and comprehensive descriptions of individual phenomena, events, organisations, or programs (Bowen, 2009,

pp.28-29). In the framework of this thesis, this method is applied with two main objectives: firstly, to position the case study within the historical and developmental landscape of Chile; secondly, to unravel the alliance's objectives, strategies, engagement, and influence, aiming to achieve a deeper understanding of its members.

Triangulation

By combining insights from semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the goal was to achieve a thorough and multifaceted understanding of the AIEC, aiming for triangulation. Following Yeasmin and Rahman (2012, p.156):

> 'Triangulation' is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods. In the social sciences, it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods, or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct and can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies.

Hence, this strategic approach proves beneficial for achieving a comprehensive and robust research outcome, particularly enhancing the investigation of a complex and dynamic phenomenon. In this instance, triangulation, given the nature of the study, involves the integration of various methods to capture diverse facets of the AIEC and its members.

Ethical Considerations

Ethically, the research process prioritised open communication. This included clearly outlining research objectives, seeking collective consent, and obtaining individual consent from interviewees. Continuous communication with the gatekeeper ensured that the research did not disrupt or strain relationships within the alliance. Simultaneously, all participants were given the opportunity to pose questions.

Confidentiality was upheld by anonymizing participants and securing interview records and sensitive information on the university account drive, protected by an institutional security system. To ensure anonymity, identifiers such as "I" (representing interviewee) and numeric values (e.g., 1, 2, 3) were employed within quotation attributions in the analytical chapters of this thesis, specifically when quoting personal appreciations and experiences shared by the interviewees. This deliberate use of identifiers ensures a discreet and anonymous differentiation when necessary.

In a reciprocal arrangement with the AIEC, the authorisation to conduct this research is coupled with my commitment to producing an internal report for the alliance. This report will feature comments on the alliance's effective work, suggestions for improvement, and quotes from the interviews—potentially usable for showcasing insights from AIEC members on social media. Additionally, I have undertaken the responsibility to translate this thesis into Spanish, ensuring accessibility for interested parties.

Chapter 4: Delving in AIEC Chile as a Case Study

This chapter provides essential background on AIEC, specifically its impactful initiatives. This contextual overview serves as the groundwork for an in-depth analysis in the following chapters, offering valuable insights into the alliance's role in environmental advocacy and its distinctive characteristics.

The establishment of AIEC in July 2019, revealed through research interviews, originated from CECC members who recognized that integrating viewpoints from diverse religious and spiritual traditions could underscore climate change as a shared concern impacting humanity. The upcoming COP25 was seen as an opportune moment to foster unity among diverse religions and spiritualities.

AIEC's significance is underscored by its collaborative efforts with diverse members of civil society at the regional level, engagement with national governmental institutions, and active participation in international civil society spaces. Since its establishment, AIEC has actively worked to raise awareness, provide training, and make an impact on Chilean society, as well as on a broader Latin American and global scale. To achieve these goals, the alliance has actively participated in international campaigns through GreenFaith[25], joined broader initiatives such as Faith 4 Climate Justice Day[26], collaborated with Fridays for Future (FFF)[27], and organised various interreligious vigils and events. Notable among these events is the interreligious send-off act for Chilean commissioners heading to COP27 and COP28, held at La Moneda Palace, involving the National Office of Religious Affairs (ONAR) and chaplains of the Chilean President[28].

Furthermore, in the current year, AIEC engaged with the Chilean Ministry of Environment to collaborate with faith communities in their training and participation in the Escazú Agreement. This cooperation encompasses the implementation process of the Escazú Agreement within Chile, specifically focusing on the religious sector of society (MMA, 2023). Simultaneously, AIEC is an integral part of the regional movement known as *Red de Fe por la Justicia Climatica* [Network of Faith for Climate Justice]. This network against the climate crisis brings together various faith-based communities, groups, and organisations working on the intersection of religion and the environment in the territories of Abya Yala, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Another distinctive aspect of AIEC is its internal structure. Operating as an informal alliance without legal status, it originated as a grassroots initiative driven by individuals who have been actively involved in social and climate justice within their communities, groups, or organisations. Notably, its leadership is currently vested in an Executive

[25]Until the year 2023, AIEC held the status of being the Chilean chapter of GreenFaith, a globally operating multi-faith organisation devoted to advocating for peaceful climate action on a global scale. However, this association came to an end as a result of a restructuring within the GreenFaith organisation.

[26] Faiths 4 Climate Justice is a global, multi-faith day of action, led by Faith for the Climate and GreenFaith International, uniting faith communities worldwide to advocate for climate justice (https://faithfortheclimate.org.uk/events/faiths-4-climate-justice-a-global-multi-religious-action/).

[27] Initiated in August 2018, FFF is a global climate strike movement led and organised by youth, particularly involving young students and activists (https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/who-we-are/).

[28] See ONAR's website for detailed coverage of both events: https://www.onar.gob.cl/

Committee, none of whom hold religious authority. This unique structure reflects the alliance's grassroots origins and the membership of faith actors connected to Christian grassroots communities advocating for LLT and LFT, as well as some involved with human rights and pro-democracy activism during and after the dictatorship.

The grassroots structure has translated into a participatory framework where religious authorities hold no special status within the alliance, nor do they enjoy preferential treatment in AIEC-organised events. This has generated tension with former members, external faith leaders, and communities expressing interest in AIEC activities. Intriguingly, part of the executive committee has acknowledged the aspiration to establish a non-patriarchal order, prioritising horizontality and eschewing institutionalisation. The alliance is sustained through bonds of trust, recognizing the significance of dialogue and uniting in a shared commitment to the environment.

Moreover, the Committee consistently features a primarily female membership, as acknowledged in interviews and fieldwork discussions, while clarifying this composition's unintentional and organic development. Historical ties reveal that many women involved in the alliance first forged relationships through demonstrations or women-centred spaces associated with LFT or ecofeminism. Despite varied stances on these issues within their respective communities and organisations, these women often assumed representative roles in the AIEC due to their early affiliations. Additionally, the inclusion of Brahma Kumaris underscores this gender balance, known for its emphasis on women in administrative leadership and active participation (Sundar & Rodgers, 2023).

Lastly, while not necessarily universally embraced by all participants, challenging patriarchal norms manifests in a novel proposition for power dynamics and relations within AIEC. The interviewees value this nuanced power structure irrespective of their diverse perspectives. Inevitably, it influences their cooperative structure and approach to handling divergent perspectives on sexuality and gender. These issues, as will be expounded upon, are frequently debated within the participating organisations and communities themselves.

Chapter 5: Unveiling Perspectives: AIEC Actors' Views on Gender and Sexuality

After establishing the necessary context, outlining the methods employed, and introducing AIEC as the case study, this chapter proceeds to explore the analytical components of the research. As previously indicated, the analysis in this thesis unfolds across three chapters, each dedicated to addressing a specific research subquestion. This chapter addresses the question: What are the diverse perspectives of AIEC's actors, particularly those interviewed, concerning issues of gender and sexuality?

