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Teaching at the Borders:

Exploring the pedagogical challenges of Gender Studies Departments in Sweden

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Abstract

Gender Studies departments have struggled to legitimize their own space in the Swedish academia from 70's. Even when the institutionalization of Gender Studies can be told as a success story, its departments continue to be quite paradoxical spaces in the academia, where the feminist oppositional tendency seems to collide with academic standards and requirements. Additionally, this clash is aggravated by an increasingly neoliberal academia. This thesis seeks to unfold how the paradoxical position of Gender Studies influences the pedagogical practices of the departments and its teachers. The study consists of a two-layered analysis where the main challenges at an institutional and pedagogical level were identified and analyzed. In order to do so, a qualitative study was conducted with a phenomenological orientation, through which nine in-depth interviews were conducted with Gender Studies teachers working in different universities in Sweden. Using Borderlands concepts by Chicana feminists and radical pedagogies, it is discussed that Gender Studies departments could be understood as borderlands, meaning that they exist between contradictory demands. These borders can also be found in the teaching practice, where teachers try to balance between different pedagogical demands, some of the borders identified through this study were the use of experience telling and/or theories; the use of emotions and/or rationality; the learning value of conflict and/or safety; and community-led and/or teacher-led classrooms.

Keywords: Gender Studies, Feminist academia, norm-critical pedagogies, feminist pedagogies, radical pedagogies, neoliberal academia

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*Because I, a mestiza,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente.
(Anzaldúa, 1987, p.77)*

1. Introduction

This is a piece about existing between borders, about being in several cultures at the same time, about being torn, but also, about finding how to stand in such a paradoxical position. Such is the position of Gender Studies¹ (GS) departments in the Swedish universities. These departments, previously known as Women's Studies, have struggled to legitimize their own space in the Swedish academia from 70's and on. However, the institutionalization of these departments focusing on feminist theories in universities has not been uncontested, but it has generated a number of contradictions and tensions that continue to be experienced in the current feminist academia. In very few words, I could say that these tensions are generated by the incorporation of a field of study which has at its core a critical oppositional tradition, into a very classical institution such as the university. This paradoxical relationship results in contradictory standards that collide in GS departments as academic spaces. Adding up to those tensions, with a growing neoliberalization of

¹ Gender Studies are also called Women Studies or Feminist Studies in different countries in different Universities, any of the names has remained unquestioned. Through this study I chose to stick to Gender Studies as this is the name used in Sweden for these programs.

educational institutions and resource constraints, research and teaching are increasingly measured in terms of effectiveness and innovation, where critical reflexive approaches such as Gender Studies could tend to be granted less value (Fahlgren, Giritli-Nygren, & Sjöstedt Landén, 2016; Hark, 2016).

Inspired by Chicana feminism and borrowing Anzaldúa's terms (1987), I argue that Gender Studies (GS) particular position in academia could be understood as a *borderland*, meaning that it is a place that exists between different realms and demands. Of course, GS departments do not exist on their own, but they are constituted by the bodies of teachers, researchers, administrative staff and students. By consequence, GS scholars also occupy particular positions, which, continuing with Anzaldúa's work, could be seen as *mestizas*, being subjects with hybrid or split identities.

This paradoxical position of GS, full of negotiations and contradictions, and its influence in the academic practice constitutes the phenomenon that I am interested in exploring. Posing questions in order to explore and challenge the institutionalization of the GS field brings is nothing new, it has been a topic widely explored by a number of feminist scholars. The work of scholars such as Gabrielle Griffiin, Sabine Hark, Mia Liinason, Maria do Mar Pereira, among many others has made me aware of the need to take a critical look at the position I occupy, currently within academia, and has motivated the present project. Furthermore, some of these scholars have called for the need to have more knowledge about the tensions surrounding GS and their implications for its academic practices. Even when the field has been vastly researched, less can be found about its pedagogical practices and challenges. My study aims to add up to the work done in this self-reflexive field while trying to contribute to one of the aspects often less looked at, teaching.

The aim of this project is to provide an exploration of the position that GS scholars inhabit and delve into how it influences their teaching practices. I am interested in exploring how teachers negotiate between several contradictory values, such as the demands of academic careers versus social activism, organizational hierarchies versus collectivity ideals, the struggle for legitimizing the learning spaces as feminist and as scientific at the same time, to name a few of

these tensions, and how these negotiations are reflected in their teaching style and pedagogic ideas.

The main **research question that guides my study is, how does the paradoxical position of the GS departments and its scholars within the academy influences their sense-making of their pedagogical practices?** In order to respond to this question, I will conduct a two-layered analysis in which I will identify which the main contradictory demands for teaching in GS are, both from an institutional and pedagogical level. Then, I intend to analyze how the identified institutional and pedagogical constraints shape the GS teachers' practices. As my research question suggests, my main interest is to investigate the pedagogical challenges occurring in the GS classrooms, however, in order to fully understand the context in which the teaching-learning occurs I also delve into the institutional level of the field.

It is worth saying that through this study, I do not aim to do a critique of the GS teaching practice, or to suggest recommendations about what should or should not be done, but I rather aim to provide an exploration of the field contradictions, and how those are ultimately translated into the teaching-learning processes in the classroom².

I am aware I occupy myself a paradoxical position while writing this thesis, and it is perhaps a good example of the contradictory demands I intend to dig into. I write a piece that could be seen as a critical reflection about an institution from which at the same time I seek recognition and validation, especially with a project such as a Master thesis. The work I intend to produce is then uncomfortably torn; on one hand, I have a critical will encouraged by feminist Chicana theory, of creating radical work with little attachment to academic standards as a way of claiming different forms of producing knowledge; but on the other hand, I have a contradictory will to attach to the standards and become a 'proper' scholar, aiming for the recognition of my work, even more, if I am looking to stay in the academic

² By classroom, I do not mean the physical traditional space, but any space where learning processes happen, including virtual ones. Through this study I use the term classroom and learning space interchangeably.

profession. This is one example of the kind of contradictions that GS scholars negotiate in their research and teaching practice and that I intend to investigate.

In her work, *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks³ (1994) calls attention to an educational crisis, where teachers do not want to teach and students do not want to learn, but moreover, where the teaching part of the job of scholars is deemed the less valuable aspect of the academic profession. It might be for this same reason that not so much research is done in the field of education. However, critical education theorists have argued that teaching carries transformative potential, and that “the classroom remains a space the classroom remains as the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (hooks, 1994, p.12). If this is the case, education deserves more attention, especially from those fields aiming towards social transformation such as GS. It is my hope that this research contributes into bringing GS pedagogies to the centre and placing attention not only to the knowledge produced by these departments but also to the political subjects that are produced through its educational programs. Furthermore, if teaching has such a transformative potential, why not start there?

This study begins with an exploration of the previous research that has been done in the field of the institutionalization of GS in Sweden as well as identifying specific pedagogical challenges in this discipline. In the following chapter, I develop the theoretical concepts of borderlands and radical pedagogies, which I intend to use to analyze the phenomenon I am interested in. Then, I will move on the methods chapter where I explain how the study has been conducted, which orientation it has and its limitations. This will be followed by an analysis that is divided into two sections, an institutional analysis and then a pedagogical analysis of GS challenges. Finally, in the discussion section, I will bring the different themes found together to draw conclusions from the study.

³ Always written in lower-case

2. Background: Gender Studies and its complexities

Through this chapter, I explore some of the challenges that have been identified in GS, both as a subject field and as a young institutionalized discipline. Since the institutionalization of Gender Studies as a Department, several scholars have reflected on the complexities that the process of institutionalization entails. Lately, scholars have also reflected on how an increasingly neoliberal academia has added up to the demands colliding in GS departments in the University. The review that I present through this chapter will also ground my assumptions for this research as it identifies some of the complexities I will explore.

Fahlgren et al., (2016) describe, through an autobiographical account, the experiences of making GS a legitimate part of the academy as a process of ‘negotiations and contestations’ that have been extended since its institutionalization, meaning that these struggles are not over, but continue to change as the institution evolves. I explore some of these negotiations and contestations, which have been identified by scholars in the field.

It is worth mentioning that through the institutionalization of GS, more and more, GS tends to be taught in the specific GS classroom as a specific discipline. However, feminist theory teaching should not be understood as exclusive for this specific department, as there are also plenty of courses and teachers using feminist theory and teaching it in different departments such as Humanities, English Studies, Literature, Geography, etc. Perhaps, some of the findings of this study can also be applied to those classrooms, however, the focus of the study is GS departments, in order to understand not only the complexities it has as a subject field but also institutionally.

I have separated the negotiations and constraints identified into two sections. In the first part, I will explore those related to the institutionalization of the field within the academy. In the second part, I explore the pedagogical challenges that have been identified at the GS field as a consequence of the institutionalization and

also what are some pedagogical recommendations done by scholars who have explored this topic.

2.1. Institutional complexities

In order to understand the setting where this study takes place, it is relevant to understand the institutional context where GS departments operate in Sweden. Throughout this section, I will explore the Swedish university as the institution that holds GS departments and how the relationship between them results in complex political and epistemological tensions.

As Hark (2016) argues, reflecting about the institutionalization of GS is nothing new, GS scholars have been posing these questions since this process began, which could mean that it has always been a contested issue. In some sense, GS's story in Sweden can be told as a success story (Griffin, 2010). Despite being a relatively young discipline, it is a well-established discipline in which it is possible to earn academic credentials such as Bachelor degrees, Master degrees, and even PhD education. However, Fahlgren et al., (2016) argue, that even when GS have reached certain legitimacy and even material spaces in the Swedish academy it is still a marginalized space as these departments often depend on bigger departments or interdisciplinary teams, where often some values need to be compromised in order not to be excluded.

Additionally, the transformation of the universities into models similar to an enterprise has aggravated the constraints for GS in the university. The university as an institution has historically mirrored the economic and production needs of society. Therefore, it has transformed according to the needs of the economic systems, for instance, it originated from a free competition environment during the Renaissance and then it transformed into a Humboldtian model of specialization during the Industrial Revolution (Alvanoudi, 2009). Nowadays, in late capitalism, intellectual labour has become an object of economic exploitation. In this neoliberal logic, knowledge becomes a valuable commodity which is subjected to the needs of the market (Alvanoudi, 2009; Hark & Wetterer, 2010). Therefore, the neoliberal

university is almost a model of an enterprise university, which receives customers, sells them a commodity, and shapes products according to the needs of the market. However, in the enterprise university, students are not only the customers but also the products which need to be shaped by what the market needs (Alvanoudi, 2009). Universities have quickly evolved into what Hark (2016) calls “entrepreneurial” entities which have the main task of producing applicable skills and knowledge to ensure economic competitiveness. Therefore, every member of the organization is now perceived as a resource that needs to be used productively in an environment of continuous limited resources and increasing responsibilities. Under this model, scholars have become a “scientific proletariat” working often under precarious conditions with the aim to stay in a competitive and individualistic academia (Alvanoudi, 2009).

In this atmosphere, the work produced by a field that often features a critical reflection of power and its politics aiming toward transformation, such as GS (Lundberg & Werner, 2013), is not often encouraged. Consequently, authors such as Hark (2016) have argued that as successful as it might seem, GS programs also are at risk of disappearing from Universities together with some Humanities and Social Sciences, as these departments often fail to prove their value in increasingly entrepreneurial or revenue-driven institutions.

