Lund University

Master of Science in International Development and Management (LUMID)

June 2020

Unlocking Liberation: A Study on Critical Pedagogy Projects with Saraguro Women, Ecuador

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I got lost between the hills walking to Kuri Kinti's house in the Ñamarin community in Saraguro. Sweaty, excited and out of breath from the long walk up the hill, we salute each other with a kiss on the cheek. She leads me through the vegetable garden full of medical plants into her house and we install ourselves by the rustic wooden table. Kuri Kinti, as her big, almond-shaped eyes grab hold of mine, explains that she is quite sceptical towards researchers coming to her community doing investigations, appropriating and objectifying their voices. She gives me a lesson on how to conduct responsible research with Indigenous communities, but seems to soften up towards the end of her extensive account: "*Yo te invito a hacer parte de la minga con esta investigación. Es la responsabilidad de todos, no solo mujeres Indígenas, aportar a la transformación social. I invite you to be part of the minga [collective work] with this research. It's everyone's responsibility, not only Indigenous women's, to contribute to social transformation.*"

Abstract

How can critical pedagogy (CP) further Indigenous women's sociopolitical agency and liberation? This case study is engaging with a CP project conducted by the Ecuadorian NGO GAMMA with Indigenous Saraguro women. Given its methodological approach, the project represents an interesting case for looking into alternatives to top-down and technocratic capacity building approaches within mainstream development. Utilising qualitative methods and an analytical framework based on Freirean and *mujerista* conscientisation theory, I explore the experiences, ideas and practices produced by the participants throughout the project. The analysis shows the importance of a deep intertwinement between theory and practice and of paying attention to cognitive as well as emotional learning and healing processes. Moreover, it is clear that CP, as a participatory and capacity building approach, should be about learning how to co-move with learners and building a process based on people's existing spiritual, emotional, relational and political resources. While the method is limited by structural issues, these obstacles are seen as an important part of the learning process. In conclusion, what is characterising the theory for liberation produced throughout the project is continuous learning, healing and action, but also deep patience and hope.

Word count: 14,935

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to everyone who participated in this study. To the *chaskis* and other engaged women who openly and wisely shared their experiences, thoughts and opinions on transformative learning processes. To the staff of GAMMA who with their openness and warmth made the carrying through of this research a lot easier. You all inspire me greatly. With your help, I have been able to convert myself into a *chaski* as well, hopefully forwarding your messages justly through this study.

Secondly, I would like to give special thanks to my exceptional supervisor Catia Gregoratti. For guiding me, engaging me and provoking new, critical and radical thinking. Without you this thesis would not be what it is today. Would Freire and I even be friends?

I also thank the staff of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Quito for introducing me to alternative(s to) development projects such as the GAMMA one, and for teaching me a lot about the socio-political context of Ecuador.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful for the generous financial support from the Crafoord Foundation, making this study possible. My family on the other hand has given me crucial emotional support when it was most needed. Thank you for always being there for me. The same goes for my supervision group - I truly valued your encouragement and constructive feedback.

A todas las compañeras y todos los compañeros que han participado o aportado a la realización de este estudio - les agradezco de todo corazón. Son una gran inspiración. Este estudio es mi manera de también ser una chaski, de sistematizar y compartir la sabiduría construida por ustedes. Espero que sea un aporte a la lucha por la liberación de todas las mujeres, todos los pueblos y la Madre Tierra. Nunca rendiremos, seguiremos caminando. Un abrazo fuerte.

Acronyms

CRG - Consciousness raising groups

CIP - Critical Indigenous pedagogy

CP - Critical pedagogy

GAMMA - Grupo de Apoyo al Movimiento de Mujeres del Azuay

PAR - Participatory Action Research

RLF - The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

Spanish and Kichwa Words

Abrir los ojos - open one's eyes

Apoyo - support

Aprendizaje - learning process

Cabildo - local council

Cariño - love; care; affection

Casa de la Mujer - The Woman's House

Compañera - (female) companion; colleague; friend

Chacra - a type of orchard in which a specific agroforestry technique is applied

Chaski warmikuna ("chaskis") - female messengers

Despertar - wake up

Desahogarse - to blow off steam; discharge

Granito de arena - little grain of sand

Limpia - ritual of energetic cleansing

Machismo - sexism

Mujerista - womanist

Raymi - important religious/traditional feast

Sanación - healing

Surgir - emerge

Testimonio - testimony

Yachay Karanakui - exchange and sharing of knowledges

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1. Introduction

The Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1970) argues that people will only be able to overcome situations of inequity, oppression, poverty and violence if they first critically recognise their causes. This, according to Freire (1970; 1985), can be achieved through critical pedagogy (CP) - social and radically participatory educational projects, facilitating critical reflection as well as political action. Whereas strategies always vary depending on historical and geographical context, these education projects aspire to assist people in freeing themselves from everyday forms of oppression and foster progressive social and economic change and justice (Keahey, 2019).

While social capital building, empowerment through education, and gender inclusive processes are often stressed in development practice, much mainstream development work continues to be characterised by a top-down approach, in which participation is mainly embraced discursively or in a routinised manner (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). According to Beck and Purcell (2013) and Murray Li (2007) participatory methods are all too often a depoliticised consultation or information giving exercise where the community is presented with a limited range of predetermined options. However, simply going around and asking people what they want is most likely to fail. Without a process of critical reflection and learning, people will inevitably respond to symptoms rather than root causes and even the symptoms will be understood and responded to in the light of the dominant discourse. Similarly, capacity building projects and gender trainings are often carried through with largely technocratic and depoliticised approaches. In contrast, projects focusing on facilitating actual, individual *and* collective socio-political agency, engaging with the social and political structure within which people's position and status are enfolded, are rare (Cornwall and Rivas, 2016; Mukhopadhyay and Wong, 2007).

One actor that is breaking with the top-down and depoliticised approach of development, applying a radical participatory approach which reminisces much of Freire's critical pedagogy methodology, is the Ecuadorian NGO GAMMA (Support Group for the Women's Movement in Azuay [1]). Since 2010, they have been conducting a project called "Building synergies with the women of the South: collective rights, rights of nature and women's rights." This has been sought through establishing and consolidating the *Chaski Warmikuna*, a group of Indigenous Saraguro[2] women engaged in a capacity-building[3] process. Applied with an ecofeminist, intercultural and

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[1] In Spanish - *Grupo de Apoyo al Movimiento de Mujeres del Azuay.*
[2] The Saraguro people is an Indigenous group, part of the Kichwa nationality of the Andean mountains in Ecuador. Saraguro can refer to the ethnic group as well as a canton in the Loja province in which a big part of the population are *Saraguros* (CONAIE, 2014).
[3] While GAMMA is mostly referring to capacity building and strengthening when describing the objectives of the project, empowerment is also occurring in project reports. I, however, have chosen to stick thoroughly to

communitarian approach,[4] the process has included workshops, study groups and meetings, aiming to strengthen women's local proposals to protect life, nature and territory (GAMMA, 2019). The GAMMA project can be considered as an alternative to mainstream development as its point of departure lies in the idea that political solutions to social and climate crises are to be found with the people most affected by its consequences. The project thus seeks a radical and political form of participation and learning, engaging with and building on the potential of the experiences, knowledges, actions and ideas of the group of women they are working with (Giroux, 1996; Tomlinson and Lipsitz, 2013).