To commence, I will delve into the insights from the interviews, including information gathered through desk research to complement the analysis. This exploration encompasses interviewees' expressions, revealing the emphasis placed on specific themes and the omission of others. Furthermore, I will examine the ideals associated with femininity expressed during the interviews.' Specifically, this pertains to the ideals linking femininity

with qualities like gentleness, nurturing, and sensitivity, especially when referring to AIEC's leadership style and women's participation in the alliance.

In this manner, this first analytical chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the diversity of viewpoints within AIEC, offering insight into potential areas of convergence and divergence concerning these specific issues. It is a foundation for deeper exploration and analysis in subsequent chapters, further developing intersections and exploring how actors perceive and work around their differences. All the information was retrieved from AIEC's documents, organisations, and communities' social media, plus the interviews made exclusively for this investigation.

The discourse unfolds across five distinct yet interconnected categories, each representing a pivotal facet of the broader conversation. The first, 'Gender Equality and Equity Advocacy,' discusses equal opportunities, particularly for women, covering their participation in religious spaces and nature-related decision-making processes. The second category, 'Gender-Based Violence Concerns,' examines perspectives on violence against women and girls, encompassing various forms. The third category, 'Concepts of the Feminine and Non-Patriarchal Leadership,' explores interviewees' perspectives regarding the qualities associated with femininity, especially its implications for leadership. This exploration aims to understand the interviewees' interpretations of these traits and the significance they attribute to adopting a non-patriarchal leadership model. Moving forward, the fourth category, 'LGBTQ+ Rights and Inclusivity,' includes perspectives on the LGBTQ+ community, covering rights, inclusivity, and unique challenges. Finally, the fifth category, 'Feminism as a Controversial Subject,' highlights instances where certain individuals or groups reject discussions related to feminist discourses within their community or organisation. This rejection impedes discourse on feminism among these actors. Through this structured framework, I aim to present a broad spectrum of AIEC members' perspectives on gender and sexuality, capturing the diverse topics that emerged during the exploratory interviews.

Gender Equality and Equity Advocacy

This section examines the multifaceted dimensions of gender equality and equity advocacy. It delves into three distinct sub-topics: (1) valorizing women's roles in religious spaces, (2) involvement in nature-related decision-making processes, and (3) pursuing equal opportunities. Notably, religious communities from different denominations and organisations working directly with them predominantly emphasise the importance of women's participation in religious spaces, especially in leadership positions. While there is a general acknowledgment of increased participation, concerns persist regarding the terms and roles associated with women's engagement, revealing underlying patriarchal structures.

> Now, I think we are heading towards that [equality between men and women], and it is not easy. It is not easy because I believe that it brings such a strong cultural part of thousands of years of patriarchy. Thus, in my writing, even though it is true that the theoretical aspect should, to some extent, diminish the resistance to change within our own communities, it is not so easy. I notice that progress is slow (I1).

> Within the congregation, there has been increasing progress towards integrating women into decision-making roles. Not only in positions, not just as collaborators in a mission, but

> also in roles where decisions are made. This has been a challenging and difficult process because, although there is respect and appreciation for the contribution, for what women can offer, whether from our professions or our faith, in the various aspects of the congregation's mission, they [women] still face the same questioning that the Church, in general, has concerning gender issues (I4).

Simultaneously, an interviewee offers insights into how these norms are deeply rooted in the historical narratives of certain Christian denominations, predominantly authored by men with a narrow and restricted perspective:

> All that remains in history, and what they tell you, is that history is written by men—evangelical history, I say, Protestant history—is written by men, from their perspective, and based on an ethic that is questionable. I do not like it, and it upsets me (I7).

The cautious optimism the interviewees expressed underscores the inherent challenges stemming from deeply ingrained cultural norms. The slow progress in dismantling patriarchal structures within religious communities reflects the complex nature of effecting change, as evidenced by statements such as "progress is slow" (I1) and the ongoing questioning faced by women in decision-making roles within congregations (I4). Moreover, the critique of male-centric historical narratives within some Protestant traditions (I7) emphasises the need to reevaluate prevailing perspectives on women's roles. This imperative holds relevance within Protestant traditions and extends to communities that share similar positions, regardless of whether they align with Protestantism or Christianity.

On the other hand, non-governmental organisations spotlight a distinct concern related to women's participation in nature-related decision-making processes. From this point of view, intersectionality emerges as a critical consideration. Two voices from Otros Cruces and Caritas Chile shared their perspectives.

From Otros Cruces:

> Many women are in charge of agriculture and then of food, making them directly affected by the environmental crisis more strongly than men in general, while also being less represented in decision-making spaces to address these issues. Especially when they [the decision-making spaces] are more technical, for example, in energy transition, women do not have much space in the energy councils, in the way energy is installed, solar panels, (...) but energy is like that. But also agriculture, industry, and everything else, they do not have spaces, the decision-making spaces, for that while they (women) are most in charge.

From Caritas Chile:

> From the work of community intervention in all actions that arise from the mother program, they are purposely sensitive to gender in so far as how, in territorial realities, we find certain situations that are necessary to intervene. For example, macho behaviours, and patriarchy, which from the background are behaviours that do not favour a community intervention having this comprehensive perspective, especially because socio-natural disasters do not affect all people equally. These include perspectives from vulnerability, from the conditions of the human person, development, and multidimensional poverty.

In this light, there appears to be a broad consensus within both religious communities and non-governmental organisations regarding the significance of equal opportunities and women's leadership. Moreover, a particular interviewee from the alliance confidently asserts that these matters are usually not contentious:

> There are things that ...I do not know... like women's leadership or equal opportunities, that are not really controversial (I9).

Nonetheless, the theoretical support for inclusion contrasts with the challenges encountered in practice, revealing deeply rooted historical structures that resist change. Despite these obstacles, these interviewees express a collective hope, positioning themselves outside prevailing patriarchal systems within their institutions.

Within this context, the AIEC serves as a domain where equal opportunity aspects and women's access to leadership manifest. Women hold official positions in the Executive Committee, coordinating routine meetings and managing various aspects of the alliance, including finance, rituals, materials, and logistics for events and internal activities. Social media coordination is carried out by the one male member of the team. (Field notes, April 21, 2023, to December 29, 2023). Additionally, committee-affiliated and non-affiliated women openly take on leadership roles during events. For instance, at the AIEC's interreligious send-off for Chilean commissioners bound for COP28, they took on the roles of master of ceremony and lead speakers. Men also actively engaged as speakers and contributed to logistical tasks (Field notes, November 9, 2023). Therefore, the diverse involvement of women in leadership roles, inclusive role assignments, and active participation from both genders exemplify positive strides toward equal opportunities and access to leadership positions within the alliance.

Gender-Based Violence Concerns

Regarding gender-based violence, the most discussed is violence against women and girls. Closely related to the previous section, most of the concerns revolve around efforts to recognize women and girls' realities and struggles in different contexts, including migration, domestic violence, and gender-based violence in broader terms. Remarkably, this theme is not prominently emphasised by the religious communities interviewed; rather, it is more prevalent in the organisational sphere, where entities discuss their dedicated initiatives and work on this matter:

> Two years ago, we decided to start embroidering the names of the women murdered by their partners, and we made a big, big burlap that to our sadness ended up being 4 metres wide by 7 metres long. Each person had a space of 30 centimetres to embroider. (...) We have been exhibiting it in different places in schools, where it has allowed us to speak with young people and with other people of other beliefs, with respect to the fact that we [women] were created in the image and likeness of God. So, why do you not recognize me then? (I2).