In Sweden, the New Public Management (NPM) reform has been one of the catalysts into the neoliberal academia. According to Berg (2010) due to the NPM reform in Sweden, the Universities have become more bureaucratic and controlled institutions, where the academic profession has also been affected by an increased administrative workload and increased accountability to governance organisms. Additionally, scholars commonly have more students with fewer hours dedicated to teaching in each course. As a result, administrative positions have increased and might become an attractive choice for some scholars that do not enjoy teaching (Berg, 2010).

In this neoliberal system, which has inherited practices from the business world, audit culture has also become common in the Swedish academia, where relevance, quality, scientific excellence impartiality, and efficiency have become

indicators against which GS practices, among other disciplines, is regulated (Fahlgren, Gillander Gådin, Giritli Nygren, Johansson, & Söderberg, 2011; Griffin, Bränström-Öhman, & Kalman, 2013). In a similar sense, Berg (2010) argues that the NPM reform brings the management structure from the private sector into the educational sector, including performance management systems, efficiency assessments, budgetary constraints, and pressure to achieve measurable goals.

As a consequence, GS scholars might need to compromise certain values in order to survive in this environment. GS researchers have elaborated on these tensions. For instance, in order to keep a space in academia, or to climb into better positions in their academic career, gender scholars often need to confirm, resign, or disguise project proposals to make them look more attractive to the fund holders, and ensure the sustainability of the field (Fahlgren et al., 2016).

Additionally, as Davies & Petersen (2005) argue, scholars become subjects of neoliberalism, influenced by a competitive individual culture that seeks to comply with what the institution desires from them. After all, becoming an “appropriate subject” comes with the satisfaction of being acknowledged and recognized (Fahlgren et al., 2016). As a consequence, the feminist desire to explore power dynamics, including those playing in the neoliberal academia, conflicts with the will to reach academic legitimacy and qualify as a researcher to be able to hold academic power positions (Wahl, as cited in Fahlgren et al., 2016).

Perhaps the focus on critical reflection about power relations is one of the aspects that make GS a paradoxical space in academia. I would not try to define the aim of GS in one sentence, but it can certainly be said that one of the main goals of feminist theory is deeply rooted in a critique of power relations, including those in which knowledge is produced. Lundberg & Werner (2013) argue that a “critical approach aimed at change, as well as an active and conscious relation to power and identified hierarchies” is the most basic feature of the discipline.

With these complexities, the rooms of GS become ambivalent spaces, where feminist scholars attempt to produce knowledge that would challenge the power structures, including those of the university, while trying to live up to the expectations of the institution that is measuring them in order to determine their

worth in resources. By doing this the feminist researcher is also reproducing these practices, as they are inevitably part of the institutions in which we engage, “constituted by them and constituting them with our embodied practices (Davis and Gannon, as cited in Fahlgren et al., 2016).

Maintaining this position with a potential for transformation depends on the “continuous critical reflection over feminist teaching and research as oppositional, radical and transformative” (Liinason, 2011, p.18). Therefore, it is highly relevant for feminist theorists to challenge the mechanisms in which power is executed in the academia, and through the several activities of the academic profession, such as knowledge production and teaching. Therefore, it could be said that feminist scholars are embedded within the same institution that is to be criticized, somehow making GS scholars accomplices to the institution. Even when this could be a relationship of which scholars are aware and critical about, it still brings a number of complexities.

Fahlgren et al., (2016) explore this tension reflected on a wonderful example on how to do research in such way that it complies with normalized academic standards, even when the aim is to challenge that normalization. They express “In our research should we accept traditional academic demands, the normalized ways of doing research and writing, if we want to challenge normalization? I am torn uncomfortably between the two.” It would seem more logical to challenge something without complying with it, however, if that work needs to be recognized it obliges scholars to make certain compromises. They explain:

Of course, I want to challenge scholarly theory, method, and form; that's what I've always thought. And written. At the same time, I know that at the end of every year I'm going to be asked to list the project group's international publications and external funding, and that's what's going to count. And it's me who's going to be held accountable for the answers (Fahlgren et al., 2011, p.114).

This paradoxical position might travel to teaching as well, even when wanting to teach in radical ways, if this teaching is to be recognized, it needs to comply with

certain standards. Such ambivalence might lead scholars to comply with the hegemonic academic discourse, therefore legitimizing the exact discourse that aspires to be criticized.

According to Davies & Petersen, (2005) what happens then is that “the mantra becomes that we must be pragmatic and live within the resources we have” (p.88), for which is understood that complying with certain standards is only the means to obtain certain resources. However, it is also that scholar, desiring to be included, appropriate, and hireable, would also try to live up to the neoliberal expectations (Hey & Bradford, 2004).

The results of this reforms and bureaucratization of education could be reflected in tired and burnt out teachers. Griffin (2010) reflects that the time she used to spend in activist and political advocacy activities goes more and more to filling forms, attending meetings, transparency reviews, monitoring, etc., even when any of these activities are rewarded or even perceived, either by students or non-academics, but still needed.

Additionally, Fahlgren et al., (2016) also recognize a new tendency that challenges the stability of GS departments, which they term *overing*, drawing on Sara Ahmed’s work. *Overing* could be understood as the idea that after successfully incorporating certain initiative, the social problem that initially originated it is now permanently solved. It has been argued that Sweden has got over its gender challenges as the feminist ideals have been successfully incorporated into every aspect of Swedish culture, so there is no longer a need for efforts pushing this agenda (Alnebratt as cited in Fahlgren et al., 2016). Under this argument, some Gender research centres in the Nordic region have been challenged, and even closed such as the Åbo Academy in Finland, the GS programme in Malmö, and the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research funding has been questioned (Fahlgren et al., 2016).

The current atmosphere then leaves the departments with academics and researchers who work precarious jobs, often with reduced time and energy to involve in activist movements, or even to focus on their pedagogical responsibilities. This work conditions, where instability and competition are

characteristic, might have an effect on the decrease of political commitment among feminist academics (de la Bellacasa, 2002).

Through this section I have elaborated on how the position of GS in the university is a paradoxical one, the feminist determination to critically reflect on power relation, inclusive of those of the neoliberal academia, conflicts with the individual need to have academic legitimacy in order to be able to hold academic power positions and even subsist as independent departments. Additionally, it has an effect on the political commitment of the scholars, which undoubtedly has an effect on its students. In the following chapter, I explore the pedagogical ones.

2.2 Pedagogical complexities

Over this section, I explore the challenges that have been identified around the pedagogies of GS departments. It is worth noting that there is vast research done on the institutional constraints of the field, however notably less material can be found on how these challenges influence the teaching-learning processes taking place in these departments.

In 2013, the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research published a special report on Education and Pedagogy in GS where the authors claim that because of the critical thinking aim at the centre of the feminist field, the educational methods used to develop these skills in students are to be constantly questioned. Therefore, it is claimed that GS scholars are constantly working to improve the didactics of the department, inspired by Paulo Freire, bell hooks and Kumashiro mainly, even when there is no underlying pedagogical system to which all GS departments in Sweden subscribe too. (Lundberg & Werner, 2013). I develop on these authors ideas on radical or power-critical pedagogies, to understand how they are used by the GS scholars.

GS is a especially complex place to teach for several reasons. In Maria do Mar Pereira's (2012) words the GS classroom is an "intense" one, as it rarely limits to reading and discussing theories, instead, there is a heavy emotional load attached to analyzing the world in a critical way and trying to change it. To enter to a GS

room “is to dare to prepare for reality perhaps not being what you have previously perceived it to be and to dare to challenge your normalized and quite comfortable – perhaps also privileged – picture of reality” (Pease as cited in Fahlgren et al., 2016, p. 125). In other words, the critical approach of GS leads to the critical reflexivity of one own attitudes, values and norms, which might shake students’ self-image and identity, and as positive as this process might be to the knowledge and critical skills of the students, it is almost always a painful process (Larsson, 2013).

Therefore, teaching about power structures can bring complexities to the GS scholar, as this combination produces an ambivalence for the teachers’ role, which at the same time is an authority for the students, teaching theories that challenge the position and the dynamics of this very authority. (Lundberg & Werner, 2013)

Additionally, to the discomfort associated by getting awareness of power relations, according to Lundberg and Werner (2013), the critical analysis on concrete social, cultural, political and economic conditions generally not only leads to theoretical discussions because it also touches upon the personal lived experience of students, leading to highly engaged students, emotionally and intellectually. However, GS is also a highly theoretical field, a critical science, which produces ‘academic’ knowledge, leaving the field in between personal and public spheres, experience and scholarly discussion. This kind of setting requires pedagogical methods which can fully accommodate the emotional and rational parts of the learning process (Lundberg & Werner, 2013).

In summary, GS then needs to move between several dualities that are contradictory but indivisible, such as “knowing, being and doing, between experience-based learning and scholarly dialogue, between self-reflective knowledge and cross-boundary science”. (Lundberg & Werner, 2013, p.9) I extend on how some feminist scholars have reflected on this division and suggested methods on how to deal with them in my theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical framework

Throughout the following chapter I intend to present the main concepts of the theories that will guide my analysis, or in other words, through which kind of lenses I intend to look at the phenomenon I am interested in exploring.

It is important to mention that my theory selection is informed by some feminist critical education theories combined with a postcolonial perspective, meaning that even when I do not use post-colonial theories directly as part of my analysis I chose to use theorists that have challenged the hegemonic Western production of knowledge. For instance, I chose to use Anzaldúa, whose work could be understood as in the realm of embodiment theories, over Western theorists as her work is not often found in mainstream educational theories and because I feel her work closer to my own personal views. In a similar sense, I use bell hooks as an educational theorist, instead of using Paulo Freire who is considered one of the main contributors to norm-critical education, for her experience working in Women's Studies and because she does include gender and race aspects in her work.

As this is a two-layered analysis, in which I will identify the main contradictory demands first in an institutional level and secondly in a pedagogical level, I also divide the theories I will mainly use for each part of the analysis. The main theory I will use to analyze the institutional constraints are borderlands theories by Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists. To analyze the pedagogical level, I will use radical pedagogies theories, mainly inspired by bell hooks, but also by feminist scholars who have suggested methods for the GS field. This division does not intend to separate the effect of institutional constraints in the pedagogical field or vice-versa, but it is rather a conceptual tool to understand these two levels of the teaching reality. Therefore, at times, the theories I use also intersect through the analysis.

3.1 Borderlands

According to Anzaldúa (1987), a *borderland* is any place where two or more cultures encounter each other. Gloria Anzaldúa suggests the concept of borders from her experience of living in the border between Mexico and the United States but is not limited to explaining her geographical location. Instead, she elaborates on how this geographical position brings complexities to affective, psychic, cultural and political aspects.

This culture clash is not limited to different values occupying the same space, but it is also that those cultures are contradictory, making this relationship even more complex, as the colliding cultures undervalue one another. The indigenous culture is not valued by the Mexican culture, which is not valued either by the Anglo culture, and the same happens the other way around, however, it is very clear which culture holds a position of power in respect to each other. She elaborates on how the contradictory values of these different cultures generate also a feeling of being *rajada*⁴, as she embodies these colliding and contradictory values. She often relates to the clash between an Indigenous Nahuatl culture, where spirituality is placed in the centre, against the culture of the United States where rationality is instead placed at the centre. She elaborates,

El choque de un alma atrapada entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada. Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war...⁵ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78)

⁴ Split

⁵ Anzaldúa often writes in a mix of Spanish, English and Indigenous words, to exemplify how her identity is thorn between these different cultures, creating her own language. Even when there are available translations to English of her work I chose to leave her quotes as she wrote, in order, not to kill the spirit of her work. I offer here my translation of the parts in Spanish: *The clash of a soul trapped between the world of the spirit and the world of techniques sometimes leaves one numbed.*

The work of Anzaldúa (1987) is undoubtedly about borders, in a sense of disconnected, separated and divided worlds, however, also by naming the different tensions in a borderland she introduces the possibility of connecting, uniting and building bridges among those worlds.