Hence, I believe engaging with this project adds to the rethinking of how supporting actors, such as local NGOs or development agencies, can further Indigenous women's socio-political agency and struggle for liberation, thus finding new ways of practicing development.

1.1 Purpose

In this thesis, the GAMMA project in southern Ecuador will be appraised as a whole through Freire's conscientisation theory with a *mujerista*[5] lens. Given its critical pedagogy approach, its political understanding of development issues, and the centrality it accords to a knowledge-building process *with* Indigenous Saraguro women, the project is an interesting case for an analysis. Engaging deeply with GAMMA's methodology is a way of looking into alternatives to top-down, technocratic, depoliticised and individualised capacity-building approaches, addressing the urgent need to rethink, remake and replace social capital building and participatory practices within development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Mukhopadhyay and Wong, 2007). In listening to and learning from the experiences, knowledges, ideas and practices of the people who participate in the project we can gain an in-depth understanding of possibilities, as well as limitations, of a systemic CP approach, specifically in furthering Indigenous women's and other oppressed groups' individual and

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the less conceptually laden concept of capacity building and avoid the use of the contested concept of empowerment.

[4] An ecofeminist approach makes connections between capitalism's exploitation of Indigenous people and nature, and patriarchy's exploitation of women (Mies and Shiva, 1993). Interculturalism in education refers to learning based in one's own culture, worldview, language, values and system of knowledge, while at the same time being open to and appreciative of other knowledges, cultures, and values (López, 2010). Communitarianism is acknowledging the importance of community in political and social life (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

[5] *Mujerismo* or womanism is a social theory based on the experiences, problems, culture, spiritual life and orality of women of color (WOC) and minorities. While womanism emanated from black feminism, *mujerismo* comes from scholarly work by and with Latina women. In its view of social change, womanism strives to find methods in order to eradicate all forms of inequality, not only for WOC, but for all people. It also seeks to restore the balance between human life, nature and spirituality. It is, in the words of Alice Walker (2005/1983:x) who keyed the term, "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people". Thus, like third-wave feminism it embraces intersectionality, but contrary to white feminism which largely has been alientating for minorities, *mujerismo* permits WOC to affirm and celebrate their ethnic identities and culture (Phillips, 2006).

collective socio-political agency. In particular, the case provides insights on how to find place-based ways of facing up to gender inequities in the socio-organisational sphere, high indices of gender-based violence and climate change.

Looking at the larger picture however, the purpose is to contribute with conceptual tools for the liberation of Indigenous women and their communities, adding to the practice of *Yachay Karanakui*[6] and the engaged and critical scholarship developing insights aimed at progressive social change benefitting oppressed groups (Tomlinson and Lipsitz, 2013).

1.2 Research Question

For these purposes, the research question that the study will aim to answer is the following:

- How can critical pedagogy projects facilitate the *conscientisation* and *praxis* of Indigenous Saraguro women in *liberation* processes?

Below follows a brief explanation of the Freirean concepts framing the research question in order to facilitate understanding. These concepts will be further elaborated on in the Theoretical framework chapter.

Conscientisation is the process through which oppressed groups develop a deeper critical awareness of their situation and its causes, as well as start to consider themselves as subjects capable of acting for change. However, according to Freire (1970), a critical consciousness must be combined with *praxis* in order to transform the reality one has become aware of. Praxis is theory and practice, reflection and action, combined and directed at the oppressive structures to be transformed. In other words, conscientisation and praxis stand for processes of developing and practicing critical, sociopolitical, individual and collective agency. Only through praxis and conscientisation is *liberation* possible - the process where people challenge and free themselves from the oppressing conditions that limit their capacity to intervene in and transform their world (Freire, 1970).

2. Setting the Context and Case

This chapter will sketch a brief background on the persistent gender injustices that Indigenous women are facing on the social and political arena in Ecuador, providing an understanding of how

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[6] In Kichwa - Exchange and sharing of knowledges. According to the Saraguros, knowledge is believed to be commons and not property of anyone (Chaski Warmikuna, 2011).

their agency is constrained. Following is a short overview of the history of critical pedagogy[7] as a method to advance social justice struggles, especially in relation to Indigenous women's struggles in Ecuador. Lastly, GAMMA's CP project is introduced in closer detail, mapping out the most important activities, methods and themes.

2.1 Indigenous Women in Ecuador: Heroes and Victims

In Ecuador it is not unusual for women to participate, even to lead, Indigenous struggles. Throughout the 20th century, Indigenous women have been active in different political, cultural and social associations all over Ecuador. Some of these struggles can be conceptualised as Indigenous or based on communitarian feminism, referring to a double-charged political struggle which is addressing political and cultural matters of importance to Indigenous peoples and communities (e.g. environmental protection, language revitalisation), as well as advocating for women's specific rights, exposing discriminating and violent conditions and barriers that women face from both within and outside Indigenous social groups (Smith, 2005).

However, despite an inclusive discourse of social justice in Ecuador's contemporary Indigenous movement, Indigenous women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. This applies both on the local level and on the national one within the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Indigenous party Pachakutik (Picq, 2014).

Moreover, while Indigenous women are politically engaged, their participation in decision-making and organisational spaces is conditioned by family agreements, in which it is implicit that when the men go out to participate in meetings, political activities and strategic discussions, the women are supposed to stay in the home, care for the household and the *chacra*[8] work.[9] So while women's contribution to the Indigenous struggle has been substantial, making possible the independent and deep political engagement of their male spouses, this gendered set-up has simultaneously augmented the workload and household responsibilities of women and limited their influence, politicisation and political training (Figueroa, 2018).

Apart from political exclusion, Indigenous women have to face a high degree of physical, psychological, sexual and patrimonial violence. There are also vast social injustices in relation to economic resources and workload. Generally, the incidence of poverty as well as the amount of

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[7] Also conceptualised as emancipatory education, transformative education, political education, human rights' education, radical adult education or popular education (Schugurensky, 2000).

[8] In Kichwa - Chacra is a type of orchard, prevalent in the Andean region, in which a specific agroforestry technique is applied (Calle Crespo, 2019).

[9] This represents an important principle within many Indigenous cultures in Ecuador - the one of complementarity and duality. In this view, male and female are not seen as opposing, but complementary pairs. In practice, it means that the public sphere is not regarded as separate, nor superior to the private one (Tsosie, 2010).

workload tend to be higher among Indigenous women than among men and other ethnic groups in the country (SNDP, 2017). Rural Indigenous women also tend to put more of their time into non-remunerated housework than remunerated occupations, hence carrying a double workload while also being economically dependent on their male spouses (INEC, 2017).[10]

2.2 Critical Pedagogy within Social Struggles in Ecuador

The participation of Indigenous women in social and political struggles highlights the necessity not to depict Indigenous women in Ecuador as defenseless, in positions of inferiority and as objects for empowerment programs (Radcliffe et al., 2004). However, as discussed in the previous section, major gender injustices and oppression still remain in relation to and in the intersection of political participation, exposure to violence and economic security. As a result of these realities, many Indigenous women have channeled their participation in less formal political spheres, and sought alternative spaces for political and leadership training (Picq, 2014). Indeed, transformative learning, through the creation of proper spaces for reflection, formation and the fostering of Indigenous women's autonomous, political thinking, has been applied historically as a strategy by women in Ecuador. One famous example is Dolores Cacuango's Leadership School[11], founded by ECUARUNARI (Confederation of the Kichwa Nationality in Ecuador), and supported by various international development organisations (Bernal, 2004).