> If I talk about migration and children, I incorporate the issue that nowadays, the most vulnerable populations within migration are girls and the girls who are arriving alone. Why? Because they are the most vulnerable to suffering violence and sexual abuse on the way, you know? To suffer human trafficking, you know? That is, the children in general, but if we talk about percentages, the girls are right in the middle (I7).

Both testimonies underscore the vulnerabilities women and girls face, albeit in different contexts. While the first quote seeks recognition within a cultural and religious framework, the second quote focuses on the practical challenges faced by a specific demographic group—migrant girls—within the larger social issue of migration. Both testimonies

contribute to a broader understanding of gender-related challenges and advocate for increased awareness and action in response to these issues.

At the same time, while recognizing the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and girls, another organisation introduces a new perspective, arguably complementary to the last:

> Among those vulnerabilities is obviously the perspective of gender-based violence, that there are situations of violence that we have sometimes encountered that, well, the most exposed is men's violence towards women in context, right? of vulnerability. But there are times when there is psychological, cultural violence that somehow circulates in the constant of how people and communities inhabit a territory, and there are cultural behaviours (I3).

This entity acknowledges the complexity of gender-based violence, extending beyond overt physical violence to encompass psychological and cultural forms ingrained in the constant behaviours of communities inhabiting a territory. This broader perspective enriches the discourse, emphasising that gender-based violence is not confined solely to explicit physical acts.

In summary, these testimonies collectively underscore the interconnectedness of gender-based vulnerabilities, addressing various aspects such as symbolic commemoration, practical challenges faced by specific groups, and the broader cultural and contextual dimensions of gender-based violence. It is crucial to note that organisations not explicitly focused on gender and sexuality issues may not explicitly highlight this as a separate concern from gender equality, indicating a potential gap in awareness or emphasis.

Concepts of the Feminine and Non-Patriarchal Leadership

In the realm of femininity and masculinity, diverse perspectives coexist within the AIEC, ranging from more essentialist to more constructivist views. These viewpoints are influenced, in part, by religious traditions and variations among faith actors who lack a unified collective position on the matter. This section explores these diverse perspectives and their religious or personal contexts.

During interviews, there was a notable emphasis on the feminine category, particularly as various participants characterised the alliance as embodying a feminine leadership model. However, a greater consensus emerged during a meeting with four members of the Executive Committee, describing it as non-patriarchal leadership, since not all were comfortable with gendering it as feminine (Field notes, January 9, 2024) Simultaneously, the discussions during the meeting and the interviews seem to indicate that referencing patriarchy as a structure of inequality is less contentious than exploring concepts perceived as explicitly feminist. Thus, it may be that the term non-patriarchal has also been preferred considering these possible tensions.

Among the Christian faith actors who participated in the interviews, two represent religious communities, while others belong to networks, movements, or faith-based organisations. Religious communities such as the Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile or the Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago, as well as Caritas Chile, which holds canonical legal status, adhere to the official position of the Vatican on these matters. Furthermore, within the Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago, an indigenous perspective underscores the

interdependent roles of men and women, expressed by the interviewee[29] as, "they are a complement" in the community. As for the remaining actors, they do not appear to have a unified stance on these topics. However, some do explicitly favour more constructivist approaches, including the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín and Otros Cruces secular organisation.

On a more personal level, individuals affiliated with various denominations within the AIEC describe the alliance's leadership as embodying a feminine model. This sentiment is consistently expressed in interviews and is particularly noteworthy within the alliance. Notably, interviewees highlight the significance of care in maintaining inclusivity and fostering relationship-building:

> I think that the great work of AIEC has been to create the necessary trust, and for me, that is a feminine way of leadership. Leadership is not only established by having common objectives and clarity about how to achieve that objective, but it is also very important – not only, but I think it is a great contribution of female leadership – it is the process to get there. And in the AIEC, I think that is what much time was devoted to; the process. (...) I believe that the AIEC is a great laboratory for a form of feminine leadership, not exclusively, not composed solely of women. There are women, men, and perhaps all kinds of options within us. However, I think it is a trust in the process. That the steps, perhaps to reach agreements, require first going through relationships; through built trust (I4).

> In the AIEC, it is very interesting. We have talked sometimes in the council [Executive Committee] that there are many women [in the committee] and that in all the other interfaith groups, they are usually male representatives, right? And we believe this gives a more welcoming sense of generating activities with dances or prayers, with meditations, providing space to all the manifestations, right? (I5).

> I think that, as women, we have a home-like perspective. In one way or another, we make sure that people feel welcome, that it is important not to leave anyone out, and that everyone participates. And I think that, from what I observe, I believe that what we bring is our home to each of our acts, and we have that quality that I think no one else has (I1).

Collectively, these interviews show that trust-building, relationship cultivation, and an inclusive environment are recurrent themes that resonate across different AIEC members. The participants perceive feminine leadership not just as a gendered phenomenon but as a set of qualities that contribute to a distinct organisational culture and approach that goes beyond traditional leadership norms. For the interviewees, these qualities enhance collaboration, creativity, and belonging within the alliance.

However, during a subsequent meeting in January 2024 with the Executive Committee, a consensus emerged categorising this leadership style as non-patriarchal. This decision was influenced by a reluctance among some members to embrace the fixed and binary categories of feminine and masculine, who prefer a more constructivist perspective that recognizes the fluidity and diversity of gender expressions. This consensus aligns with observations made in the 'Gender Equality and Equity Advocacy' section, where several interviewees express a comfort level in taking critical stances against patriarchy.

[29] As an indigenous person, embodying both Catholicism and Mapuche spirituality.

LGBTQ+ Rights and Inclusivity

When considering the inclusivity of the LGBTIQA+ community among religious and spiritual actors, a crucial distinction arises between the values embedded in their doctrines and their stance on LGBTIQA+ matters beyond their community, encompassing social coexistence and state policies. Within the AIEC interviewed members, two organisations actively work and publicise their efforts in this realm, exemplified by Otros Cruces and the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín.

Otros Cruces has taken strides to amplify the experiences of the LGBTIQA+ community in the realms of spirituality and faith. They have published diverse texts shedding light on the discrimination faced within religious spaces. Furthermore, Otros Cruces utilises platforms like Spotify[30] to host podcasts delving into gender and sexuality issues to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding gender identities and sexual diversity. Consistently, the interviewee comments that:

> Otros Cruces tries to make visible the streams and voices within religions that are in favour of equal conditions and rights for men, women, and diversities (...). We are also actively working with feminist movements, with spaces for diversity, to build bridges between these people and religious movements and organisations that want to open up to new narratives.

The Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín has made its voice heard in the public sphere, advocating for the rights of sexual diversity (MOVILH, 2007). Moreover, the Centre has played a proactive role in creating spaces to raise awareness and deliver unbiased messages to evangelical churches and families about sexual orientations and gender identities (MOVILH, 2011). The interviewee references this involvement, primarily in explaining the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, and environmental issues. A detailed presentation of this information will be deferred to the next chapter, to avoid redundancy.