She argues that “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.3). The openness to this transition leaves borders as unfixed limits, so that is possible to play and explore the spaces in between the boundaries. Anzaldúa (1987) suggests an identity that is capable of articulating all of the boundaries, the identity of the *new mestiza* suggests a hybrid identity, that embodies and negotiate different and even contradictory values.

The *new mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode - nothing is thrown out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradiction, she turns ambivalence into something else (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.79).

Through this direct quote of her work, it is visible how the *new mestiza* consciousness is about allowing contradictions and turning them into something else, something new, and unique. The mestiza identity rejects the possibility of separate identities within herself and rather embraces the tensions that she inhabits. The *mestiza* main element is the negotiation of identities within one identity, a new identity that is born in the borders, where two or three or more cultures clash (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Anzaldúa (1987) calls attention to the mental and emotional challenges that inhabiting several cultures might generate, such as insecurity. She calls it “nepantlismo”, a *náhuatl* word that means to be divided between different forms of being. According to her, it can only be tolerated by being tolerant to ambiguity and learning to ‘juggle with the cultures’. The *new mestiza* has a plural identity, not

split, she functions in a plural way, where everything is used to create something new. This identity requires to distance from fixated habits and goals, which might be difficult from a Western perspective, and instead have a more inclusive perspective, where nothing is rejected (Anzaldúa, 1987).

For me, *mestiza* consciousness offers the possibility to reject and transcend the dualist division between the subject and the object that could be paralyzing. It is a rejection of dualist thinking, that could lead to the understanding of being as a whole.

3.2 Radical pedagogies

There are several names that have been proposed in order to name pedagogies that aim towards a social transformation. Some of these names have been feminist pedagogies, critical pedagogies, norm-critical pedagogies, transformative pedagogies, radical pedagogies, etc. Perhaps the name that has gained more popularity is ‘feminist pedagogies’, however, defining what feminist pedagogies are is difficult, because defining it would mean adopting one ideology, and accepting one single feminist pedagogy as dominant.

‘Feminist pedagogies’ has become a broad term in education that can be used to encompass interventions that challenge traditional academic canon and that propose alternative educational methods. Feminist pedagogies started being used in universities between the 60’s and 70’s, with the most common issues questions being about power relations in the classroom and epistemological questions about knowledge production. Overall, feminist pedagogies, heavily grounded in Freire’s work, focus on consciousness raising and the acknowledgement of oppressive relations while opening a possibility for social transformation (Weiler, 2002).

It is perhaps worth mentioning that I perceived from the preliminary stage of this study while talking to teachers and students that the use of the concept “feminist pedagogies” resulted in resistance to talk about the topic and seemed to be intimidating. Perhaps because it assumes certain political engagement with feminism, or perhaps because of the complexities of defining “feminist pedagogies”

without subscribing to a dominant kind of feminism. Therefore, and because my aim was to discuss with teachers about their teaching experience and meaning-making, I thought it was unproductive to use this term, but instead, refer to “radical pedagogies” or “critical pedagogies”.

Therefore, in this study, I chose to use radical pedagogies, as this is the term used by bell hooks (1994) to encompass both critical and feminist pedagogies and to suggest a different name as a response to the critique towards feminist pedagogies of having been mostly used by white and male pedagogues. Most of my critical education theories are heavily inspired by bell hooks, however, I am also departing from the contributions from feminist scholars that have worked on the pedagogies of GS.

In this section, I present some of the main tenets suggested by radical pedagogies, where I would later ground my analysis of some of the teaching methods and challenges of GS scholars.

3.2.1 Questioning power

Perhaps the best-known tenet of feminist pedagogies is the call to question power relations in the classroom. And this makes sense, if one is committed to a liberatory democratic model of education, questioning the authority dynamics within the classroom becomes obligatory (Hill, Fitzgerald, Haack, & Clayton, 1998).

Feminist perspectives have contributed in developing methods that (t)ease power relations in the classroom, however certain approaches to this question have been proved to be problematic. Ellsworth (1989) argues that it is impossible to remove the fact that there are power relations within the classroom, and that pretending those are left outside the classroom is rather unproductive, as the teacher, occupies a position of power in relation to the students due to the institutional power given to her. Instead of ignoring this fact, she suggests it is better to critically reflect on this relationship, together with the students, and to develop together methods to ease that tension. One way of empowering students against the teacher’s power is to give personal experience value for knowledge, therefore if

experience counted as a valid form of knowing, the knowledge authority of the teacher gets challenged (Bromseth & Sörensdotter, 2013).

In order to create a setting where students and teachers are to share experiences and open to vulnerabilities, hooks (1994) suggest a different approach towards the idea of safety. She proposes the creation of “communities” or “learning communities” where every member of the classroom takes an active role. As discussed before, classrooms with wide diversity might lead to conflicts, however, one thing that every member of the class shares is the desire to learn, to acquire knowledge and to develop intellectually, therefore communities can be created from that shared goal (hooks, 1994).

Learning communities do not suggest that everyone has power on the same degree, as it acknowledges that teachers hold certain institutional power and the aim is not to disguise it. However, all the members of the community are equal in the sense that they “are equally committed to creating a learning context” (hooks, 1994, p.153). Understanding the group as a community helps to also see the teacher in a learning spot and the students in a teaching post (hooks, 1994). Communities should then recognize the value of each member’s voice to the classroom, as listening to each other is to acknowledge one another's presence.

Building a community might also be done through the starting point of recognizing teachers and students first as bodies and transgressing the conservative idea of the mind/body split. Hooks (1994) argues that this disconnection seems evident when teachers, mostly those who identify as liberal or progressive, are readily willing to have conversations to change their intellectual or political position on the content of their curriculum but strongly resist to change or challenge their pedagogical practice. This might reflect a split between what can be changed and not, where the mental ideas can shift but not the bodily work. For hooks, this makes sense as challenging pedagogical strategies might seem like a risk, as teachers trying to do progressive or alternative pedagogies risk being discredited. To start with, the will to use different pedagogical methods could be received with mistrust from a student who is expecting a more traditional way of teaching. Additionally, teachers and students inhabit institutions, where the will to change might be

minimal, with almost none questioning to the paradigm, where knowledge and information continue to be understood as universal and communicated in conventional matters. (hooks, 1994)

Another common resistance from students to being more active agents in the learning community is to shift towards mutual responsibility for the learning process instead of leaving this responsibility to the teacher, however this approach opens the possibility of teachers becoming together with students co-creators of knowledge, where both, students and teacher are equal in the sense they are both learning subjects. (Larsson, 2013)

3.2.2 Experience telling

Another of the main tenets of radical pedagogies is active participation. Freire (1972) argued that pedagogy can only be liberatory if all of its members, both teachers and students, claim knowledge in a field we all labour. He suggests that to do so, “praxis” should be enabled, meaning reflection and action upon the field, in order to change it. bell hooks, inspired by Thich Nhat Hahn, relates this praxis with breaking the idea of a division between mind, body, and spirit, and instead understand teachers and students as whole beings (1994).

Hooks (1994) claims that GS has lost certain interest in exploring participatory ways of engaging with knowledge, as before she noticed more efforts from GS teachers to acknowledge the connection between ideas or theories learned in the classroom and experiences outside of the class. Despite the shift she notices in GS pedagogies, she thinks that students continue to believe that in those classrooms, more than in any other place on the academy, breaching the divide between theory and experience is possible.

According to hooks (1994), this divide is originated by an academic tradition that promotes ideas of compartmentalization, instead of wholeness. This could be seen from the way in which subject or topics are divided, from faculty level to courses, or even topics within the same course. This division between topics, mind/body, goes on to a private/public divide which could be noticed on the

resistance to incorporate everyday life or private life into the classroom sphere, both by teachers and students.

A good example of the splits in the resistance of students to use memory work documented by Liinason (2009) when in a workshop for GS' Master students, the teachers aimed to do an exercise to discuss the value of experience sharing for feminist theory. However, some of the students resisted the method. Among the reasons they gave was that they did not trust the group enough to do this kind of activity, or that it was too emotional, comparing it with therapy. The separation that students manifested between therapy and experience telling reflects the understanding that only theories belong in academic feminism. Therefore, experience telling belongs somewhere else, outside the academic rooms.

This kind of dualist understandings, like the one between theory and experience, is not the only one that can be found in the classroom, as many others coexist such as the divisions between mind/body, theory/practice, etc. The resistance of students to this intent to fade away one of this dualisms proves the challenge to the field to have a more articulated pedagogy (Liinason, 2009). One of the main aims of radical pedagogies has been not to engage with the mind/body split, in the same way as the split between academia as separated from the 'outside' world, that could also be explained as a public/private divide.

Hooks (1994) also talks about professors resisting the use of personal experiences as it is not perceived to be connected to the function of academy, again coming from a divisive understanding of students, who are to learn but not to feel, as the classroom is not to be considered encounter groups or therapeutical spaces. It is quite common to find the association between the use of personal experience with therapy and therefore rejected as a different aim. However, she questions what the use of theories if they cannot be applied to make sense of the students' life experiences (hooks, 1994).

Furthermore, as much of the theory is complex and difficult to understand in an intent to legitimize GS as academic or theoretical enough, having it disconnected from lived experience could result disempowering for students, undermining the liberating empowerment aimed to provide to GS students. Therefore, lived

experience could also be regarded as a new theory and its discussion as an intellectual social practice that can be liberatory. The idea that theory is practice and practice is theory breaches the split, making possible critical consciousness and a liberatory education (hooks, 1994).

In a similar sense, Anzaldúa (1987) suggests the use of *teoría encarnada*⁶. Through this concept, she calls to acknowledge that theory always originates from an embodied experience. Therefore, allowing students to bring their embodied experiences to the academic world builds a bridge that will connect the personal with the theoretical. In other words, to open the possibility to narrate one's own life, accentuating those aspects that need to be explained makes it possible for any student to theorize, despite their academic credentials.

With this understanding of experience-based knowledge, as a tool, it then can be said that there is no student that knows nothing, as they all carry experiences with them. Therefore, disregarding this knowledge risks considering the student a *tabula rasa*, ready to be filled. The memories, experiences, feelings carried by students should be instead of the way into approaching theory, or in other words, the basis of teaching (Larsson, 2013).

Hooks (1994) suggests that the use of pedagogies where all voices are heard while sharing their own experiences provides a sense of the uniqueness of each individual and of the diversity of the group. By creating an environment where experience is valued as a way of knowing, students might be less interested in competing for taking more space, as every unique experience is granted value for the learning of the group.

The use of experience sharing in the class is not only helpful as a way to create a theory or to understand oneself experiences but to deepen discussions on theoretical concepts, in other words, to bring abstract concepts into lived realities. Therefore, it represents an opportunity for combining analytical and experiential learning. Additionally, for radical pedagogies, those who have experiences of oppression have a standpoint from where to criticize the dominant structures.