At a local level, various Indigenous organisations have themselves organised political education processes for women on a smaller scale. Similarly, many NGOs and development agencies have implemented human rights and gender education in rural areas. According to Figueroa (2018), these formative and awareness-raising spaces created on a communitarian level in Ecuador have contributed to Indigenous women starting to perceive themselves as rights agents, just like their male counterparts and the majority population.

2.3 On GAMMA, the *Chaski Warmikuna* and the Formative Project

Building on this tradition of critical pedagogy in order to amend persisting gender injustices in different social spheres is the project "Building synergies with the women of the South: collective

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[10] In Ecuador, almost 7 out of 10 Indigenous women have experienced some kind of violence, which is more than any other social or ethnic group in the country. Meanwhile, women's, and especially Indigenous women's workload, is higher than men's, working over 24 hours more weekly, including both domestic and remunerated work. These injustices especially apply to Indigenous women living in rural areas (SNDP, 2017).

[11] Well before their time, Indigenous female leaders such as Dolores Cacuango and Tránsito Amaguaña argued for the relevance of a change in mentalities through educational processes and fought for a valuation of women's contribution to the radical transformation of colonial patterns of discrimination in Ecuadorian society (Bernal, 2004). These ideas were later put into practice in Dolores Cacuango's Leadership school which facilitated a reflective process on the formation of the Indigenous woman's identity, gender relations and the exercise of power within a non-Western framework (Figueroa, 2018).

rights, rights of nature and women's rights." It was initiated in 2010 as a collaboration between GAMMA,[12] Saraguro women and representatives from the then existing *Casa de la Mujer* in Saraguro (GAMMA, 2015b).[13]

Since then, the overall objectives of the project have been to strengthen, enrich and broaden the political and social undertakings of women in the southern region of Ecuador (mainly the provinces of Azuay, Loja and Zamora), building on an already strong organisational culture and importance given to the collective within the Andean cosmovision. However, the gender perspective was an element that was previously judged absent in many Indigenous and Saraguro women's social and political participation, which is why it has been the common thread running through the project activities (GAMMA, 2015b).

While the activities have been based in the actions and propositions of Saraguro women, representatives from other, non-Indigenous women's rights or feminist organisations in the southern provinces have also been invited to many of the activities, thus supporting the political participation and social leadership of Saraguro women in specific, and other women's organisations in general (GAMMA, 2019).

With a participatory approach, the initial theme around which the project was centered was gender-based violence, and then new themes have been introduced throughout the process following the women's expressed interests and needs, dealing with issues such as political participation of women, self-determination of the Saraguro people, the care economy and the sustainable use of water (GAMMA, 2015b; 2018).

The process is denominated as integral,[14] meaning that the activities have covered a range of different issues and methodological approaches. For example, the formative approach has been realised through facilitation of meetings, study groups, workshops and awareness-raising efforts. Moreover, throughout the years, the activities[15] have had therapeutic components, centered around group therapy, the sharing of experiences and therapeutic massages. Many of these exercises have been inspired by Indigenous spirituality, rituals and ceremonies, such as *limpias, baños*[16] and dancing (GAMMA, 2015b; 2017; 2018; 2019). Other aspects have been more conventional with the women receiving workshops and capacity building on a range of issues, exemplified in Text Box 1 below.

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[12] Based in the city of Cuenca, GAMMA has been carrying out projects in support for the women's movement in the southern provinces of Azuay, Loja and Zamora in Ecuador since 1999.

[13] The project has through its implementation been funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLF), a German political association related to the left-party in Germany.

[14] This is in line with the Andean worldview, highlighting the interconnectedness and importance of harmony of all parts of life, e.g. between people, communities, nature and spiritual, social and political practices, conceptualised as *la red de la vida* - the network of life (Chaski Warmikuna, 2011).

[15] Most of these workshops have been held a few times a year in GAMMA's center in Garupamba, located high up in the Andean moorland between Cuenca and Saraguro.

[16] Ritual baths in rivers, flood streams and waterfalls; a ritual of cleansings with medical plants in order to purify and revitalise energies and connection with nature (Pachaco, 2007).

Text Box 1: Thematics in GAMMA Workshops

- Gender roles and gender based violence
- Individual and collective human rights
- International and national legislation for Indigenous peoples
- Psychology in the context of painful experiences
- Sustainable natural resource use, especially in relation to the Andean moorland and its water
- Food sovereignty
- Agroecology and organic fertilizer
- Leadership and communication

Source: GAMMA project reports 2011-2019

The activities have also been about practicing what is preached, often in relation to the production or recuperation of new and ancestral knowledges of Saraguro women. For example, a large part of the project activities have been about conducting participatory research processes through study groups. These research processes have resulted in publications on ancestral seeds, recipes, medical plants and technology, on food sovereignty and gender based violence (for a full list of investigations, see Appendix 1). These practical activities have also been about the planning and active participation in local and national demonstrations,[17] leading the important traditional and religious ceremonies of the *raymis,*[18] and conducting workshops in the women's communities (GAMMA, 2015b; 2019).[19]

According to GAMMA (2015b), the project has been carried out through participatory methodologies: dialogue, sharing of local knowledge, peer work and theorisation starting in the realities of the women themselves. In GAMMA's account, their role within the project has been to accompany the women in realising their proposals, and to suggest tools and exercises in order to generate reflection and debate on the ideas proposed.[20]

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[17] E.g. the International Women's day, the International Day Against Violence towards Women and the National March for Water (GAMMA, 2015b).

[18] In Kichwa - important religious feast in the Andean region.

[19] Other examples include the construction of a Plan for Government during the initial part of the project, in which the *chaskis* addressed their necessities and visions as Saraguro women in relation to a range of issues, such as subsistence, protection, participation and leisure. In 2014, they were involved in the implementation of a Meeting Center with Nature in Quinguiado, together with the municipality and the schools in the area, where school children can go and get environmental education (GAMMA, 2015b).

[20] Accompanying has also meant having facilitated workshops or hired professionals in the different areas worked with, such as psychology, social therapy, law, sexual and reproductive rights or communication. They have also been the ones designing, producing and helping to spread the publications of the research conducted by the women (GAMMA, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a; 2016; 2017).