Conversely, some entities refrain from overtly showcasing their involvement in LGBTIQA+ initiatives. Instead, they engage in collaborative efforts that are supportive of the community within a broader framework, emphasising the dignity of all humanity rather than explicitly advocating for LGBTIQA+ rights. This case is illustrated by one interviewee from a Catholic community who shares an anecdotal experience:

> As a result of the arrival of residents from the LGTBIQ+ community [to migrant shelters managed by this community], an inter-institutional alliance was made specifically with an institution dedicated to migrant work, but specifically working with the LGTBIQ+ community. They came, the two representatives of this community, of this group, and obviously, to present their program, they started with gender theory (...). They [the priests and seminarians] did not ask them questions; they did not question them. So much so that the two people who came were fascinated because they did not receive anything against it, right? They did not; we did. The next day, no, that same afternoon, I got emails, and they were saying: "How is it possible that...? "Francis says in his letter, he says this, they said this, and so on..." It was shocking. (...) I remembered them because they were the only institution that we have a certain relationship with; that is, we have a bond of mutual help for the migrant issue, but it generated this kind of noise, you know? (I4).

The collaboration between the organisation and the LGTBIQ+ community signals a recognition of shared responsibilities in addressing challenges faced by both migrant

[30] The Spotify channel can be visited via this link: https://open.spotify.com/show/2MzyDS9XMkNVhSoVhB39kl?si=1WSpxDdKQ5S43PglDkKJtw

populations and the LGTBIQ+ community. However, internal tensions became apparent when some members reacted negatively, invoking figures like Pope Francis. This internal discord reflects varying perspectives on gender and sexuality issues. Simultaneously, this incident, to some extent, mirrors broader societal and religious dynamics, highlighting ongoing struggles and diverse viewpoints within certain religious institutions regarding gender, sexuality, and inclusivity.

Moreover, when asked if someone was pressured to break that relationship, the interviewee clarified that this was not the case, nor did anyone question why they were collaborating with this institution. Rather, the main question was: “How do we preserve what is ours in the face of this, and what kind of link should be made?”. This question emphasises the challenge organisations and institutions encounter in navigating internal diversity, as well as sustaining collaborative efforts with others.

Feminism as a Controversial Subject

At the same time, interviews point out that topics related to gender and sexuality, aligned with feminist perspectives, may evoke adverse reactions, especially within Catholic communities and organisations. Personal anecdotes substantiate this observation:

> When we were putting together the team, we were thinking about certain people and it came out that there were only two men or two women, and it was like: "Oh good, we are going to achieve parity," and they said: "Why say parity, that is not what we are doing, we are not looking for that purpose." It was like, I do not know, like a rejection of that word (I9).

> The issue of gender, which is not a problem for me, but the gender perspective has its reservations within the congregation because it is associated with pro-abortion, with feminism, which is not wanted (I4).

Adopting the term 'parity', coined by feminist perspectives, and framing gender discussions aligned with feminist principles generate tensions in certain groups. This also in the context that these same actors, along with others in the alliance, engage to varying extents in matters related to gender equality or equity, gender-based violence, and LGBTIQA+, as presented in this chapter. This suggests that cooperation on gender and sexuality issues within the varied spectrum of AIEC actors is somewhat feasible, especially when contextualised within a broader humanistic social justice framework that extends beyond recognisably feminist viewpoints.

Chapter 6: Intersections of Environmental Concerns with Gender and Sexuality Issues

In the preceding chapter, various ways in which the AIEC faith actors and the secular organisation Otros Cruces engaged with gender and sexuality issues were presented. Establishing this comprehensive overview of the discussed topics, the current chapter aims to delineate the connections identified between AIEC's environmental activism and issues related to gender and sexuality.

The specific question that will be addressed is: How do these actors comprehend the intersections of these positions concerning climate change, environmental protection,

gender, and sexuality? Together with the follow up question: How do the actors justify these intersections?

Examining their comprehension regarding these intersections serves to identify conflicting and shared values related to their environmental goals and the connections, or lack thereof, with gender and sexuality issues. These insights are valuable for understanding the motivations that drive their collaboration on environmental issues and assessing the relevance that divergent views on gender and sexuality may have within the alliance and its collective purpose.

Explored across four interlinked categories, the findings within this chapter unfold a nuanced understanding of gender-environment dynamics. The initial category, 'Vulnerability of Women Facing Climate Crises,' delves into tangible links highlighting how women bear unique vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change. The subsequent category, 'The Impact of Patriarchal Framework on Nature, Women, and Diversity,' explores symbolic connections, illustrating the marginalisation of women, the LGBTIQA+ community, and non-human nature within the patriarchal hierarchy. The third category, 'Spiritual Gender-Environment Nexus,' delves into a spiritual perspective suggesting that nature responds to human consciousness, emphasising the pursuit of a more equitable society as integral to sustainable environmental practices. Lastly, the fourth category, 'Motherhood and Mother Earth,' analyses perspectives that underscore the connection between women and the earth through the lens of motherhood and the conceptualization of nature as Mother Earth. This exploration is based on insights from interviewees representing the Catholic, Baha'i Faith, and Brahma Kumaris perspectives.

This information will serve as a basis for addressing the third sub-question in the upcoming chapter. The focus will be on comprehending how variations in perspectives and approaches within the AIEC are strategically perceived and navigated to maintain successful collaboration. This includes addressing differences in environmental matters, sexual and gender issues, and other areas of divergence.

Vulnerability of Women Facing Climate Crises

One theme that stood out across different interviewees when asked about connections between their environmental activism and issues of gender and sexuality, is the concern that women are part of the population most affected by the consequences of climate change. This is significantly deepened in two interviews, in which the participants point out:

> It is very difficult to separate land struggles from women's struggles because women are the ones who will suffer the most from climate change. They will not only suffer; they are already suffering the most hunger, more... I don't know... migrations, everything. Everything we can think of as a crisis will happen first to the poorest women and their children (I6).

> Women are the poorest, women are the ones who manage the household, the head of household, etcetera, and there are very high percentages of female heads of household in Chile, families are not nuclear, they are single-parent families, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So, when you understand this reality, you position yourself from there when you do a project, whatever it may be (I7).

These two extracts highlight the intersectionality of land struggles and women's struggles within the context of climate change. Both make special reference to women's economic vulnerability, with the second (I7) also addressing specific socio-economic structural challenges in Chile, as the prevalence of female-headed households[31].

Moreover, another interviewee confidently states that the disadvantaged situation of women in the face of climate crises is something that everyone in AIEC agrees on:

> I do not think it would be very difficult either [to talk about connections between environmental activism and gender issues], at least in the sense of this superficial layer, that it affects women more, because everyone agrees on that (I10).

While acknowledging the necessity of caution when extrapolating the views of the entire alliance from a single testimony, the interviewee's confident expression suggests a degree of consensus or, at the very least, a lack of controversy within the AIEC regarding the acknowledgment of the disproportionate impact of climate crises on women. The document analysis did not yield any formal references within AIEC spaces to corroborate this claim. However, at the beginning of the partnership in 2019, two newspaper articles on this topic were shared on the AIEC Facebook account and remain accessible on the page, potentially contributing to an expectation of unanimity (Alianza Interreligiosa y Espiritual por el Clima, 2019a; Alianza Interreligiosa y Espiritual por el Clima, 2019b).