⁶ Theory in the flesh

Consequently, students have in their backgrounds, meaningful experiences from where they can root critiques of structures of domination, hence valuable for teaching about these structures (hooks, 1994). In order to achieve engaged pedagogies, is not only the students who are encouraged to share experiences, open up, and be vulnerable, but more likely, this happens after the teacher does the same, and lets students see their personal stories behind their teacher role (hooks, 1994).

Actively sharing the experience is not only encouraged because of the value of the content shared but because for students raising their voice and articulating makes other students acknowledge their presence in the classroom. According to hooks (1994), the teacher is to show students how to listen to one another, and to create an environment where everyone feels entitled to speak, but also the responsibility to listen.

One of the main tenets of radical pedagogies is to create a setting where every member feels not only entitled, but responsible to contribute with their knowledge and experience sharing, but also in creating an atmosphere where all voices are heard and where politics of domination are identified and reflected. Therefore, instead of a banking model of education, Freire suggests caring about students fulfilling the responsibility of contributing to the teaching-learning process (Freire, 1972)

3.2.3 Emotions

In classrooms with wide diversities, there might be times of confrontation, especially in GS. However, many teachers think the appropriate space for learning should be safe, which might translate into passive students, teacher lecturing. There is an underlying assumption that where there is a conflict there is unsafety and where there is silence there is safety, however, many students might not feel safe in what appears to be a neutral space (hooks, 1994). Moreover, diverse and multicultural classes where the teaching is rooted either in critical pedagogy or feminist critical theory might have more tension than the traditional classroom. This tension could be generated from more critical questions and challenges towards the

teaching methods and the content of the courses, and from the discomfort or pain that could be experienced from gaining awareness of different kinds of social oppression in which one can take place and from gaining a different understanding of the place one occupies in social relations. When different positions on social issues such as race, for instance, clash in the classroom, the classroom might be a site of “conflict, tensions, and sometimes ongoing hostility” (hooks, 1994, p.113). In order to confront these tensions, the ideas of how learning is achieved in relation to safety and comfort should be challenged, moving from fear to conflict to the use of conflict and emotion as a resource for growth.

Paradoxically, one of the backlash or critique that commonly arises for the use of norm-critical pedagogies is pleasure. According to hooks (1994), there seems to be an understood relationship between pleasure in the classroom and non-serious teaching. She narrates that often other teachers have questioned if she is actually teaching because there seems to be much laughing in the class. It seems to me that often in higher education to be considered serious or proper, there should be no display of emotions, laughing, or anger as result of conflict are perceived out of place. In her own words, which I cannot improve, she explains that “to prove your academic seriousness, students should be almost dead, quiet, asleep, not up, excited, and buzzing, lingering around the classroom” (hooks, 1994, p.145).

For hooks (1994), denying the emotions from the classroom denies passions and excitement about the learning process. And represents a distorted notion of learning, totally disconnected from body and soul, as if the learning process could occur only in the minds of the students. In a similar sense, Kishimoto & Mwangi, (2009) argue that this idea of safety in the classroom prevents students from feelings and struggles that could be the source of energy to encourage change.

Hooks (1994) suggests acknowledging that learning can be painful and that this possibility should be reminded to students, as there is no reason for pain to result in harm, neither for comfort to always lead to positive learning outcomes (hooks, 1994). Instead of looking for comfort either in teaching or learning, Hill, Fitzgerald, Haack, & Clayton, (1998) suggest looking for comfort in the certainty that is there is discomfort, there is learning.

In a similar sense, Pereira (2012) reflects on the use of discomfort as a learning tool, however against the way hooks talks about it, she warns about the risks of romanticising the effects of discomfort. Several feminist scholars have talked about the perks of using discomfort as a didactic element, claiming that these experiences can “invite students and educators to examine our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture” (Boler, 1999, p.178), something very in line with the aim of GS departments. However, Pereira (2012) states that creating uncomfortable learning spaces is extremely demanding, as students might need more time from the teachers, who, given the current conditions of higher education, are unable to provide it. Therefore, she calls for feminist scholars to reconsider “overly celebratory ideas of the value of discomfort” (p.132).

4.Methods

Through this section, I develop the methodological orientation of my study, as well as how this orientation has informed my methods. As mentioned early I do a two-layered analysis in which I identify the main contradictory demands for teaching in GS both from an institutional and pedagogical level.

For the first part of the analysis, corresponding the institutional level I mainly conduct a theoretical discussion, between the institutional background and the selected theory. Meanwhile, for the second part of the analysis, which I consider the core of this research project I conduct an empirical qualitative research with a phenomenological orientation, more specifically, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method as proposed by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009). Through this section, I elaborate on the methodological concerns for the second layer of the analysis, from the data collection to the data analysis technique used to conduct this study.

4.1 A phenomenological orientation

Phenomenology could be understood both as theory and as method. As a theory, it originated between the nineteenth and twentieth century as a counter-reaction to an over-reliance on positivism (Schwandt, 2000). However, it has more recently transformed into an interpretative analytical tradition (Alase, 2017).

Understanding phenomenology is not easy as there are several phenomenological perspectives, making impossible to attribute to “phenomenology” one single definition (Miller, 2003). Even though, I would think that most authors would agree that phenomenology could be understood as the study of how lived experience is understood and given meaning. In better words, phenomenological research is

the study of what shows itself in the unique manner that it shows itself to us. Every mode of being ... is always simultaneously a way of understanding the world. These modes of being in the world need to be interpreted (Van Manen & Adams, 2010, p.445).

As Alase (2017) refers, Edmund Husserl, considered the first phenomenologist, was interested in understanding how individuals know their experience, identifying the essential qualities of that experience. Then Heidegger, who was Husserl's pupil, took on his work and introduced existential phenomenology and hermeneutics. Through hermeneutics, he suggested that phenomenological research is indeed a dual interpretative process, in which the researcher tries to make sense of how participants make sense of an experience. Therefore, the informants make a first interpretative activity by making sense of a phenomenon, and then the researcher makes a second interpretative action when making sense of the participant meaning-making.

IPA method originates from both, phenomenology and hermeneutics. In its descriptive side, it tries to understand how a phenomenon appears to participants, while in its interpretative side it acknowledges the impossibility of an uninterpreted phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Smith et al., (2009) have been some of the most important contributors as they have developed this approach together with a 'step-by-step' guide to designing a study with this approach.

Smith, et.al., (2009) defined IPA as a "qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 1). I have chosen to use a phenomenological orientation, as my aim is to understand how the paradoxical position of the GS departments and its scholars within the academy influences their sense-making of their pedagogical practices. It could be said that the phenomenon that I am studying is teaching at GS, and because GS scholars are the ones inhabiting and constituting the departments and its teaching, it is my interest in to explore how this phenomenon is experienced and given meaning by teachers in GS in Sweden.

Another reason for choosing IPA was because I am interviewing researchers as my informants, therefore I want to use their input without an intensive interpretation. I choose a participatory method in which their voices and their accounts can be represented and where they act as co-researchers for the study. For IPA humans are conceived as “sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience” (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 4). Additionally, for this approach, the experience can be known or understood through the analysis of how people make sense of it (Smith, et al., 2009). Therefore, I agree with (Alase, 2017) when he argues that it is a very participant-oriented approach to research, which shows respect and sensitivity to the experiences of the informants.

4.2 Data collection

According to Miller (2003) the only way of coming to understand the experiences is through the persons who have experienced the phenomena in first-hand. I decided to do in-depth and semi-structured interviews because from a phenomenological method, participants or informants need to be understood as research partners which together explore certain phenomena. As Hesse-Biber (2013) argues, a semi-structured interview is conducted with a specific interview guide as a frame for the interview, however, there is vast space for new questions. The order or the set of questions is not strictly determined as spontaneity and deep listening is desirable.

Therefore, I conducted interviews with a set of open-ended questions as a guide for the conversation, however, I did not follow these questions strictly but I followed the answers of the respondents. This approach would allow informants to provide relevant information even when not asked, and for me as an interviewer to improvise and jump between questions in different order for each informant not to interrupt the train of thoughts of the co-researchers. The interviews started with a set of questions related to the teaching experience of the scholars and their current position within their Universities. These questions had the intention to build trust

with the interviewees and to inform the following questions that were related to their teaching practices and challenges at GS.

The key to getting deep and meaningful data is putting participants at ease in such way they can lighten up and feel comfortable to communicate (Smith et al., 2009; Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). To accomplish this, all interviews were conducted at the place and time of choice of the interviewees, being most of the times their office at their Universities. This, with the aim of letting participants have control over the space and time during the conversation. Additionally, for all of my interviews, I intended to establish a couple of minutes of rapport with the informants before starting the interview and the recording. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that a power relation between me and the participants was always present, due to their position as experienced researchers and scholars in relation to me as a Master student, where I assume they would feel comfortable talking from a more powerful position.

Most of the interviews had a duration of around one hour, one of them went on for over two hours, and another one was conducted in two sessions of one hour. While most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, in three cases where it was not possible due to location of the scholars, interviews were conducted through video conference.

4.2.1 Access

In order to get time with GS's scholars, I first approached GS Departments Heads and Directors of Studies with a description of the study I intended to do and asking for access to the department to do class observations and interviews with teachers. From five departments contacted, only one department denied access to doing fieldwork there due to my closeness with the scholars. Other universities replied that even when they could not grant access to do class observations as they did not have enough courses or any courses during this semester they were interested in discussing other methods so that I could conduct the fieldwork. Therefore, for

issues with access and practicality, I decided to do the study through in-depth interviews as my only method.

After agreeing on access to the institutions through one contact person at each university I asked for the names and contact details of the scholars who had been teaching for over one year at the department and were therefore eligible to participate. Then, I sent them an invitation e-mail, with a brief description of the aim of the research and asking them to suggest a time and date in case they were interested in participating.

4.2.2 Sampling

Smith, et al. (2009) suggest that what matters the most in the IPA approach is the quality of the data, instead of the quantity, therefore the research benefits from focusing on few participants. Additionally, this kind of sample gives the researcher the possibility of exploring similarities and differences among individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Therefore, in order to gather the data needed I conducted nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with scholars working at Gender Studies in Sweden, who have teaching experience in this department for at least one year. This sample could be considered a purposive sample, as the choice is informed on my research question, but also limited by my resources and access given (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The purpose of this sample is not to produce findings that can be applicable or generalizable to the whole population of GS scholars, but rather to understand the meaning that is given to the phenomena of teaching in this particular location by its scholars (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the sample chosen is not representative of all GS in Sweden, neither the findings generalizable. However, I intended to have a heterogeneous group of informants so that the findings could better represent diverse kinds of experiences. Among the nine teachers I interviewed there were scholars with different kind of backgrounds, expertise fields and years of experience teaching ranging from 1 to 21 years.

4.3 Ethical considerations

The Good Research Practice from the Swedish Research Council informed some of my decisions during the design of this study.

First, the guide suggests that anyone who participates in a study should know and provide consent for their participation, if possible, in written format (Swedish Research Council, 2017). In order to ensure consent, I e-mailed all participants individually with an invitation to an interview, their responses, when interested to participate is a written form of consent.