Together with GAMMA, a group of Saraguro women participating in the project have been part of planning the project's activities. Throughout the project, monthly meetings have been held in Saraguro between these women and one or two coordinators from GAMMA in which activities have been planned and coordinated. These monthly meetings have also served as a space for analysing the social and political context, and discussing the content of workshops that have been held. The women call themselves the *Chaski Warmikuna*[21] and they are a group that was created and then consolidated throughout the trajectory of the project, with women joining in voluntarily (GAMMA, 2015b). The group is not an organisation; rather, they consider themselves *chaski warmikuna* or *chaskis* - female messengers in Kichwa - with the goal to strengthen, motivate and create dynamics around the socio-political struggles taking place in their communities or in the diverse organisations where some of them are participating. In other words, the *chaskis* are putting in practice *el Yachay Karanakui, la minga*[22] and the highly-esteemed value within Saraguro culture of communitarian solidarity (Chaski Warmikuna, 2011). Some are representatives in *cabildos,*[23] schools or local organisations, others are individuals simply being interested in the work of the *Chaski Warmikuna* (GAMMA, 2015a).

With this chapter having provided the most important contextual information on the project investigated, the next section is dealing with the theoretical framework of the study, based in and around CP.

3. Theoretical Framework: Towards a Critical (*Mujerista*) Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a theory or philosophy of change, informing the practice of teaching and learning. It is worth highlighting that GAMMA themselves do not use the concept of critical pedagogy when describing the project outlined above. Nevertheless, looking at the project activities and methodologies, one can obviously see the affinity to critical pedagogy. The methodology of CP, as well as the GAMMA project, is focusing on collective, as well as individual forms of capacity building. It is seeking to build awareness of locally relevant social-political issues, grounded in collaborative cycles of action and reflection, promoting dialogue between popular (Indigenous) knowledge and systematised (scientific) knowledge (Freire, 1970; Keahey, 2019).

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[21] In Kiwcha - Chaski means messenger while warmikuna is the plural form of women.

[22] In Kichwa - *Yachay Karanakui* means exchange; sharing of knowledges. *Minga* means collective work.

[23] In Spanish - Local councils. The Saraguro people have established a traditional, communitarian organisational structure. The base of this social network are families which in turn are organised in communes. Leading the commune is el Cabildo, the council, with members appointed by the the community through direct-election systems (CONAIE, 2014).

Thus, in order to understand the project, it will be analysed through CP theory, adding a *mujerista* lens since this was deemed necessary. In the following section we will dive deeper into the broad field of critical pedagogy, give some *mujerista* perspectives on CP practices, and finally merge the two into a comprehensive analytical framework for the study.

3.1 An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy

3.1.1 Knowledge and Power: Education as a Liberating Act

A line of thought found in Freire (1970) and other critical educationalists such as hooks (1994) is that education is political. This means rather than seeing education as neutral, there is an acknowledgement of the strong links between knowledge and power, structure and agency, as well as a recognition that education can play a role to both reinforce and challenge oppressive social relations.

Freire (1970) conceptualises society as divided between dominant and dominated groups: an elite minority of oppressors, and a majority of oppressed, living in systematic oppression. Within this system of economic, social and political domination persisting in many countries, Freire sees an educational culture aimed at maintaining and reinforcing the existing unequal social relations. Through the practice of a so called banking education, where learners are perceived as storing deposits to be filled with information, people are deprived of their social agency. They are also taught to obey authority (hooks, 1994). The situation makes it practically impossible to achieve a critical awareness about the order of things and act upon that awareness. The idea of banking education can also be related to capacity building within mainstream international development practice. Mukhopadhyay and Wong (2007) argue that participants in many gender training projects are seen as empty vessels, devoid of their own context or history, to be filled with gender knowledge. Similarly, within the post-development school it is argued that international development work to a large degree has been part of maintaining a system of domination through depoliticised, technocratic, positivist and individualised approaches (Escobar, 2005).

In order to respond to banking education, Freire (1970) calls for a pedagogy of the oppressed, a critical and problem posing pedagogy, which would be education as the practice of freedom. Likewise, hooks (1994) suggests that critical pedagogy can be a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist and free yourself of all kinds of domination. Thus, within CP the focus is on *liberation*, conceptualised as the process where people discover themselves as politically reflective beings, develop their abilities to give voice to their ideas and impressions, and practice the act of critique through engaging with and challenging power relations. Hence, liberation can be understood as both a process and an end goal (Shor and Freire, 1987). In order to understand how

liberation comes about, an introduction to the central concepts within CP is necessary. Thus, the interrelated and interdependent concepts of conscientisation, denunciation and praxis will be elaborated on below.

3.1.2 Conscientisation: Critical Awareness and Transformative Power

Essential within critical pedagogy processes is *conscientisation* (Freire, 1970), also conceptualised as critical learning (Foley, 2001) and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997). Freire (1970: 109) stresses that through conscientisation marginalised groups can start reflecting critically on the causes of oppression, "emerging from submersion" and taking into account the possibilities of acting for change. In other words, a deepening consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend the situation as a historical reality susceptible to transformation - it is an untested feasibility - and not a closed world from which there is no exit. When the world is perceived in this way, people can become active subjects in their own lives and in the transformation[24] of society, rather than objects in the narratives of others. This means recognising and believing that we have a productive and transformative power (Giroux, 1985). Apparently, in Freire's theory of popular power and production the language of critique and possibility comes together. CP is thought to serve as a tool for organising *hope*, not in its wishful form, but as guiding concrete, reflective action for the eradication of different forms of oppression. According to Freire (1997), there is no genuine hope in those who want to make the future repeat the present, or in those who see the future as something predetermined. A rejection of fatalism is thus inherent in CP theory (Darder, 2017). A prerequisite for this, however, is dialogue and denunciation.

3.1.3 Dialogue, Denunciation and Domination

It is worth highlighting that Freire (1970) considers conscientisation to be a collective project since it takes place in a person among other people through the power of *dialogue*. Dialogue for Freire is defined as a collective reflection for action, through which educators and learners engage in order to search for a clearer understanding of the causes of their realities and thus a more coherent political commitment (Shor and Freire, 1987). In other words, through dialogue is *denunciation* possible. According to Freire (1985), in order to surmount situations of oppression and dehumanisation, people must first critically recognise - denounce - its causes, i.e. the social structures limiting their self-development and self-determination.

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[24] Transformation/transformative is understood and used in the following way throughout the thesis: what is aiming to make a profound and integral social change come about, in the many spheres of social life and with diverse strategies, including but not limiting itself to public policies and its surrounding structures (Brand, 2016: 146).

Denunciation is necessary for conscientisation since the dominated consciousness is historically conditioned by the social structures, implying that without CP, one does not have enough distance from reality in order to know it in a critical way. This element of domination is called *internalisation*. Freire (1985) stresses that domination is more than just cultural forms of oppression bearing down on certain groups daily, it is also to be found in the way the values, ideas and practices transmitted through the dominating culture are taken for true and practiced among those disadvantaged by the same oppressive structures. One such internalised idea is that people do not perceive themselves as reflective and transforming beings - they are immersed in a *culture of silence*. Having internalised an incapacity to act or speak out, people find themselves in what is called limit situations, situations that they cannot imagine themselves beyond, thus rendering oppressive realities an immutable character. This, according to Freire (1970), is part of a dehumanising ideology, since part of being fully human is to reflect, create and transform. Consequently, denunciation and gaining a voice requires the facilitation of CP processes, as the oppressed are immersed and participating in the system of oppression (Mosedale, 2005). A crucial component of these processes is praxis, explained below.