The Impact of Patriarchal Framework on Nature, Women, and Diversity

Among the organisations with a more constructivist perspective, such as the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín and Otros Cruces, as discussed in the previous chapter's section on 'Concepts of the Feminine and Non-Patriarchal Leadership,' interviewees consistently articulate a discourse aimed at deconstructing patriarchy. They use this discourse to elucidate the underlying mechanisms connecting gender inequalities and discrimination to environmental harm.

From Otros Cruces:

> This has to do with an epistemology, a way of understanding the world in which a strong dualism between spirit and matter has grown in the West, and where nature and everything related to nature are very devalued as objects—something that can be objectified and used for the benefit of others. That dualism (...) is directly connected to the perception of gender and patriarchy. In the sense that women, as well as native peoples, African peoples, and perhaps also people of sexual diversity, are more associated with nature, the cyclical, the power to give life, menstruation, everything (...). That means that women, in the same way as nature, are objectified, devalued. All that part of life—reproduction, feeding, everything that has to be done daily in the house so that life is maintained—is much less valued than the public space, work, politics, and is very much separated in the Western world.

From the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín:

> From feminist critique, and from the critique of feminist anthropology, it was the first link, was it not? To see that in patriarchy, men have been the ones who have produced culture,

[31] This can also be corroborated on the territorial statistics site of the Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile [Library of the National Congress of Chile], with data from 2017: https://www.bcn.cl/siit/estadisticasterritoriales//resultados-consulta?id=293410

> and women have been in the reproductive space, related to all this space associated with the mimetic, with the earth, with cycles. Thus, it was almost as if there was a natural connection (in inverted commas), but that was dismantled by theologies, anthropology, and feminist philosophy. In the sense that it is not something that happens to women; it is something that has been part of a culture, which has constructed identities where some are in spaces of domination and others of subordination. So, it is like beginning to understand this dualistic logic of exclusion (...). Therefore, what has been done was perfecting or broadening this concept of exclusion that we had and understanding the link between feminism and ecofeminism. That is, when ecofeminism somehow discovers that the same system that kills women, that rapes women, that puts them in last place, is the same approach that destroys the earth, kills the earth, destroys the ecosystems—the other living beings that are the waters, the forests—one realizes that it is not possible to make a change if it is not by changing the paradigm.

Both quotes underscore the interconnectedness of epistemology, gender, and patriarchy. On the one hand, Otros Cruces' representative highlights a dualistic worldview from the Western world, where nature, women, and also sexual diversities are devalued, reinforcing gender inequalities. On the other hand, from the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín, the interviewee examines the cultural construction of gender roles within patriarchy and its relationship with nature, especially through the concept of reproduction, emphasising the situation of women, and the need for a paradigm shift. Although through different insights, these perspectives recognize the harmful consequences of gendered hierarchies and point them as inherently connected to understandings and attitudes toward non-human nature.

Spiritual Gender-Environment Nexus

An interesting point raised by perspectives from the Baha'i Faith and Brahma Kumaris spirituality is one that transcends a specific connection between issues of sexuality and gender with nature, and focuses instead on a notion of social justice that comes from a harmonious balance with the way we inhabit the world and relate to it.

From Baha'i Faith:

> For us in the Baha'i world, as long as there is no fairer equity within the planet, when all the wealth of the planet has been divided in a more transversal way, there will be no progress, and on the contrary, all the problems will become more acute.

From Brahma Kumaris:

> Look, the issue of land itself is not mentioned in our beliefs, but there is coherence in living in harmony with nature, indeed, because it is a natural principle. If your origin, if what is most divine in your being is emerging, naturally, your task is one of care. And also, what is sometimes discussed in some classes is that nature responds a lot to the consciousness of the human beings that inhabit it. So, in the origin, for example, in this, because we believe that paradise was the origin, where human beings lived in harmony with nature, there was this context that is sometimes mentioned, right? That the lion and the lamb drink from the same water. If the consciousness of those who inhabit the earth at that moment is in harmony, then no one fights with anyone. But nowadays, there is a bit of a reflection of our consciousness that also affects nature, right?

While the first extract emphasises achieving a fairer distribution of resources as necessary for progress and addressing social problems, the second makes reference specifically to the need to develop our consciousness in a broad sense to live in harmony, which comes from a

caring position. Thus, perspectives share a concern for the relationship between human beings and the environment, while not directly addressing the gender and sexuality issues, but implying that these are included within his notion of fairness, unity, and harmony.

Motherhood and Mother Earth

The notion of Mother Earth is one that comes up at different times during this investigation, as the concept is quite widely used across AIEC during events and internal meetings (Field notes, April 23, 2023, to December 29, 2023). However, in general terms, the participating Christian denominations, Baha'i and Brahma Kumaris, do not appear to have, universally, explicit teachings using this specific concept and perceiving nature or the earth as a mother figure. There are, however, circles within them that do present this relationship, using it in the media and some making it part of their beliefs.

During interviews, participants of the AIEC from different denominations, particularly women, expressed a keen sense of responsibility tied to their understanding of Mother Earth. This responsibility is grounded in their role as mothers, nurturers, and educators. These are still relevant, as they show the approaches that exist within the alliance and the circles to which they belong:

> I think that when we [women] are called upon to perceive something that is endangering our human nature, our children, our grandchildren—my grandchildren—I think we are the first ones to place a red alert, to say, "This is not right, and we have to stand up to correct this." We are the women (I1).

> So I feel that we [women] have, we and the men too of course, but we as educators, we as mothers who had and decided to have a living being in our womb, we know what it is to be Mother Earth, the one that contains us all, all of us (I2).

> I think that caring for the earth is a very feminine moving energy. Yes, well, it is called Mother Earth for a reason (I5).

For these women, the association with Mother Earth goes beyond a metaphor; it represents a call to care for and protect others, human and non-human. To sustain life is seen as something that aligns with being a mother, and vice versa. At the same time, interviewee I5 also makes reference to how this care is "a very feminine moving energy", establishing a relationship between femininity and motherhood as linked to each other. These perspectives, while rooted in personal reflections, contribute to the broader discourse within the AIEC, shaping to some extent the narrative of environmental stewardship and responsibility.

Chapter 7: Understanding Mutual Perceptions and Collaborative Dynamics within AIEC

After examining various perspectives and approaches to gender and sexuality within the AIEC in Chapter 5 and exploring the primary intersections between these issues and environmental protection in Chapter 6, this concluding analytical chapter aims to address the third sub-question of this research: How do these actors perceive each other's viewpoints? Complemented by the subsequent question: How do they navigate and

experience these differences in their collaborative relationship to promote environmental protection?

In order to answer these questions, each will be explored in a dedicated section. The first section will discuss how AIEC members perceive and respond to different perspectives. The excerpts presented illustrate that these divergences are embraced as integral components of the alliance's diversity. At the same time, there does not appear to be a particular concern for disagreements on these issues of gender and sexuality. Moreover, this diversity is contextualised within a unity-seeking approach, emphasising a shared commitment to the greater good. It underscores that agreement on every aspect is not a prerequisite for collaboration; rather, the focus is on their shared concern for nature and the challenges posed by the climate crisis.