Due to the nature of the interviews I conducted, I was interested in protecting the identity of the participants. Therefore, all interviews have been anonymized and de-identified meaning that I have eliminated all information that could reveal the identity of the teachers or the institutions where they are located, additionally I removed from the data any information that could lead to connections with the involved individuals. In order to do the analysis, I have changed the names of the participants for generic female names and will always refer to them using “she” as pronoun in order to maintain their identity anonymous.

All interviews were audio recorded in order to then be transcribed. All informants gave consent for the recording at the beginning of the interviews and they were reminded that their participation was anonymous as neither their name or institution’s name would be disclosed in any document resulting from this study.

4.4 Limitations

In this section, I reflect upon the limitations that the study had, what I did in each case and the effect they might have on my findings.

Most of the limitations of this study are related to the data collection process. For example, some of the teachers I interviewed have experience teaching GS and other fields internationally, meaning that some of the experiences they relate to could have been acquired in other countries, even when the aim of this study is to explore the Swedish context. This information cannot be discarded through the

analysis as it might be deeply entrenched in the way they understand experiences in Sweden. Therefore, some of the findings might be influenced by these experiences.

Another limitation of the data collection process was related to the occupation of my interviewees as researchers, and the relationship they had with me as an interviewer. Because all of my informants have significant experience conducting research, interviewees tended to provide theorized answers to the questions posed. Additionally, due to the relationship of being professors of a field I study, even when any of them has been directly one of my teachers, it was easy for them to take the position of teachers and provide theoretical and methodological advice to the research. Even when the advice was helpful for me as a student sometimes it compromised the nature of the interview. It is relevant to say that at the beginning of the research I intended to do a narrative analysis of the material, however, many of the responses I was given in my first interviews were informed by theories, leaving limited space to analyze the way they narrated their own experiences. For this reason, I changed the way in which I asked some of the questions and changed the method of analysis.

Additionally, given the power relation between the interviewees and myself, I realized when doing the transcriptions that it was hard for me to reconduct the interviews or to pose challenging questions. As influenced by the power relation, I tended to listen passively, and I found it intimidating to challenge their responses. I tried to improve this as the interviews progressed, but it should be acknowledged that I could have gotten better material, have I responded more strongly to some of their answers.

Another limitation that might influence the research is that I do not have enough proficiency in Swedish to read academic texts. Therefore, even when there is available research on the topic I study which is more specific to Sweden, I could not include it as material for this study. Having included that material would perhaps have resulted in a better-situated analysis.

4.5 Analytical process

According to Miller (2003) the analysis the most important phase of research as it the opportunity to understand and represent the chosen phenomenon. Broadly speaking, to do so, the transcribed text is organized into units, that are transformed into meanings, or themes, which when put together form a description of the experience.

The first step of my analytical process was the transcription of the interviews. Through my transcription I omitted the use of repetitive phrases or fillers such as ‘you know’, ‘you know what I mean’, ‘like’, etc. I did this because many of my informants are not English native speakers and honouring Chicana work in relation to the openness to different ways of speaking languages. I intended to stick to what informants tried to communicate, with limited attention to the form in which they communicated it. Therefore, I am not analyzing the use of this fillers or silences. During this step, I also took notes on repeated topics, and answers that I found particularly interesting.

The next step of the analysis, as suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) was reading the transcripts several times and making notes on the content. The list of notes from each interview where then put together to be transformed into themes. The list of themes was then to be clustered by similar categories, ending up with a list of superordinate themes and subthemes. That list of themes is analyzed in the next section using extracts from the interviews and theoretical concepts in order to understand how participants understood of their experience as GS’s teachers.

4.6 Some reflexive considerations

According to Donna Haraway (1988), any kind of knowledge production needs to be understood as produced from a certain location, or in other words, situated. Meaning that researchers are unable to provide “objective” findings as these are always influenced by the position of the researcher (Lykke, 2010). Therefore, I

consider relevant for me to express my position and how it can influence the research results.

I am a Master Student in the Social Studies of Gender programme, which is an international 'branch' of the Gender Studies Master program at Lund University. Meaning that I am a Gender Studies student in the sense that all my courses have been organized by this department and most of my teachers come from that department, however, I am registered in an Interdisciplinary department called Graduate School, and therefore I now write my Master thesis in Education. Therefore, many of my assumptions about the GS field are influenced by my own experiences as a student in its classrooms.

However, this institutional particular position represents for me both a limitation and an opportunity as the subject of the study is also my latest academic home. In the positive side, I am able to look at GS from an outsider perspective, as even when I spent most of my Master in the GS department, during the last months I have been able to take some distance and look at it from an educational perspective. On the limitations side, due to the power relations between GS scholars and myself, some parts of the data collection and analysis have been challenging, as there is an element of admiration that influences how I look at their work.

Additional to my academic positionality, my experience as a Mexican student in a Swedish master programme has increased my awareness on dynamics of colonization in knowledge production. This awareness has influenced the theories I decided to work with, as I am interested in giving more visibility to Latin American, Chicano and Black feminist, which I find to be underrepresented.

5. Analysis

Through this section, I explore some of the findings that I obtained from the interviews in light of the concepts discussed through the theoretical framework. Even when the material obtained is quite vast, for reasons of space and time, it would not be possible to discuss all of the themes found. For that reason, I am discussing those themes that could provide more relevant answers to the posed research questions.

As mentioned through the design of the research, I aim to understand how does the paradoxical position of the GS departments and its scholars within the academy influences their sense-making of their pedagogical practices? To do so, I conduct a two-layered analysis in which I will identify which are the main contradictory demands for teaching in GS from an institutional and pedagogical level. In each section of the following analysis I intend to do two things, first to identify which are the main tensions or contradictory values or demands colliding at the GS departments, and second to explore how scholars understand those tensions, and where they stand in between different realms.

My main interest is to understand how the pedagogical processes that occur in GS learning spaces are shaped by its position within the institution. However, in order to analyze the GS classrooms, it is relevant to explore the context in which these processes happen. In other words, because the GS learning spaces do not exist in a bubble but are part of bigger departments within the universities which at the same time are part of an academic system, it is relevant to analyze the context before starting the exploration of the teaching practices that take place inside of it. Therefore, I am starting the analysis at the institutional level to explore how scholars make sense of the space they occupy in the academy and what are the main challenges they find on this level. Then, I explore how scholars understand the

paradoxical position they occupy and how these tensions inform and influence their teaching practices.

As mentioned before I use the material from nine interviews conducted with GS scholars working in different universities in Sweden. All of them work in a GS department as researchers and teachers with different positions and responsibilities. Among them, there are PhD students, Directors of Studies, Deputy Directors of Studies Lecturers, Associate Professors, and Docents. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants but also trying to keep the discussion lively I have assigned random names to them (Kristina, Suzana, Maria, Larisa, Andrea, Helena, Marcela, Pia and Selma) and I will not disclose information related to each of them so that identification is not possible.

In each of the tensions identified, I want to underline, that I do not mean to say that teachers should go for any of the sides of the border, but rather identify which are the main borders where teachers stand at, and how do they negotiate their position at it through their teaching methods.

I neither mean that the dualisms that I identified are the only demands and complexities in each of the cases, as it certainly is a much more complex position and affected by many other aspects. I am aware this could appear simplistic, however, I found pedagogical for the reader to frame the dualisms I identified between contradictory values as borders between two sets of values.

5.1 Institutional challenges: Gender Studies, a Borderland

Through this section, I explore the institutional constraints identified through the background research drawing upon the Borderland concepts by Anzaldúa. I also use examples gathered through the data collection to exemplify those tensions.

GS departments might have specific complexities that differ from other disciplines. As discussed in previous sections I was interested in exploring how the teachers' role is affected by the position of the departments in the academy. From the previous research done in this self-reflexive field by GS scholars, I could conclude which were some of the tensions that affected this space, however, I

wanted to know how scholars made sense of those, and the effect it had in their educational role.

As argued by Liinason (2011) GS is a field that occupies several positions and needs to comply with different demands in different realms. Because of this, it could also be said, that its scholars then also intend to comply with different and even contradictory demands.

This phenomenon could be understood as a similar experience to what Chicanos experienced at the borders, as they embody identities that could be perceived as contradictory. For Anzaldúa (1987) a borderland is any space where two or more cultures collide, in the case she describes, it is the Mexican, American and Indigenous cultures that clash geographically in the place where she lived, but additionally, she explores how these conflicts took place also in her own body.

Talking now about GS, it could be said that it is a space where also different cultures encounter, and not unproblematically. In some sense, the critical feminist approach of GS collides with academic demands of being scientific and even apolitical. Marcella, one of the teachers I talked to explained this in a very simple way when talking about the place of GS in the University saying,

I think one challenge is to be both, theoretically lively and scientifically good, and sometimes be a pain in the neck of society..., it's hard to be combining this, it's both academically and politically... to combine these things can be sometimes very tricky...

This example illustrates how there is interest to be political, while there is also pressure to comply with certain academic standards. Andrea also illustrated the tension between GS and the academic institution by expressing

we are an institution within an institution, but [...], there's some kind of isolation, but when that isolation breaks down is when well..., funding... So, how do we make the largest system look good when what we are really gifted at is critiquing that larger system (laughs).

This phrase illuminates not only the tension of being critical of the institution where the department belongs to, but also depending on that institution financially. Therefore, the place that GS then occupies in the academy could be compromised or challenged, as this critical work of institutions could be not appreciated by the latter, making them less independent or financially strong.

Therefore, if I compare these examples with what Anzaldúa describes I could say that GS could be understood as a *borderland*, a space where several worlds collide. In a similar sense that for Chicanos, these cultural frictions affect not only the rooms, the halls, and the spaces of GS in the Swedish University, but it goes on to its syllabus, contents, reading lists, and more importantly the bodies of its scholars.

Furthermore, the previous examples unfold how the values of the academic institution might contradict those of GS and vice-versa, making it hard for both cultures to appreciate another. This is similar to what Anzaldúa (1987) exemplifies when talking about how the *náhuatl* culture is not appreciated by the Mexican one, which is neither appreciated by the Anglo one. She mentions that the clash of a highly spiritual cultural against a rational one leaves her “numbed”, as she embodies both traditions. If I substitute the spirituality she talks about with the political character of GS work, and similarly, the academic tradition with rationality. One could understand that cultural clash in the same terms, as the rational tradition often undervalues the political affiliation of GS, for not being ‘rational’ enough.

As mentioned before, for Anzaldúa this split is not only geographical, either cultural, but the split is embodied in her body. Same with the bodies of GS scholars, as it is the same body that writes a critical piece about knowledge production, as the one who seeks the approval and sponsorship from the knowledge production institution. As even myself in this case.

However, Anzaldúa continues by saying that the body does not allow splits, or seams, so in order to subsist she needs to transcend the dualities that inhabit her. For her, this can only be transcended by developing tolerance to ambiguity, learning to work within all these contradictory values. What she then does is to open a

possibility of a different way of existing that can embrace all the different tensions in her, which is what she terms the new *mestiza*.

Once again, bringing this concept to GS, it could be said that its scholars develop this kind of hybrid *mestiza* identity by making sense of the different cultures they inhabit in different ways. The following example by Kristina, another of the teachers I talked to, can exemplify how the experience of occupying different demands can result in uneasy feelings, however, it is not always easy to perceive it. She initially argues,

...when I experience like I am torn between two, or I realize that I am in one position and in another, or I am expected to be in maybe both, or maybe... I feel like where the tensions become like visible for me or sensible, then I feel discomfort. [...] sometimes I think the feeling is more apparent than the knowledge that I'm split, so the feeling is more there...