3.1.4 Praxis: Reflection and Action Combined

Freire (1970) argues that conscientisation is brought about not through an intellectual effort alone, since becoming aware of an oppressive situation is not enough for changing that reality. Rather, consciousness must be combined with *praxis* in order to accomplish the untested feasibility; through joining reflection and action. In that sense conscientisation is not a result of a linear learning process, but something developing gradually in the struggle already begun (Heaney and Horton, 1990). Thus, the theoretical learning context must find ways in which it can facilitate socio-political, transformative action. How praxis is done, however, must be indicated by each local reality, identifying generative themes (Freire, 1985).

3.1.5 Generative Themes: Starting in People's Experiences and Realities

Of course, a central issue in relation to CP projects is the challenge of making them relevant to the people concerned. Various scholars stress the importance of starting in local issues in order to engage people in organisational and collective study spaces (Beck and Purcell, 2013; Freire, 1970; Hope et al., 1984; Kabeer et al., 2013; Selwyn, 2009). What is highlighted is the importance of centering learning processes around *generative themes*. Generative themes are issues related to the participants´socio-cultural reality and experiences, making them into themes about which people have a passion and a willingness to take and sustain action (Beck and Purcell, 2013; Freire, 1970).

According to Fujino et. al. (2018), working around generative themes also facilitates understanding of cultural, systemic and affective violence.

3.1.6 Limitations to Liberation

However, some scholars have highlighted that the capacity of a CP approach is limited. Lockhart (1999), for example, argues that Freire has failed to provide evidence for how transformative social change can come about as a consequence of CP. Similarly, Keahey (2019) and Selwyn (2009) have found that while a grassroots' conscientisation and bottom-up praxis of liberation seems to be able to achieve transformative relations and higher organisational engagement in defined locations, it struggles to contribute to broader structural change. According to Keahey (2019), CP is limited by structural barriers that separate communities and their collective action across time and space. For example, with institutions controlling the access to resources and space for engagement as well as national legislation.

Likewise, CP as conceptualised by Freire has received critique, especially from feminist and post-colonial - womanist/*mujerista* - scholars. hooks (1994) has been one of them, critiquing Freire's scant attention to issues of gender and race, and his failure to acknowledge the specific gendered and racialised nature of oppression. Perhaps more importantly, *mujerista* scholars have been among those adding important dimensions to the school and practice of transformative learning. Below I am taking you through some of these.

3.2 Adding a *Mujerista* Lens to Critical Pedagogy

3.2.1 Personal Healing

While the social and material conditions of people are usually considered through generative themes in relation to critical pedagogy, how emotional state and spirituality may also inform conscientisation has been largely neglected.[25] Adding a Latina feminist or *mujerista* lens to the conscientisation process reminds us of the need to create support in CP processes for *personal healing* and for the emotional, spiritual and relational resources that Latina and Indigenous women have drawn on in their different struggles against oppression (Trinidad Galván, 2006). Similarly, hooks (1989; 1990) highlights that transformative agency, for those who have been oppressed, is as much about personal healing and wholeness as it is about collective action changing dominating structures. And there is evidence that the personal transformation, once begun in the personal sphere, can generate more public forms of resistance (Dyrness, 2008).

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[25] However, Freire himself did start to include emotional aspects into his theory in his later works: e.g. Pedagogy of the Heart (1997).

3.2.2 *Testimonio*

Furthermore, in adding a *mujerista* lens to Freire's idea of denunciation and dialogue, the concept of *testimonio*[26] is particularly valuable. *Testimonio* could be described as a form of expression coming from situations of oppression, in which the purpose of the story is less about exposing a personal life and more about creating a record of violence on whole groups or communities. In this sense, they are both individual and collective testimonies (Dyrness, 2008). Testimony has been central within feminist consciousness raising groups (CRGs), a feminist type of CP practice, as well as within the everyday survival strategies of women living in oppressive situations. According to Madriz (1998; 2000), communication among women can be an awakening experience and an important element in the consciousness-raising process. The awareness that other women experience similar problems or share ideas are important in that it contributes to women's realisation that their opinions are legitimate and valid and that their problems are not just individual but structural. It is thus a way of breaking the culture of silence that has suppressed the expression of their emotions and ideas. CRGs can then serve as a space for mutual support in various acts of resistance and transformation, putting these previously suppressed ideas into practice (Benmayor, 1991; Randall, 1980).

3.2.3 Building a Theory for Liberation: Individual *and* Collective Praxis

Hence, through *testimonio* and similar to praxis, the main objective for feminist CRGs has been to build "theory" for political change and liberation purposes, based on the lived experiences of the women participating. However, while Freirean CP is mostly focusing on *collective praxis*, acting politically to transform society on local, regional, national or global levels, the *mujerista* approach is pointing to the fact that *individual praxis*, undertaken in the personal sphere within oneself, relationships, family bonds and everyday life, might also have an important role to play in women's liberation processes. It also points to the fact that individual and collective praxis can complement each other (Dyrness, 2008; Trinidad Galván, 2006).

So, this section has outlined Freire's CP theory and *mujerista* conscientisation theory. These are conceptually summed up below in Figure 1 to facilitate understanding. However, this figure is not to be confused with the study's analytical model, presented in the forthcoming section.

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[26] Testimony; bearing witness.

Figure 1: Central Concepts within Critical (*Mujerista*) Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy Concepts 101

Concepts of Domination

Concepts of Liberation

Banking education - an educational system in which learners are perceived as storing deposits to be filled with information

Culture of silence - a culture in which people do not see themselves as reflective, active creators and transformers of the world, due to an instilled self-image about one's role in society

Domination/oppression (dehumanisation) - controlling thinking and action, adjusting people to the status quo and inhibiting their creative power. Domination is always socioculturally specific but could relate to patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism

Internalisation - when the values, ideas and practices transmitted through the dominating culture are taken for true and practiced among those disadvantaged by the same oppressive structures

Limit situations - immutable situations people cannot imagine themselves beyond. The theme to reference of these situations is fatalism

Graph developed by the author based on Freire 's (1970;1985;1997) and mujerista research (Benmayor, 1991; Dyrness, 2008; Madriz, 1998, 2000; Trinidad Galván, 2006)

Conscientisation - the process in which people develop a critical awareness of their realities and its causes, as well as a growing belief in one's capacity to transform that reality

Denunciation - to critically recognise the causes of situations of oppression and dehumanisation

Dialogue - collective reflection for action

Generative themes - issues close to the social, political and cultural realities and experiences of participants, about which they have a passion and a willingness to take action

Healing/*sanación* - strengthening and supporting emotional, spiritual and relational resources

Humanisation - going from object to subject; becoming able to reflect and create in the world, thus realising one's transformative capacity

Praxis - reflectively informed action directed at the oppressive structures to be transformed

Testimony/*testimonio* - sharing of stories and experiences in organised group contexts

Untested feasibility - a situation perceived as a historical reality susceptible to change. Implies hope and a rejection of fatalism

3.3 Analytical Model: Stringing a Saraguro Necklace

In this section I will present an analytical model building on the theoretical framework outlined above. Firstly, it is crucial to point out how the *mujeristas* and Freire come together in their focus on the process of *production*, i.e. the various ways in which people have been and are constructing their own voices and validating their contradictory experiences within special historical settings and constraints (Freire, 1985). The Freirean, *mujerista* framework thus directs the analysis towards identifying the knowledge and resistance patterns stringed together by the women participating throughout the critical pedagogy project. In this way, the *chaskis*' theory for liberation can be mapped. It can also be highlighted that the alliance between these two theoretical approaches is adding to the specificity of the study.