The second section will outline practices within the AIEC fostering cooperation, trust, and inclusivity, despite differences—whether related to gender, sexuality, or other matters. These practices involve prioritising and cultivating personal connections, upholding horizontal structures, and allowing for flexible participation.

Experiencing Diversity through Embracing Religious Plurality

The interviews reveal that within the alliance, participants, despite differing opinions on gender, sexuality, and other subjects, perceive AIEC as a space where they can express their distinctions and share their perspectives. A shared environment of respectful listening and openness to learning from diverse viewpoints exists. This collaborative environment is rooted in a shared respect for nature, a collective intention to cultivate it, and a commitment to taking action from diverse viewpoints. This is explicitly stated by diverse participants standing from their own community and organisational perspectives.

From Brahma Kumaris:

> You know, it is interesting because in this living together in diversity [within the alliance], it is important to give space, is it not? Because in this free sharing there are things that are useful for you and others that are not, right? So, it is important to have the peace of mind that you are allowed to choose freely. In Brahma Kumaris, it is like that: take what is for you and what is not for you, no, and so on.

From the Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago:

> We are in the AIEC because we feel that it is related to climate change and those fundamental parts of ourselves, of *küme mogen*[32], and everything. And also, for the gain and richness of the diversity of beliefs, you know? You share with others, learn from others, and also showcase yours, share it.

From Caritas Chile:

> We value very much the perspective that we are very different in terms of our spiritualities, but that we are united by the same principle that the care of the creation of the common home, of the planet, of Pachamama, of Mother Earth, these are just things of language.

From Otros Cruces:

[32] *Küme mogen* can be understood as the Mapuche variation of Good Living, which considers a state of horizontal human-nature relationship and implies respect and balance with the environment.

> So you can see that this organisation thinks differently about a gender issue or something like that, than we do, but we kind of try to focus a lot on what unites us rather than what separates us. (...)I believe it is interesting that in the AIEC, there are differences of opinion on these issues [of gender and sexuality], but not so clearly, there are not very fundamentalist positions either.

From the Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile:

> In the first moment, I think it helped us a lot to have clarity in the objective we wanted, which was to show that the different churches and spiritualities in Chile had the same feeling and voice and clamour on the ecological and environmental issue. Now, how did that translate? That is how we began, and at that time, we saw it more as a presence, as a presence from spirituality, right? The power of all the spiritualities united in a common cry.

In the diverse interview excerpts, a recurrent theme emerges—the recognition of a unifying element that transcends differences. Additionally, the Brahma Kumaris' representative underscores the idea that diversity coexists harmoniously within the alliance, allowing individuals the freedom to select and discard aspects beneficial to them, emphasising the liberty to "choose freely."

Simultaneously, this unity demonstrates a remarkable openness to diverse conceptualizations of nature, Earth, and the environment. This inclusivity is evident in the Mapuche Pastoral interviewee's perception of AIEC aligning with her indigenous worldview, küme mogen. Similarly, Caritas Chile's representative highlights shared values extending beyond specific cosmological terms, such as the Common Home from Pope Francis's Laudato Si' encyclical, Pachamama from Andean traditions, and Mother Earth which is shared by different indigenous traditions[33] and forms of contemporary mysticism[34].

Moreover, Otros Cruces' interviewee notes the absence of rigid stances on gender and sexuality within AIEC, suggesting a willingness to consider diverse viewpoints that might prevent significant disruptions or heightened divisions among participants. This observation likely points to the overall consensus-driven and collaborative nature of the alliance.

Fostering Cooperation, Trust, and Inclusivity

Concerning deliberate practices upheld by the AIEC to sustain the effective functioning of their alliance and its continued existence, two primary approaches emerge. The first revolves around prioritising trust at the personal level, emphasising its significance over the specific actor or denomination it represents within the alliance. This will be explored in the initial category, titled 'The Importance of Trusting and Cultivating Trust.' In the second category, 'Ensuring Horizontality and Autonomy,' a distinct practice involves maintaining AIEC as a collaborative space where all participants are equally free to engage or abstain, and to be involved to the extent of their preference.

[33] Including the Mapuche cosmovision, which refers to the *Ñuke Mapu*.
[34] For example, the collective *Caravana por la Paz y la Restauración de la Madre Tierra* [Caravan for Peace and the Restoration of Mother Earth], one of AIEC members.

I. The Importance of Trusting and Cultivating Trust

The AIEC is recognized as an interfaith and spiritual alliance encompassing diverse participants affiliated with various organisations and communities. Notably, a subset of individuals, particularly, though not exclusively, within the Executive Committee, share pre-existing personal ties preceding the alliance's formation. These interpersonal connections play a pivotal role, providing a sense of belonging and encouraging active engagement. However, during the initial phases, not all participants were acquainted. Accordingly, significant emphasis was placed on cultivating inclusivity, ensuring that newcomers and distinct collectives could seamlessly integrate, thereby fostering a comfortable and respectful atmosphere. One Executive Committee member emphasised the importance of this inclusive approach during her interview:

> The big thing was not to break the communion. Let us see, not to betray, on the one hand, our very strong positions, but at the same time, being able to set up the conversation was very important, okay? Because we realised that when there is a bond. When you build a bond, discussing conflictive issues is possible. If there is no relationship built, no trust earned, it is impossible for you to put on the table certain problems that are already difficult by themselves. So, I think that the great work of the AIEC has been to create the necessary trust (I6).

This insight sheds light on the delicate balance the Executive Committee sought to maintain. The emphasis on preserving communion and avoiding betrayal of strong positions that participants may have, signifies a commitment to shared values. This commitment is conscientiously framed to avoid imposing any specific stance, regardless of its significance to the participants.

Simultaneously, there is a pronounced awareness of the imperative need to cultivate relationships for addressing potentially contentious issues. That is, putting forward the idea that a secure space is a prerequisite for the subsequent discussion to address potential conflicts.

At the same time, this also has another side of the coin, in that a participant in the alliance who is not part of the executive committee perceives that by joining the AIEC, she has to have or gain trust:

> Our prior knowledge of the person [within AIEC] will determine the level of legitimacy. And I see that for me too. I also feel like I have the authority to arrive and give my opinion, and I know that I will be listened to, because they already know me (I7)

This sentiment highlights the significance of familiarity within the AIEC, where a pre-existing acquaintance engenders a sense of comfort and authority to actively engage. The interviewee emphasises the notion that established trust positively influences how observations and opinions are received within the alliance.

Finally, another participant offers a more comprehensive insight into the significance of mutual respect, openness to sharing, and building connections, particularly when engaging with representatives from diverse positions:

> We are doing something right to be together with a variety of very different organisations. Perhaps not so different among some, but there are also very different people there [in the AIEC]. A space is created, and I believe that we have done it a lot in this way: with food,

> sharing, trust, spirituality, in a very broad sense. (...) We listen to each other and respect different opinions a lot. They are heard well. It's beautiful (I10).

The mention of sharing meals, trust and spirituality points to a holistic approach, incorporating elements that go beyond exclusively formal discussions. For the interviewee this contributes to the richness of the collaborative experience within AIEC, even using the term "beautiful", which conveys a positive and harmonious tone, indicating a successful cultivation of a collaborative environment from their perspective.