Then she continues by making sense of that experience by making it a learning tool for herself by saying,

I try to see them as a resource, so if I feel discomfort or if I identify that I am located like in, like if questions arise like the division between academia and feminist theory or feminist values, then I see this like an opportunity to question my own assumptions of the differences.

This last quote by Kristina can show how making use of the tensions as a tool to make her aware about her own ideas about the separation between two fields, helps her question herself into a more integrated perspective. In a similar fashion, Anzaldúa (1987) argues that the only way of transcending the feeling of being split is to become comfortable with feeling this discomfort, or perhaps to make peace with that feeling, and learn how to live with the complexities.

It is worth saying that when I initially started this research, I expected to find teachers more conflicted between the demands of different cultures. I thought this from the research developed in my theoretical chapter where I explored some tensions found in these academic spaces, as explored by some of its scholars.

However, after conducting the interviews, I realized that scholars have developed what could be called a *mestiza consciousness* in several ways. As, even when GS scholars do identify different tensions, and relate to them, I observed tolerance to ambiguity or a *new mestiza* identity in Anzaldua terms.

One of the main ways I identified in which scholars make sense of their paradoxical position is by adopting a somehow pragmatic look at the institutionalization of GS, which is in line with what Davies & Petersen (2005) argued when they stated that pragmatism has become a new mantra. Meaning that even when they acknowledge that the position they occupy is contradictory, there are also benefits which are worth the compromise or the uncomfortable position. Scholars appreciate that despite the fact that there are compromises, the discipline still is recognized as a formal one in Sweden. For example, Pia responded when commenting on the negotiations with the institution,

it is really amazing that in some places you have GS, and that actually you can educate, that you can actually have students, so how to put it? In one hand I am actually very grateful.

However, this appreciation is not unproblematic or unchallenged by the scholars but is taken to be reflected upon critically, adding up to the power relations that are to be studied in the field then, it's their own position in the relation to the academia. Kristina reflects,

GS is also engaging critically with the fact that being in the academic institution also involves being part of the academic hierarchies of the academic institution, so one part of the aim of the subject area is to engage critically with this.

In other words, this paradoxical position can be taken as a resource for learning and critical reflection.

From the eyes of Anzaldúa, this critical appreciation to the benefits of the space could be understood as *mestiza consciousness*, as the ability to grasp the best from the different cultures that one inhabits and create a different identity. GS scholars

as Chicanos have learned to inhabit contradictory worlds by having a pluralistic view where they can take the demands and the benefits from different realms they are given in and create a new discipline.

The *new mestiza*, such as GS scholars constantly needs to shift between habitual formations; “from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode) to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.79). In a similar fashion that scholars move from a scientific acceptable perspective to a more critical approach, by trying to make the latter fit into the criteria of the first one. By doing this, GS scholars transcend the duality of the spaces and find solutions to the limitations placed by the institutions.

However, it is noticeable that despite the feeling of gratefulness or appreciation for having “legitimate” spaces in the academia, there is also a perceptible border between the feeling of being protected and the feeling of being undervalued which can be seen when scholars talked about the position of their departments in respect to other departments. In other words, despite the ability to look at themselves as a new culture and make sense of themselves through being critical of their own positions, when talking about resources scholars often went back to explain the nature of the space as divided between different demands. It could be said that their ability to make sense of themselves in a paradoxical position does not make the limitations imposed by the universities any less severe and real. Through the following lines, I explore the tension I identified between the feeling of appreciation for the spaces, and even certain idea of protection by the GS field, versus the feeling of instability and constantly having to prove the worth of GS spaces to the academic institution.

In this vein, one of the main constraints that scholars reported was having a lower pay for teaching than scholars in Natural Sciences fields, precarious job conditions, and even trouble to maintain research grants that were obtained. One of the most outrageous examples I found was a scholar who shared that having gained a research grant for with an interdisciplinary project, the grant was then taken away

from the GS department to be given to the other involved departments, which not surprisingly were Natural Sciences areas.

It would be hard to say if this precariousness in the resource management is specific to GS or is it something generalizable to Humanities and Social Sciences but is something definitely affecting the way the GS departments can operate, and more importantly for the aim of this research, the possibilities they have for teaching. For instance, Helena affirmed:

different parts of the university are valued very differently. Arts and sciences, or the natural sciences... so they are paid much more for every hour of teaching that they do, which is bizarre, right? Meaning that we give our students like one lecture a week and a seminar, and they can have 8 hours of teaching a day... so you are given totally different money for courses depending on whether they are labelled natural sciences or social sciences. Which is... I mean, we would love to have more time for students, and they need it...

This quote clearly exemplifies how the resources the faculties might have could be very limited. As explored in the background of this work, these resource constraints have been accentuating due to the neoliberalization of the academia. These examples could confirm what Alvanoudi (2009) stated, as the universities become more enterprise-like, the departments which can produce more marketable knowledge get financially encouraged, while those who cannot prove their market value tend to be more controlled.

However, it is paradoxical that despite expressing how constraining the atmosphere could be, many of the scholars still reported feeling protected by the GS institutions. For instance, Pia, when I asked about her views on the compromises that the institution might require responded,

I just try to make compromises, and at the same time be ethical and respectful to both sides, to the university and to students. And I already think that when there is a good will there is a way, nobody here interferes in the way I teach, or in the content, so I am absolutely free to design it the way I want.

Here it is made evident that despite the fact that she recognized the need to make compromises and negotiations, she still feels free to design her teaching in the way she prefers. What I found intriguing was that despite the acknowledgement of having some freedom to teach or do research in any topic or in a number of ways, there is also certain fear respect the resources limitations, more specifically, talking about money. The following example can better illustrate the paradox I refer to when Andrea first made a reference to the feeling of protection by saying,

I feel safe enough in the sense that I am funded and fine... I will just throw this up and out there, criticize everything. And I am ok with that...

However, later in the interview, when talking about the constraints of the department and the difficulties for the department to find funding, Andrea added,

well, if we ruff our feathers too much, some bad things can happen, and there have been talks about these wings, GS... potentially even being obsolete in a number of years...

These limitations are not restricted to the institutional level in which the department can be funded or not but also affect teachers' stability in their position. Out of nine teachers who I interviewed, only three of them had a permanent position. The scholars often talked about finding themselves in precarious job conditions that often result in stress and an unhealthy work environment, that could trickle down to the different activities in which scholars engage. For example, Andrea mentioned,

What I've seen at this institution and elsewhere is a very stressful phenomenon, and that puts a very unhealthy set of pressures on whomever, and what I've noticed is that that is breaking people. So, professors, lecturers, they need health care and go to places to feel good for like overwork stress-related anxieties and just health problem. And I think this is, basically, directly related and co-related to the very insecure, the insecurities around this academic kind

of profession, that competition, you know, with others, even in your own department. That isn't a good thing, and then how does that trickle down?

However, I found intriguing that most of them, even when acknowledging that they felt stressed under their job conditions, they did not think this had an effect on their teaching practice, as they feel that due to their commitment to the practice they still manage to do the best they can. For example, Pia mentioned that despite the very unstable job conditions in which teachers at the department worked,

and yet, it has never really influenced the teaching. But it has a big influence on us, mentally, physically, you know what I mean..., stress, burn out, this kind of stuff... that then you need to deal with, that's true.

In another case, Larisa who had an especially precarious (2 months contract extensions for over a year) mentioned first how the lack of energy was affecting her by saying,

I would like to do more but then if I don't know if I am going to be there next fall. Why would spend my energy developing the programme when there is no guarantee that I would actually be there to materialize it. It is frustrating.

However, later in the interview, she said,

I am still committed to teaching on the best way I can, so I don't really think it shows really that I am stressed about my job.

In the previous examples, it is noticeable that despite the awareness of the consequences of the job conditions on scholar's health, it is often not associated with having any effect on their teaching practices. Looking at this from the eyes of Anzaldúa (1987) and hooks (1994) it could be said that there is an idea of certain separation from the practice of teaching and the body, as if the effects of the stress in the body in their also bodily teaching practice could be resolved by a very high commitment to their teaching.

Through this analysis, I have elaborated on how GS departments occupy a paradoxical position in the Swedish university. Such position could be understood as a borderland. Due to this position, it can be said that some of its scholars embody challenges, or splits that are particular to the field, that they make sense of through a pragmatic understanding of the benefits that come with negotiating and compromising with the institution those tensions. This ability to transcend the duality in which they are entrenched could be called *mestiza consciousness*. Additionally, the position they occupy also has a material implication, as the recognition, they get from the university as governing institution is tied to the resources they can get for teaching and conducting research. This is also similar to what Chicanos experience at the borders, as Anzaldúa (1987) mentions, Chicanos also suffer financially as a consequence for not fully acculturating. In the following chapter I explore how the challenges that can be found in a pedagogical aspect.

5.2 Pedagogical challenges: Teaching at the borders

Through this section, I explore how the latter explored tensions found through the position that GS occupies in the Swedish University might make GS a particular place to teach at, and how scholars understand these challenges. I frame these tensions as borders between two demands, in order to conceptualize these tensions in a simplified way, however, in most of the cases I would say that it is not only two demands colliding but many more. It could be argued that another way to call the tensions are identified is using the term “dualisms” as many authors have, however, I chose to use borders because I think it better portrays that scholars not only identify different realms but also tend to draw an imaginary line between those. It is also worth saying that I don’t intend this list to be inclusive of all the tensions that can be found at this crossroad, but rather some exemplification.

5.2.1 Experience-telling and/or theories

As Lundberg & Werner (2013) have argued in their exploration of GS pedagogies perhaps one of the most important borders that can be found in GS is the use of experienced-based learning from a feminist tradition against the positivistic idea of disengaged research methods that still can be found within academia. As hooks (1994) stated GS is a field that touches upon the lives and experiences of most of the students. Additionally, feminist theories have challenged the assumptions regulating the knowledge production systems and therefore have defended the epistemic value of personal experience. Therefore, the value of personal experience in the GS classroom is unquestionable.

Through this study, I found that even when GS teachers mostly agree on the importance of using personal experiences in the classroom, they make sense of this pedagogical tool in different ways. For some of them it is impossible to separate from learning any theoretical concepts, from an embodiment perspective, Pia stated,

the personal is always there, you know what I mean?... because the knowledge cannot be produced by itself, but it is always a person that produces that knowledge...

Other scholars made sense of the use of personal experiences in the classroom as a good tool to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For example, Suzana responded,

we have been extremely academic, and we have a high theoretical level, always [...] and then we try to attach those ideas down to earth, [...] real practical life, because a theory is only floating up there, but then always, always, always, you can attach it down to real life, and experiences of people, everyday people.

The way in which Suzana argues for the use of personal theory is very much in line with what bell hooks (1994) questioned, what would be the use of learning theories if students are then unable to be applied to their own personal lives. As various others, Suzana then would agree with hooks that the use of personal experience is

a productive learning tool that aids students to better understand theoretical concepts by putting the theory to work on lived experiences.

Despite the general agreement on the pedagogical benefits of using lived-experience as a tool in the classroom, teachers also showed having certain reservations about the use of this kind of tool for two reasons. Through the following paragraphs, I analyze the resistances found.

The first drawback identified by scholars is related privacy, highlighting a separation between what is personal and what is private. For instance, Maria argued that even when she could perceive the need to use personal experiences she thought it could be challenging. She mentioned,

I have no intentions like of being too personal with the students, [...] but that is also a challenge because I think it is important to be personal in a sense, but not private.