Judging from the account given above it becomes clear that a representation of the analytical framework (Figure 2) will not be neat nor clearly cut. This is because the core concepts - conscientisation, collective and individual praxis, as well as its subsets of processes - are all

interlinked, interdependent and simultaneously ongoing. Representing this complexity and dynamism, as well as paying tribute to the fostering of creativity through CP projects and within the artisanal traditions of Saraguro women, the analytical framework is inspired by a typical Saraguro hand beaded necklace, with its intricate and interwoven patterns.

The black, broader horizontal lines represent collective praxis, while the thinner, vertical black lines represent individual praxis. The coloured vertical lines on the other hand visualise conscientisation. These have different colours since conscientisation have various subsets of processes and components such as testimonio/denunciation/dialogue, healing/support and generative themes. In the necklace, all of the parts feed into and depend on each other. Lastly, the fact that the necklace is unfinished represents how liberation is not a once-and-for-all act, but a space of becoming, filled with obstacles of different kinds, but simultaneously fueled by hope. These processes are all part of the same totality - the necklace - which is representing the theory for liberation as produced by the women throughout the CP project:

Figure 2: Analytical Model
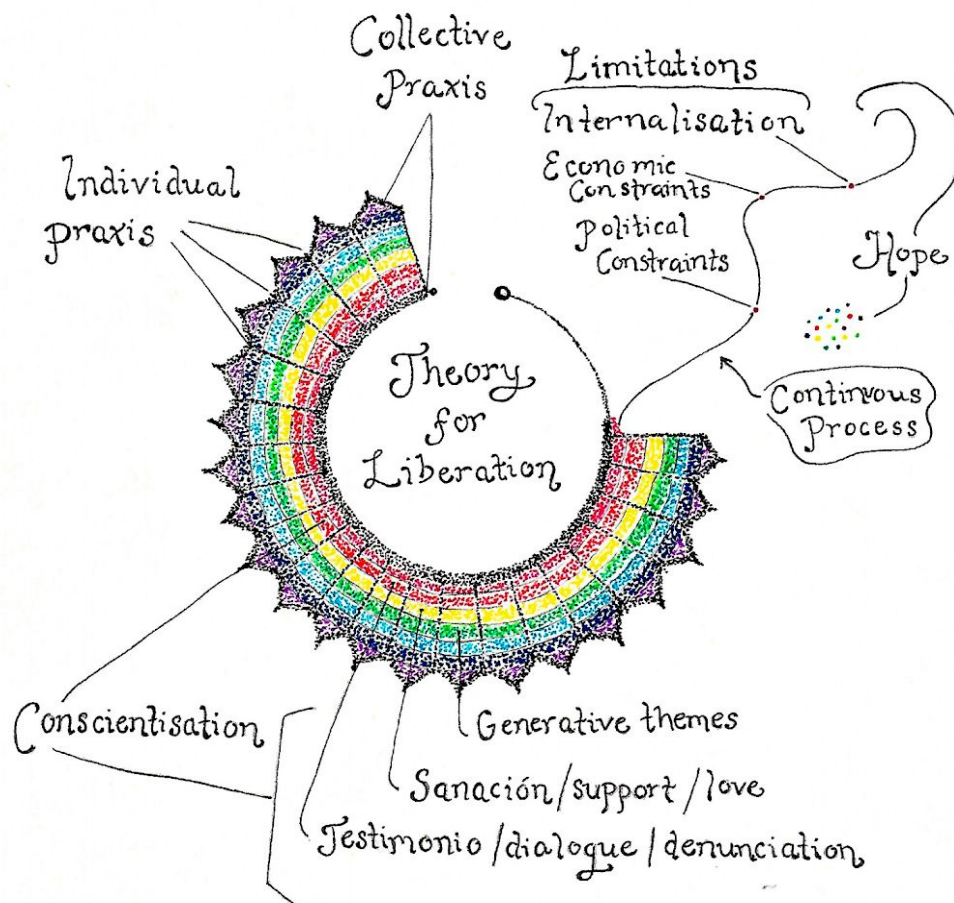
Theory for liberation-framework, created by the author based on Freire's (1970; 1985) and *mujerista* concepts (Benmayor, 1991; Dyrness, 2008; Madriz, 2000; Trinidad Galván, 2006).

4. Methodology

In this chapter I account for the methodological choices that have guided the research, including epistemological foundations, research design, sampling, data collection methods, limitations and ethical considerations.

4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Foundations

The epistemological and ontological foundation for this study is grounded in critical Indigenous pedagogy (CIP), which is a dialogue between Indigenous and critical methodologies, regrounding Freire's critical pedagogy in local, Indigenous contexts, as well as feminist standpoint theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). CIP is based on a communicative, critical realist ontological perspective, thus presupposing the existence of structural realities, but acknowledging that they can be known only through linguistically and historically mediated processes (Morrow and Torres, 2002).

Epistemologically, a feminist CIP perspective sees knowledge, meaning and truth in its multiplicity, meaning that people, with an emphasis on Indigenous people and women, are seen as legitimate producers of knowledge with a transformative power (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). In other words, a dialectical, relational view of knowledge is embraced, meaning that this research is about the sharing of ideas[27] in a theoretically grounded and systematic way. The focus is thus to put academic knowledge, in the form of Freire's and *mujerista* theory on liberating education, in conversation with the *chaskis*' theory for liberation as produced throughout the project (Scheyvens and Leslie, 2000). In this way, the study is re-working theoretical assumptions together with the women, creating the potential to achieve resonance in relation to theoretical and methodological debates on CP across similar contexts.

4.2 Research Design

The present study is a single case study, focusing on the experiences of the people involved in the GAMMA project and its activities. Case study research is used for in-depth study of a particular unit, community, event or organisation (Yin, 2003), meaning that it is a useful approach in order to gain detailed knowledge on the CP process undertaken by GAMMA with Saraguro women. My case study design uses multiple data sources, all accounted for below. However, before going into that, I will explain the sampling procedure.

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[27] Similarly, within Saraguro culture the sharing of knowledges is an ancestral practice. Knowledge exchange and sharing is referred to with *Yachay Karanakui* (Chaski Warmikuna, 2011).

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Site Sampling

The GAMMA project was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the project has an alternative approach in having the objective to strengthen women both individually, collectively and on a socio-organisational level. Secondly, reading up on the project gave the impression that GAMMA had not fallen into the rhetorical and empty form of participation mentioned in the introduction (see examples below in Text Box 2). Thirdly, with the project running with stable financial support since 2010 it presented the somewhat unusual opportunity to look into a long or middle-term process of a capacity building project within the development sector. Lastly, the reasons were practical, since I had conducted an internship at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, a partner organisation and funder of the project, during the months previous to the field study.