Indeed, in the AIEC general assembly in which I participated in person on December 29 at St. Paul's Methodist Church, as well as in the act as well as the interreligious COP28 send-off act for Chilean commissioners bound for COP28 at La Moneda Palace, bonding meal sharing where present. On the one hand, in both events it was agreed that members of the alliance who were attending would bring something to share, either to drink or to eat, and a time was set aside to enjoy the food and share together. It can be argued that this practice is one that promotes closeness, to share in a kind way from what each can contribute.

On the other hand, there was also a ritualistic bonding activity during the above-mentioned general assembly. The room was arranged in a circle, with a central clay pot surrounded by representations of the four natural elements: a candle for fire, incense for air, a water fountain, and an earth fountain with flowers. Participants took a moment to connect with the earth. Following this, a group ritual involved each person receiving two paper strips—one blank and the other with another attendee's name. Using the blank paper, each would write a positive wish for the AIEC in the upcoming year 2024, and on the other, good wishes for the named person. Each participant then read their wish for the alliance aloud, and after placing it in the central pot. The second paper was passed on for private reading by the named person, who then continued the process. Once all wishes for the alliance were shared and good wishes received, the papers in the pot were set on fire, symbolically representing their ascent (Field notes, December 29, 2023).

This ritual incorporates symbolic elements, communal experiences, personalised interactions, and private reflections, culminating in a multifaceted bonding activity within the alliance and with nature. Furthermore, it nurtures a collective sense of unity, a shared purpose, and the promotion of mutual care among participants. In this regard, the ritual mirrors the sentiments articulated in the recent interview excerpt (I10), emphasising the cultivation of sharing, spirituality, trust, and attentive listening practices.

II. Ensuring Horizontality and Autonomy

Since its inception, the AIEC has remained an alliance without legal personality, allowing for a flexible structure that does not impose rigid definitions or hierarchies, nor require a specific level of participation from its members. Furthermore, the alliance upholds financial autonomy. Interviewees express a favourable view of this organisational characteristic, perceiving it as endowing them with enhanced individual and collective autonomy. It also empowers them as representatives of their respective organisations and communities within the AIEC. As articulated by several interviewees:

> What we always say to new members or people who come in is that we do not work with hierarchies among the people who participate [in AIEC] (...). Also we are a network, and we

> have not institutionalised (...). Having that loose structure and not marrying ourselves to statutes with a very rigid position of flexibility to be able to adapt to circumstances (I10)
>
> It is a network, and it is an informal network, by the way, so it is not that it has so much responsibility or should have so much responsibility and, in fact, if there is something that they want [the AIEC members] to take care of, is precisely that the network is informal (I7)
>
> When we want to do something, we finance it ourselves. We ask among ourselves who can contribute, and we put things together. As long as this remains the case, for me, it seems like a healthy place to participate. My mouth does not owe anything to anyone; I can say what I want with freedom and responsibility (I2).

Collectively, these insights highlight the alliance's deliberate avoidance of institutionalisation, reliance on self-financing mechanisms, and rejection of hierarchical structures or authoritative figures. These aspects contribute to a narrative emphasising the AIEC's commitment to autonomy and self-determination, which goes in line with fostering an egalitarian environment and promoting collaborative decision-making, as also suggested in the previous section of this chapter.

Discussion & Conclusion

This thesis has delved into the intricate intersection of religion and development within the domains of environment and climate, as well as gender and sexuality, through a case study of the Interreligious and Spiritual Alliance for Climate (AIEC) in Chile. My objective has been to explore the collaborative efforts of AIEC members in addressing climate change and promoting environmental protection, taking into account their diverse perspectives on sexuality and gender issues. Examining the varied positions of faith actors within the alliance regarding gender and sexuality, understanding the intersections of these positions with climate change and environmental protection, and exploring how actors perceive and navigate differences in their collaborative endeavours, this study sheds light on the nuanced dynamics within the AIEC. Moreover, the relevance of the findings is underscored by the AIEC's distinctive role as Chile's sole national interreligious alliance engaged in climate change activism, accompanied by its visibility in political spaces linked to the government, as well as its relationship with regional and international initiatives.

Within this broader context, my goal has been to address the limited exploration undertaken by previous studies regarding the potential connections between faith actors' environmental care and perspectives on sexuality and gender. Mainstream studies in the area of development tend to oversimplify religious and spiritual affiliations, categorising them as either pro-environmental or anti-progress in terms of gender and sexuality. This oversimplification fails to capture the diversity inherent in religious identities and the multifaceted roles that faith actors can assume, including their engagement with secular and political spheres. Furthermore, this oversight takes on distinctive nuances in the Latin American context, where colonisation dynamics and a history marked by past dictatorships influence the interactions between faith, environmentalism, and issues related to gender and sexuality. Thus, these pages are intended to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the question: How do different faith actors in Chile collaborate to protect the environment through the AIEC while having differing views on gender and sexuality issues?

This question was answered through three sub-questions, which are discussed in detail in each of the three analytical chapters 5 to 7 respectively. Following this same structure, the main results will be presented and discussed in the same order.

In Chapter 5, key findings include slow progress in changing traditional gender roles in religious communities, contrasting with what is deemed as positive developments within the AIEC where women actively participate in leadership. Nonetheless, this empowerment from certain sectors within the alliance reproduces binary gender oppositions by sticking to traditional ideas of femininity, which is a trend already observed in mainstream efforts from faith actors according to Bartelink and Wilson (2020), as noted in the literature review. At the same time, more critical and constructivist perspectives that question these paradigms coexist.

Moreover, the chapter also highlights tensions around feminist discussions in certain Catholic circles, showcasing the challenges of addressing gender issues within diverse viewpoints. At the same time, it is also noted that while within this denomination there may be tensions within Christian communities around this and diversities of the LGBTIQA+ community, this does not necessarily imply the impossibility of collaborating with controversial issues, depending on the approach in which they are framed.

As for Chapter 6, the main findings explore intersections of environmental concerns with gender and sexuality issues. Notably, interviewees emphasise the vulnerability of women to climate change, a perspective portrayed as a relatively impartial and widely shared sentiment within the AIEC. Moreover, viewpoints from organisations like Otros Cruces and the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín, embracing more gender constructivist ideologies, scrutinise the patriarchal system and its role in perpetuating gender inequalities linked to environmental harm. This critique revolves around an imposed hierarchy that positions women, diversities, and non-human nature further down the power ladder. Spiritual perspectives from the Baha'i Faith and Brahma Kumaris stress themes of social justice, equity, and harmonious coexistence with nature. Simultaneously, the concept of Mother Earth emerges prominently, particularly among female participants, expressing a profound sense of responsibility rooted in their roles as mothers and nurturers.

The exploration of these topics contributes to understanding the diverse motivations and values that shape collaboration within the AIEC, which also entail varying perspectives on gender and sexuality issues. In terms of their justifications on a deeper level, as can be appreciated in the chapter, confessional elements and personal appreciations often intertwine, posing challenges in differentiation. This also enables me to emphasise the permeability of these divisions, highlighting the challenge of categorising a perspective as inherently or primarily religious, especially in the realm of human conversations.