I found thought-provoking in the last quote that the scholar in one hand acknowledges the importance of the use of personal experiences, however, in the other hand she feels the need to draw a border somewhere, so it is not “too much”. This quote is a clear example of what bell hooks (1994) argues when she brings attention to ideas of compartmentalization in education mentioning a division between the public and private life grounded on the idea that experiences can be separated, as if one could leave private experiences when going into the public sphere as the private does not belong in public institutions such as the classroom.

The second downside of using personal experiences identified by the scholars is that students might resist it. The following example, again by Maria is a good illustration of what scholars have experienced and how they make sense of student resistance. She stated,

I had some students who complained about there was like too much experiences, talking about experiences, so that was also interesting, that they wanted, ok... just give us some cases to analyze, so we don't need to analyze

ourselves [...], so now not all the assignments are experience based but more like narrative. So that was interesting. I mean it could be too much, you know...

I would like to bring attention to the use again of “too much” twice to talk about an overuse of the personal experience against the use of case analysis. It appears to me that it is a way to delimitate the use of lived experience. Once again, as in the previous example, the scholar tries to delimitate the use of personal experience, in this case, because students had disliked it. This experience is very similar to the one reported by Liinason (2011) where she reflects on how students also have an understanding of what should be done inside the academy, and normally activities where there is an emotional load are not always well received as part of the classroom, where more theoretical (understood as something different to experiences) discussions are expected.

The student resistance that can be observed in the last to quote towards the use personal experiences sharing is also recognized by hooks (1994) who argues that both students and teachers might resist it because it is impossible to be separated from emotions, often uncomfortable ones. Additionally, it might be perceived as not belonging to the classrooms, as learning is expected to happen only in a rational level. It is also evident, through the last examples that the use of personal experience is irremediably connected to emotions.

5.2.2 Emotional and/or rational

The interviewed scholars often argued that handling emotions is the hardest part of teaching at GS. Undoubtedly the main theme that came up through this study as something particular to GS was the complexity of managing emotions in the class. They would all agree that it is a very emotional classroom and it is easy for emotions to come up. I identified two main reasons for the GS learning spaces to be especially emotionally charged.

The first reason is that as the field studies different ways of oppression and marginalization, these topics could be very close to the student's experiences and identities, which confirms what Lundberg & Werner (2013) argued when talking

about the pedagogical complexities at GS. This leads to having students with a great level of engagement in the subject matter, that translates to a diverse set of strong political standpoints which are not always compatible. To illustrate this complexity, I share a couple of quotes from the scholars elaborating on this characteristic of the discipline, sometimes also comparing it with other fields. Helena mentioned

students might have very strong, very personal convictions [...], so managing a very diverse of group of students that are each very passionate [...], that is something I never have to do anywhere else

In a similar fashion, Larisa argued,

I don't think I ever had crying students when I was teaching at the English department... because it just doesn't touch you that personally. But GS [...] tends to attract students who had certain experiences of marginalization, they are trying to change something about it, they are trying to develop a voice that helps them.

A second reason for the emotional load of the learning process could be related to the kind of theories and tools of the discipline. Meaning that the engagement with feminist theory could lead to a challenging, or uncomfortable learning process. As hooks (1994) and Larsson (2013) argued, there is often a painful process associated with critical reflexivity of self-reality or realizing the place one takes in different social oppression mechanisms. Additionally, this can also be a feeling shared by teachers, as Larsson (2013) argued, classrooms where the teaching is grounded in critical theory might lead to more critical questions and challenges to the teaching methods or content from the students. The following quote of Selma exemplifies this phenomenon,

if you are student and learn different kinds of critical theory, like feminist theory or postcolonial theory, or decolonialism... then you would feel certain amounts of "I don't agree", or "this is difficult"... or "I feel very upset about the teacher describing this in that way", "I feel very upset of this description,

I don't agree with it...” because this is saying different things to what you have heard through your life. So that is in a way a learning moment, and that emotion is very creative.

The last quote identifies the presence of emotions due to the use of different kinds of critical theory, however, towards the end she also makes sense of the use of emotions as a learning tool. Most of the scholars also noted that emotions are a useful learning tool, however, it was noticeable the need to draw another border to delimitate the use of these emotions. I explore this in the following quotes.

They are too close to their own experiences and emotions in order to be able to analyze it, and I think is a challenge... I try to do it because I think it is in a way emancipatory [...], but I think it is too dangerous because it maybe is too close for some students [...] to their own experiences, so it's difficult. (Kristina)

You could be passionate about something and that is a form of feeling I think. But it could be a point perhaps, where there is too much feeling. That could be uncomfortable in a sense, so I think that is a line that, I don't know, it is maybe important to think about. (Maria)

A lot of occasions having to deal with emotions... strong emotions and of course there is that aspect that GS is not a therapy, you know it brings up all these personal issues, experiences with injustice and so forth, but it is also a discipline... yeah... so you kind of have to navigate that. It is really really tricky... (Larisa)

I would like to bring attention to how in the previous quotes, emotions are often framed very close either to “too” much, “too” dangerous, or therapy. I would say it is easy to notice a similarity with bell hooks (1994) experiences, where she mentions that as soon as her students laugh or enjoy the class too much, her teaching-learning is perceived as non-serious academic work. In this case, scholars acknowledge the frequency and even usefulness of touching emotions in the class, however, whenever uncomfortable emotions are touched the process is associated

with therapy or too much, and therefore not belonging to the classroom. This led me to identify another border between emotionality and rationality.

As with the previous border, the idea that only certain amount of emotion is welcome in the classroom and exceeding the limit is risky might originate from a divided idea of the student that continues to inform the academic practice. There is a divided understanding of mind, body and soul, and the learning process is supposed to occur only in the students' minds. It could be said that given the nature of the GS discipline field and the awareness of scholars of the embodied experiences of students, there is a noticeable attempt to include emotions in the teaching-learning methods, however, there is still a need delimit it. This might be due to the fields position in academia, where usually trying to prove their worth as a "proper discipline" pedagogies are influenced by the idea that certain experiences belong and others do not in the academy, often being the case that whatever seems to be more rational tends to be accepted in the classroom. According to hooks (1994) and Kishimoto & Mwangi (2009) these separations deny students from passion or excitement at the classroom, which is an important part of the learning process. However, as Pereira (2012) warns, even when emotions of discomfort sometimes seem to critical educators like a tax, that students and teacher need to pay to then enjoy the benefits of a deeper learning, perhaps scholars do not have the conditions now to be able to handle the demands that might arise from a bigger emotional load.

I do not mean to say that GS scholars try to maintain the learning process free of emotions, this is not the case. But that GS scholars aware of the need of using emotions in the class inhabit this borderline where they try to do both, emotionality and rationality, but due to its contradictory nature, there is a need to limit a certain amount of emotional charge in the classroom. For instance, the following quote might help to illustrate this position. In the following paragraph Larisa explains her role as a teacher, at the same time using personal experience critically and trying delimitate it to avoid going outside of the discipline through emotions,

like to comfort somebody but you cannot sort of fix their problems... but at the same time remain within the field and discussing, ok so what is like sort of the critical value of experience, and what can we do with that, [...] like in terms of scientifically [...] And sometimes that link is very difficult for some students, because it is their lives that they're living through [...]. It's one of my largest challenges, it gets really personal... but then you know, you can't be a therapist, so you can't fix them, you can't fix their problems...

However, like Pereira (2012) argues there are also good reasons to be careful when handling emotions in the classroom. Perhaps the reasons more referred by the scholars were the risk to open emotional vulnerabilities that teachers might not know how to handle. Additionally, because often scholars are not prepared to handle emotions, some of them made references to ethical concerns related to asking students to engage in activities that might result in opening up emotions. Pia argued that,

I am also trying to be ethical, and not... I do not open the doors to something I cannot handle[...] I never ask students for personal stories, never... [...] I never discuss these kinds of things, if they wanna bring it in their papers, theorizing it, of course... then it is fine. But we need to be really careful, what we are also asking, and what we want our students to do. [...] if they want in their papers or whatever, they can address those things, but not [...] to open doors as I said to perhaps monsters, in a positive way, that I cannot handle.

Another reason for scholars to be careful with the emotional engagement of GS scholars is that it could create obstacles for research as it makes it challenging to create distance with the subject of study. For example, Helena commented the following when referring to her students' research choices,

they tend to research their own passions, and frictions, and challenges [...], we kind of encourage that, sometimes I think we encourage it too much because, I mean, it is demanding [...] it is challenging, for everyone, and especially if you are new to kind of producing your own stuff that way.

In contrast to the need to create distance towards researcher and the subject of study, Anzaldúa (1987) argues for the use of theory in the flesh, recognizing the possibility of theorizing exactly those experiences that are embodied through the researcher. Through the lenses of hooks, it could be said that the comment of this scholar is influenced by the idea of compartmentalization, in which research is a rational activity, and therefore involving themes that are “too” close to the body might be perceived as obstacles towards proper research.

5.2.3 Conflict and/or safety

The mix of characteristics proper of the subject field of GS such as the use of personal stories, emotional engagement, diversity of opinions, criticalness, politically committed students, etc., often result in classrooms where conflict between students can arise quite easily. Therefore, another challenge identified by scholars was the need to manage or lead conflict in the classroom. Most of the scholars would agree that the diversity of standpoints between students together with strong emotional engagement can lead to discussions quite easily. This ease to generate engaging discussions could be perceived as a great learning tool as students are often ready to question each other, and in order for students to argue for their different standpoints they need to be able to unfold and construct their own arguments. Most of the teachers recognize this as a learning moment, however, it also represents a challenging moment for the teachers as argued in the following example.

The fantastic thing about teaching within GS is also why it is so hard, [...] students come in with so much engagement and so much political, and empathetic and affective kind of power and knowledge, and that really charges the room, which also means that it's a classroom where tensions can become really high and hard to handle. Frustrations with perspectives lacking, or vocabulary they think is problematic or other students who they feel are disrespectful or even phobic in some ways, and so that also means that teaching

in GS also becomes dealing with these tensions, in a pedagogical way... and that is the hardest part. (Selma)

As said in this quote teaching in GS comes with dealing with high tensions, and that is recognized by most of the teachers I talked with. However, the perception of teachers towards conflict varies, which led me to identify another border in relation to conflict management. In one side of the border feminist teachers agree on the value of engaging and even conflictive discussions as a learning tool, however, in the other side of the border teachers also need to ensure they build an atmosphere where everyone feels respected and entitled to speak.

I could say that this border is informed by norm-critical educational theorist such as hooks (1994) who argues that ideas of security and comfort in the classroom often influence classroom dynamics. She mentions there is often an assumption that where there is silence there is safety and where there is conflict there is unsafety. However, often there could be marginalization in that silence too. Therefore, she argues that is best to acknowledge that the classroom is not a safe space, but it is a space where discussions can arise and oppression can be called out, even when it could be painful for some students. However, it is noticeable that there is another border between welcoming conflict and ideas of safety in the classroom. Once again, teachers are aware of this division and try to construct spaces at this border, where there is space for discussion but within certain limitations. For example, I found the following quote by Pia useful for illustrating this tension. She mentioned,

I am not really that much into safe spaces and stuff like that, because sometimes I think we need to challenge ourselves, ok? I am not saying to make it a dangerous space, of course, but [...] it cannot be just like la, la, la, but it must be a bit of a turmoil also, but in a positive way... I am not talking about anything, of course, God forbid, dramatic or something like that... But, so that they can respect each other, and that is not... sometimes it is difficult, ok?