Text Box 2: The Participatory Approach of GAMMA

"The process took off in the analysis, reflection and incorporation of new concepts and perspectives, towards the definition of proposals: in the end we were able to construct an advocacy work proposal, created in the light of the compañeras' [Saraguro women's] deep discussions. These discussions were generated from questions such as: What can we do in order for women to get higher access to public spaces in general and decision-making spaces in particular? Where do we see the strongest resistance? What are the causes for this? What are the causes of these causes?"(GAMMA's compilation of the project 2010-2014 - GAMMA, 2015b: 12).

"The organisation [GAMMA] has worked conjointly with the local organisations, as in previous periods, maintaining the spaces of permanent coordination and communication in order to guarantee the participation and adaption of the project to communitarian practices" (GAMMA, 2018: 2).

"Principal objective 3 2019: Promote the debate, repueration of knowledges and scientific contributions of Indigenous Saraguro women, in order to answer to climate change and the urgent need to protect the water and the Andean highland" (GAMMA, 2019: 14).

4.3.2 Sampling of Participants

When finding and choosing individuals to interview, I employed a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Through purposive sampling individuals were selected to take part in the study on the criteria that they were considered to be important and information-rich informants, in order to maximise the use of time and resources (Bryman, 2012). The people working for GAMMA, some of them involved in the women's movement in southern Ecuador for over 20 years and most

of them engaged in the formative project since its initiation were my cultural gatekeepers, meaning that they were the ones recommending me which women to talk to and provided me with the phone number to many of them (Scheyvens, 2014).

Later on in the data collection process, women that I interviewed recommended me or referred me to more women that had participated in the project. Thus, while purposive sampling initiated the sampling process, the method of snowball sampling kept it going and expanded its reach (Bryman, 2012). The women participating in the study were chosen based on the criteria of being or having been involved in the *Chaski Warmikuna* or project activities, with preference given to those that had participated for a longer period of time.

Following the three methods of data collection applied in this study are presented: semi-structured interviewing; a participatory drawing exercise; and desk-based research.

4.3.3 Semi-structured Individual and Group Interviews

The principal source of data are the semi-structured individual and group interviews that were conducted in the cities of Cuenca, where GAMMA is based, and in and around Saraguro, Loja and Zamora, where the women who have participated in the project live. These interviews all took place between January and February 2020.

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen since it is a flexible method, well suited for exploring understandings and perceptions while also providing participants with considerable control over the interview process (Creswell, 2007). At the same time, the semi-structured interview allows for a degree of comparative analysis (Hammett et al., 2014). With CIP informing the methodology, emerging thematics were explored during the interviews in order to engage the participants in critical reflection on the possibilities and limitations of CP processes, creating a collaborative process "...oscillating between knowledge generation and critical-informed reflection..." (Foth and Axup, 2006: 2).

In total 24 people participated in the interviews: 16 Indigenous Saraguro women, 4 mestiza women from feminist/women's organisations who had participated in the formative process, and 4 project coordinators from GAMMA (see Appendix 2 for full list of interviews).

With the GAMMA staff being key informants I began the research process by interviewing those who had been involved in the project since its initiation in order to learn details about the course of the project throughout the years. They also provided me with advice on my methods, questions, and how to organise meetings with the women.

When interviewing the women I strove to follow Indigenous principles guiding researcher conduct, spelled out by Scheyvens (2014). This meant making sure that data collection was more than a self-serving service, doing my best to establish friendly relationships and creating respectful

ambiances when interviewing. For these purposes, I let the participants set the conditions for our meetings, deciding when and where they wished to meet. A few times, to my pleasant surprise, women that had been hard to get hold of showed up during interviews because their friend had encouraged them, and some women suggested doing the interview with a friend living nearby. This meant that while initially the interviews were thought to be individual interviews, some turned out to be group interviews. I felt that some of them preferred it this way and as pointed out by Madriz (1998), women often feel more comfortable talking in a group situation, especially among people like themselves. As a result, 10 of the interviews were conducted individually and 5 were group interviews with 2-4 women. Lastly, one exercise was a Participatory Action Research (PAR) exercise that was conducted in relation to the *chaskis*' coordination meeting. More details on this exercise is provided below in section 4.3.4.

An issue that is important to take into consideration when conducting group interviews with people who know each other is the risk of precluding openness in certain topics, in case the opinions being expressed are against the norm and might affect ongoing relationships (Hammett et al., 2014). I did not get the impression the women "censored" themselves in this way during the group interviews, since they were used to discussing different political and sometimes sensitive issues within the project activities. However, on two occasions I noticed a slight power imbalance in the groups where the age differences were notable. Being aware of this, I tried to mitigate power dynamics within the interviews while simultaneously respecting communal norms and hierarchies through a high degree of active engagement, inviting the shyer young women into the conversation, asking specifically for their thoughts once the older women had finished talking.

As for the interview questions, they were informed by Freire's (1970) conscientisation theory. For detailed information, the interview guides can be consulted in Appendix 3.

4.3.4 Participatory Drawing and Discussion Exercise

In relation to the criteria of meaningful coherence or methodological consistency (Tracy, 2010), it can be noted how Freire's theories have had a big impact on the ideas and practices of PAR (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). For this reason, and in order to start a discussion on the project related to the RQs in a creative and more meaningful way (McCarthy and Muthuri, 2018), I incorporated one explicitly participatory component of the data collection. The participatory drawing and discussion exercise was inspired by visual participatory research and a model found within the Gender Action Learning for Sustainability methodology (Gender at Work, 2018), but then thoroughly re-worked and adapted to the purposes of the research as well as the social and cultural context.

My PAR claims are, however, very humble. While my ambition was to conduct this exercise with all participants it was in the end, mostly due to logistical and economic constraints, only possible to do it on one occasion where 8 women participated.

The exercise was conducted in two steps. Firstly the women were presented with a large drawing (see Figure 3) representing different social levels: individual; group; family/community; municipal/provincial; organisational; national and global. Following, they were asked to reflect about the way the formative process had strengthened them to act on different levels, and to make small drawings representing these ideas and put them up on the big drawing. The idea was to create a visual representation of the women's efforts in a tangible way, identifying gaps in their efforts and remaining obstacles, and thus potentially inform future strategies for change, in line with CIP principles (Rao et al., 2015).[28] Secondly, a collective discussion took place where the women discussed and explained the drawings. Lastly, I photographed the big drawing and let it remain in the room where the *chaskis* normally have their planning meetings.