Lastly, Chapter 7, focuses on how representatives of AIEC members perceive the divergence in viewpoints on gender and sexuality within their alliance. Generally, these differences are considered inherent to sharing a diverse space. Interview responses indicate that issues related to gender and sexuality are not prominently emphasised compared to other potential areas of disagreement. This can also be partly attributed to the absence of very rigid positions within the alliance that could be found intimidating. There is a collaborative atmosphere, marked by a strong emphasis on a shared commitment to environmental concerns, prioritising unity over absolute agreement.

As for concrete collaborative practices in the AIEC, they give priority to personal connections, uphold horizontal structures, and facilitate flexible participation, fostering cooperation and inclusivity. Trust-building emerges as a critical aspect, underscoring the importance of personal trust and relationship cultivation to navigate potentially contentious issues. Furthermore, the deliberate avoidance of institutionalisation, financial autonomy, and an informal network structure contributes to a narrative of self-determination, and egalitarianism within the AIEC. This aligns with the commitment to achieving unity, ensuring that decisions are reached by consensus and allowing flexibility.

Furthermore, as narrated in the literature review, conservative efforts to maintain heteronormative values, often reinforcing gender roles and limiting legislation in the realm of sexuality, have been observed globally and also at the local level in Chile. In the Chilean context, these efforts have been notably led by Catholic Church hierarchies and the right-wing elite. Additionally, due to the historical dictatorship, a distance has been maintained from grassroots groups and alternative communities associated with more progressive issues. While not all belong to this second group, the organisations and communities interviewed in this thesis primarily include these and other actors who do not oppose or reject them.

From here, it can also be appreciated how, while conservative faith actors tend to align more with circles of political power in traditional terms, as indicated by Khalaf-Elledge (2021), actors who do not necessarily fall into this category but move within a spectrum of more progressives and non-fundamentalist conservatives also participate and position themselves in the political world. However, their stance may not be fully captured if measured from the traditional parameters of institutionalisation and hierarchies.

Regarding the limitations of this research, it is important to acknowledge that the case study's specific nature and composition may restrict its broad generalizability. Additionally, the subject matter of the thesis introduces a potential bias in participation, as individuals choosing to engage may be more inclined to discuss these topics openly. Although attempts were made to mitigate this limitation by sending multiple general emails to all participating faith actors, future research may benefit from presenting the study in a manner that minimises potential resistances. Another limitation to consider is the presence of social desirability bias, wherein direct questions on gender and sexuality issues may prompt interviewees to provide responses they perceive as socially acceptable or favourable. To address this concern, future research could explore tools and approaches that offer greater control over potential biases.

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Appendix A

Membership Overview and Denominations: AIEC Chile Case Study

	Original name	Name translated	Identity
1	Amerindia	Amerindia	Catholic
2	Asamblea Espiritual Nacional de los Bahá'ís de Chile	National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahá'ís of Chile	Bahá'í
3	Asociación Chilena de Diálogo Inter Religioso para el Desarrollo Humano (ADIR)	Chilean Association of Inter-Religious Dialogue for Human Development	Interreligious
4	Brahma Kumaris Chile	Brahma Kumaris Chile	Brahma Kumaris
5	Caravana por la Paz y la Restauración de la Madre Tierra	Caravan for Peace and the Restoration of Mother Earth	Spiritual
6	Caritas Chile	Caritas Chile	Catholic
7	Centro Ecuménico Diego de Medellín (CEDM)	Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín	Ecumenical Christian
8	Centro Tremonhue	Tremonhue Centre	Spiritual
9	Coalición Ecuménica por el Cuidado de la Creación (CECC)	Ecumenical Coalition for the Care of Creation	Ecumenical Christian
10	Comunidad Eclesial de Base Óscar Romero Sur Austral	Grassroot Ecclesial Community Oscar Romero Austral South	Catholic
11	Comunidad Mapuche Trepeiñ	Trepeiñ Mapuche Community	Mapuche
12	Comunidad Teológica Evangélica de Chile (CTE)	Theological Evangelical Community of Chile	Protestant
13	Consejo Latinoamericana de Iglesias (CLAI)	Latin American Council of Churches	Ecumenical Christian
14	Con-spirando	Con-spirando	Spiritual
15	Equipo de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación (JPIC), Misioneros del Verbo Divino	Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Team, Society of the Divine Word	Catholic
16	Equipo provincial de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación (JPIC), Misioneros Claretianos San José del Sur	Provincial Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Team, Claretian Missionaries of Saint Joseph of the South	Catholic
17	Fondacio Chile	Fondacio Chile	Catholic
18	Fundación Catarata de la Amistad y Educación Chilena Turca	Catarata Foundation of Chilean-Turkish Friendship and Education	Muslim
19	Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Chile (IELCH)	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chile	Protestant
20	Iglesia Luterana en Chile (ILCH)	Lutheran Church of Chile	Protestant
21	Iglesia Metodista de Chile	Methodist Church of Chile	Protestant
22	Movimiento Laudato Sí' Chile	Laudato Sí' Movement Chile	Catholic
23	Mujeres Iglesia	Mujeres Iglesia	Catholic
24	Otros Cruces	Otros Cruces	Secular
25	Pastoral Mapuche de Santiago	Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago	Catholic / Mapuche
26	Sociedad Misionera de San Columbano Chile	Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile	Catholic
27	World Vision Chile	World Vision Chile	Ecumenical Christian

Appendix B

Chronological Overview of Research Activities

Date	Activity	Venue
10-Jan-23	Meeting: presentation of the thesis project to the general coordinator of the AIEC	Online - Google Meet
21-Apr-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting	Online - Zoom
30-Jun-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting	Online - Zoom
02-Aug-23	Interview: Brahma Kumaris Chile	Online - Zoom
14-Aug-23	Interview: World Vision Chile	Online - Zoom
17-Aug-23	Interview: Caritas Chile	Online - Zoom
21-Aug-23	Interview: Missionary Society of St. Columban Chile	Online - Zoom
22-Aug-23	Interview: National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahá'ís of Chile	Online - Zoom
25-Aug-23	Interview: Otros Cruces	Online - Zoom
04-Sep-23	Interview: Mujeres Iglesia	Online - Zoom
07-Sep-23	Interview: Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín	Online - Zoom
10-Oct-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting	Online - Zoom
24-Oct-23	Participant Observation: 'It is Time to Express Gratitude' event	Onsite - Museum of Memory and Human Rights Auditorium
02-Nov-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting	Online - Zoom
06-Nov-23	Interview: Laudato Si' Movement Chile	Online - Zoom
09-Nov-23	Participant observation: AIEC interreligious COP28 send-off act	Onsite - Las Camelias Courtyard of La Moneda Palace
16-Nov-23	Interview: Mapuche Pastoral of Santiago	Onsite - Divine Word Missionaries Headquarters
17-Nov-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting (COP28 send-off act evaluation)	Online - Zoom
29-Dec-23	Participant observation: AIEC general meeting	Onsite - San Pablo Methodist Church
02-Jan-24	Meeting: debrief and investigation closure with the AIEC Executive Committee	Onsite - 'Me Gusta' coffee place