In this quote, it is easy to note that even when the teacher agrees that learning could be uncomfortable, she still feels the need to limit the conflict from becoming overly

‘dramatic’, which might be related to ‘overly emotional’ as in the previous border. I found that scholars had different strategies and positions on how to deal with this tension.

One of the strategies most mentioned by the scholars was to unfold the different arguments that are colliding in a discussion and translate them into theories so to have a more theoretical conversation. According to them, this helps students understand their differences in a more productive way. Additionally, for better or worst this technique helps students create distance between themselves and their standpoint, also decreasing the emotional charge of the discussion. For example, Maria mentioned,

I try to actually stick to theories in a way that it can help guiding conversations. Because, for example, if students are opposing each other, I can say that ok, do you see that you are opposed to other because you are part actually of theoretical frameworks when you do that, so actually, to theorize the actual conflict instead of, ok so you are right and you are wrong or you are both wrong or something like that, but rather say how come you have different opinions on this matter? how come that is the case? More like because they often speak from different positions.

Some other scholars often try to take part in the discussion when they feel that certain students need to be protected or empowered. Which could be perceived in a way as a form of feminist solidarity, as one of the teachers mentioned, but also as a way of keeping those that seem more vulnerable safe. This tension is illustrated by the following example, where Kristina recalls an experience when a discussion was going on in the classroom and despite she did not agree with certain student she decided not to say anything in order not to disempower her. She mentioned,

what to do as a teacher in this situation? I don't agree with her, but I also don't want to say something that disqualifies her, and then at the same time I want to teach students, so this was a bit of a discomfort [...] discomfort on the position of being a teacher in a feminist subject area where I want to empower

students, but I also want to teach students and how this sometimes, this don't match.

In a different way to respond to this border positions, some of the scholars also tried to create spaces where students are less eager to enter into discussions, or even to try to avoid discussions that could escalate to conflict. For example, Suzana shared,

I will try to calm the atmosphere down by saying well we have to listen to each other, or please don't start a quarrel because it is leading nowhere, [...] I will go from there and try to do something totally different, skip the exercise you are getting lost in, or when the quarrel started and do something totally different. Maybe something that you know that people agree on, or something fun maybe...

It is noticeable that both approaches previously cited, empowering specific students and trying to avoid conflict could be influenced by the ideas of safety that I mentioned before, where the teacher tries to take a role of protecting students vulnerabilities. However, the position from which the teacher decides who is to be protected could also be questionable. In contrast, Selma was especially sceptical about the possibility to have safe-spaces, and then she suggested, more in line with hooks recommendations, to provide some ground rules about what is allowed and what is not, and also prepares students to know they might feel uncomfortable from the beginning of a course, for example. She mentioned,

Of course, a teaching room [...] is supposed to be not comfortable, I mean, I have some issues with this idea of comfort in teaching.... they should, of course, be safe spaces in the sense that [...] it shouldn't be allowed for people to be vile or rude or go after one another. So, in that way [...] but I don't believe in a safe space or comfortable space in the sense of your views won't be questioned or won't be... that you won't be asked to tell people what you mean, or that you won't be asked to share your knowledge.

The border that I am discussing is made evident again in this quote, where the teacher can clearly see both sides and explains how she negotiates this position. It can be seen again how the teacher agrees with hooks (1994) and Kishimoto & Mwangi (2009) when she mentions that there is a part of learning that could be painful, and there is no reason to think that it might be harmful. However, she also draws a line through establishing rules of what is allowed and what is not allowed to ensure students feel both respected and entitled to speak, but also personally challenged at the same time.

5.2.4 Community lead and/or teacher lead

On a different note, it is relevant to highlight that when speaking about the conflict in the classroom most of the teachers take as their responsibility the role of leading the discussion and sort of take the role of moderators of the classroom. This tendency is contrasting with what hooks suggests about building learning communities in which the responsibility to lead the group, so to say, is shared among all the participants. Similar arguments can also be found in several radical pedagogies methods where the role of the teacher as a figure of power intends to be shifted towards a flatter power structure in the classrooms. However, as mentioned by Ellsworth (1989), even when these models are often recognized as “feminist” as they challenge an unequal distribution of power, it is also important to think how fair or ethical could it be to students to attempt to hide power that is given institutionally to teachers like in the case of the university classroom.

Due to this contradiction, I identified in this area another border between community-based teaching-learning and teacher at the front models. As with the other borders, teachers do not choose to stand on one side or the other, but they stand on both side making sense of this position in different ways. Some of them trying to solve conflicts, for instance, more communally and others trying to take the whole role of moderation acknowledging their power positions. The following quote can illustrate this tension, Suzana shared,

Of course, the teacher should be able to lead the group in a way... we are sometimes saying that in feminist pedagogy there is a characteristic of no one is a leader, no one is to lead the group, but I mean, you can't. Oh no... I don't want that (laughs) I don't want that [...] There are too many levels or too big differences between them, and that makes it harder, to apply a no-leader model, and they are coming from so different backgrounds, and it can be real tensions between those, so you can't have no-leader, you have to get some kind of calm if anyone is going to learn anything.

In this quote, it can be seen that the teacher identifies the border between trying to adopt a feminist non-leader model and the possibilities of doing so in the GS classroom, in this specific case, she justifies the need to have a leader in the classroom with the need to have a moderator who can keep the calm in a space with a wide diversity of backgrounds and standpoints.

Through this analysis, I have examined the multiple negotiations and contradictions which with GS teachers deal while trying to maintain the space academic and feminist at the same time. It was found that institutionally, GS faces a challenging environment, where it is uneasy to access and secure resources institutionally. This translates to unstable and even precarious job conditions for its scholars and teachers. In the pedagogical aspect it was found that as the literature review suggests, the GS classroom is especially challenging, mainly due highly emotionally and intellectually engaged students. In these classrooms, GS teachers try to negotiate between different borders, among those, I explored the border between the use of experience-telling and theories, the border between emotions and rationality, the borders between the understandings of conflict and safety, and the border between community-led and teacher-led learning environment. I separate each border by and/or trying to reflect the fact that teacher occupies both sides of the border, but try to delimitate limits in their practice. In the following chapter, I conclude this study by reflecting on how the institutional and pedagogical borders operate simultaneously.

6. Concluding discussion

Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the mestizas and mestizos, will remain.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 86)

This thesis has aimed to provide an exploration of the position that GS scholars inhabit and an understanding of how it influences their teaching practices. In order to do so, a two-layered analysis was conducted to explore the institutional and pedagogical context independently.

At an institutional level, I found that GS is a field of negotiations and contestations, where its scholars constantly negotiate with the institution in order to maintain their funds and resources, but not unproblematically, as it sometimes represents compromises to the feminist values. Through the use of Chicana theories, GS could be understood as a borderland, meaning that it is a space that exists within different realms and demands. In order to cope in these spaces, GS scholars have developed what Anzaldúa calls *mestiza consciousness*, which enables them to transcend the divisions they embody, which they do through a pragmatic understanding of the compromises that, at times, need to be done. Despite this ability, GS teachers have contradictory understandings of the place of GS in the Swedish university, as in one hand they feel grateful to have spaces specifically destined to the discipline and even protected by GS as an institution to write and teach as they prefer. However, on the other hand, teachers feel constrained when they compare the resources they have against other fields, and even fearful about the future of these departments.

At a pedagogical level, I identified that the GS classroom is quite intense emotionally and intellectually. In order to cope with this, teachers try to balance between methods informed by feminist or radical pedagogies and more ‘scientific’

or theoretical activities in order to keep the spaces ‘academic’ enough. It could be said that teachers are aware of the need of students to benefit from experiencing radical pedagogies methods, but at the same time, they are aware of the need of students to be prepared to comply with academic standards. Therefore, through their teaching practice, they try to combine both kinds of methods. However, due to the contradictory nature of this combination, teachers might need to draw limits to make them coexist, for example, by trying to set a line of when it becomes “too private”, “too many experiences”, “too dramatic”, “too emotional”, etc.

In order to respond my main research question, how does the paradoxical position of the GS departments and its scholars within the academy influence their sense-making of their pedagogical practices? It is now needed to bring the two layers I have maintained through the analysis together.

As I have mentioned before it is relevant to understand that institutional borders and pedagogical borders do not operate separately, but they are happening at the same time, and it all has an effect on teachers and their teaching practices. It could be concluded from the analysis done that the institutional and pedagogical constraints identified force teachers to walk a very fine line, where they try to combine and use the best from two worlds, balancing to different degrees the use of experiences and theories, emotionality and rationality, conflict and security, community-based processes and teacher-led processes, and the list continues. However, as Skeggs (1995) argues, radical pedagogies often demand time and energy, something teachers currently do not have to spare, given the conditions of the neoliberal academia.

I then agree with Pereira (2012) when she calls for being careful of opening demands that maybe cannot be met, however, I question how much can those demands remain limited? For instance, she specifically calls to be careful not to overestimate the didactic value of discomfort when scholars might not have the resources to handle it. However, given the nature of the field described, I doubt it is really possible to avoid or even limit feelings of discomfort in the classroom. In the same way, I doubt it is possible to ‘water-down’ student’s engagement or emotions so that it becomes an easier class to handle.

Thinking that these complexities are not something that can be (re)moved or eased led me to question what happens then when in an especially demanding classroom, intellectually and emotionally, the teacher is exhausted due to the current conditions of the job and the demands from the institution? And what can be done then? I somehow find it depressing to think that this neoliberal environment creates such a constraining working condition for teachers that results in fear of breaking ‘too much’ the status quo, even when that challenge to the status quo might be a way of trying to attain transformation.

Given the limitations of this study, several of these questions remain unanswered and would be interesting to explore in further research. For example, I think it is crucial to understand how students experience this environment, and what are the consequences of this teaching practices in the teaching-learning process.

Additionally, through the interviews, I found that another split in the teachers was between being teachers and being researchers. Perhaps this border is not specific for GS scholars, but it was evident that research tends to be encouraged by the institution while teaching is somehow a secondary function. It might be relevant to explore this split from a perspective of research as a production function and teaching as care labour.

The future of GS might seem uncertain. I have talked about what the effect that the institutional effects have on the teaching practices, the result is a bit grey, with stressed and exhausted teachers teaching very demanding classrooms, and the possibility for transformation looks difficult if not impossible. However, when I think about how the pedagogical practices can influence the institution perhaps radical pedagogies ideas can provide some hope.

The radical pedagogies tenets explored were the use of experience telling, emotions, conflict and community-led teaching-learning processes. Using these tools to go from the pedagogical to the institutional might mean working more closely with students as a community, opening up to telling students also the experiences of scholars using emotions and discomfort not only from students but from teachers to build up energy and to embrace the conflict that might arise. Nevertheless, students are also part of the departments and might have more energy

to spare to work towards transformation. It could be said that it is all about dualisms, and transcending them, therefore transcending the scholar-student border might open the door for transformation.

After all, given the position GS has between so many borders, its scholars have developed the skill to cope with ambivalence, which translates into the possibility of working towards transformation with the resources given, as scarce as they could be. However, how can these skills be transferred into the next generations of feminist academics if not looking at how they are being educated?

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