Figure 3: Participatory Drawing Exercise

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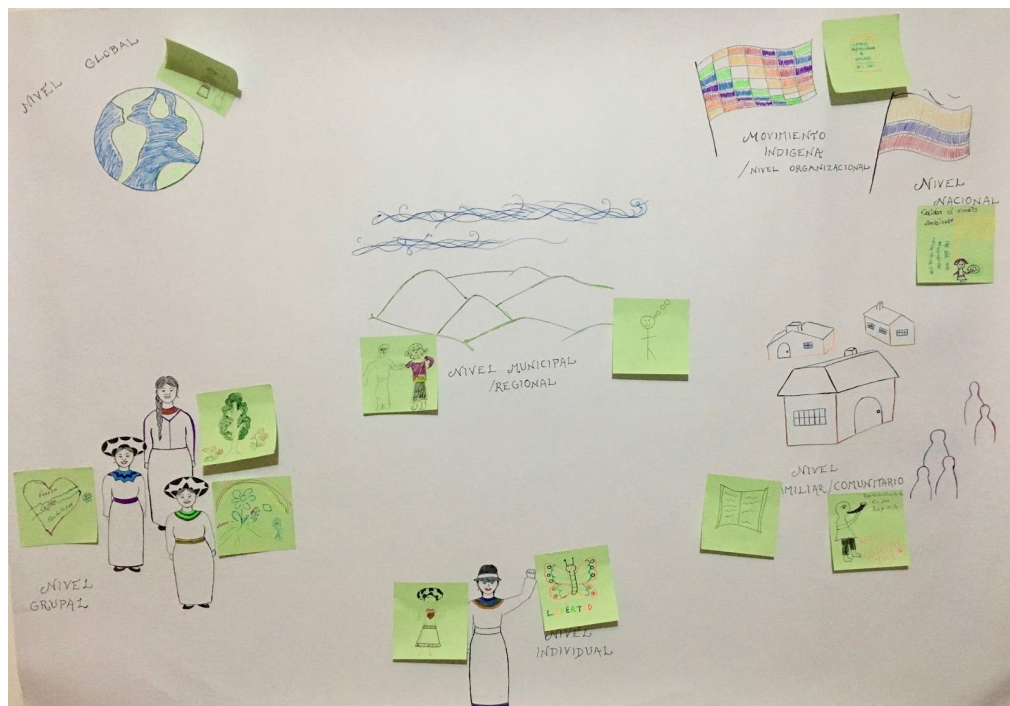
[28] In this sense, it was my humble way of trying to give something back to the *chaskis* for their sharing of insights and experiences. There was another positive effect of this activity, an unintended contribution of my research. To make a long story short, one of the women had been inactive in the group of *chaskis* for more than one year due to political disagreements within the group. During our one-on-one interview, she was reminded of how much she had liked to participate, but was unsure whether she would be welcome back. I knew that GAMMA had been sending her invitations to the planning meetings but it turned out that she had not received them since she had lost her phone, something that the staff from GAMMA were unaware of. Being in the middle of this situation I could serve as a mediator, forwarding the invitation from GAMMA to the coordination meeting that would take place at the same time as my drawing and discussion exercise. Thus, in the end the woman reintegrated into the group through the meeting and the activity.

4.3.5 Desk Based Research

In order to corroborate the individual and group interviews, as well as collect historical and empirical information I engaged with primary documents related to the project. These included GAMMA's project reports 2011-2019 and the publications produced throughout the project in collaboration with the women (see Appendix 1).

4.4 Data Analysis

As already indicated I started with a fluid theoretical framework, initially inspired mainly by Freire (1970; 1985) but then established gradually in the course of the research process, with themes, ideas and concepts discovered during the interview and transcription phase that were relatable to and had to be read through *mujerista* conscientisation theory (Benmayor, 1991; Dyrness, 2008; Madriz, 1998, 2000; Trinidad Galván, 2006). This flexibility can be defined as a retroductive analytical approach, characterised by a combination of induction and deduction and a dynamic exchange between theoretical concepts and what was said during the interviews. In this way, the risk of missing out on diverging voices and ideas is minimised, and the richness of research is maximised (Ragin and Amoroso, 2014).

Thus, after transcription was finished I identified themes that I colour-coded and related to the Freirean/*mujerista* framework, taking notes of repeated concepts, ideas and words (Wetherell, 2006). Following, relevant interview excerpts were entered into a spreadsheet to get an overview of the different themes and facilitate understanding. Only quotes that were to be used in the analysis section were translated from Spanish into English.

The last step in the analysis was about comparing the themes visible from the interviews with the drawings and discussion produced during the group exercise. The drawings could then complement and add a further dimension to the findings.

4.5 Trustworthiness and Limitations

Limitations and possibilities in relation to the soundness of the research that have not been mentioned already should be addressed. Firstly, the in-depth understanding produced throughout this study is socially, historically and culturally specific, meaning that the findings are limited to similar contexts, i.e. Indigenous communities in Latin America (Creswell, 2007). It is also important to stress how the study is looking into a bumpy, non-linear process of which it is only capturing a snapshot. The understanding of the case will thus be partial.

Another limitation relates to interpretation, meaning that there is always a risk that the researcher's interpretation might not be consistent with the one of participants (McCarthy and

Muthuri, 2018). This is especially pertinent in this study since it was undertaken in a context culturally and linguistically different from my own. Almost all of the interviewees spoke Spanish as their first language, and many of them had Kichwa as a second language.[29] Although my own level of Spanish is advanced, it is not my mother tongue, and I only learned a little bit of Kichwa during my stay in Ecuador. So while communication was possible, there is a risk that subtleties, regarding Indigenous concepts and native expressions, might have gone unnoticed. Moreover, born and raised in Sweden, it is probable that my worldview in terms of for example gender equality, political activism and ideas of what constitutes a good life, differs from the one of the women. These socio-cultural and linguistic differences can limit the ability to understand the unique perspectives and experiences of those participating in the study (McCarthy and Muthuri, 2018).

Nevertheless, I believe that some of the communicative barriers arising from cultural differences could be mitigated through being well versed within the specific beliefs, values and sociopolitical context of Ecuador and the Saraguro people. While a worldview cannot be completely "learned" I made efforts to be able to better understand and communicate with the participants, through thorough background research and living and immersing in the local context (Yardley, 2000). These issues were also dealt with continuously throughout the research process, by keeping a research diary reflecting on communicative and cultural barriers arising. For example, this prompted me to change some of the interview questions that were not understood or well received by the women.

Moreover, adding to the overall trustworthiness of the study and the data collection was a crystallisation approach. This method implied using a variety of data sources, qualitative methods and a multisource theoretical framework, as well as including multiple and varied voices (Tracy, 2010).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Moving within the epistemological frames of feminist CIP requires being a critical and ethically sensitive researcher. This includes reflecting on positionalities continuously throughout the research process (Sultana, 2007). Thus, I tried to be aware of how different power relations related to ethnicity, gender, age, etc. were influencing, inhibiting or enabling the exchange between me and the women (England, 1994). This was a complex task, since power is not static and researchers do not always wield power over participants (Faria et al., 2014). Having done an internship with the RLF and being a white Westerner, sometimes made the interviewees perceive me as an evaluator or possible funder of future projects. In other moments I was treated as an ally, being a female

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[29] In the 1970s and 80s a process of native language loss spread in the Saraguro ethnic group, leading to the predominance of Castilian Spanish as first language (Pacheco, 2007).

researcher who explicitly had stated my own interest and engagement in feminist and climate struggles. In light of all this, I did make an effort to mitigate the different power imbalances at play through always making clear that I was conducting the study as an independent researcher sympathising with their cause, and not as a representative for any development agency. I also started every interview by telling them a bit about myself, why I was interested in their struggle, their experiences and the methodology of the project, and how the results would be used. Another way of minimising the distance between myself and the participants was to be inspired by the principle of "sharing, hosting, being generous" when conducting research with Indigenous peoples (Scheyvens, 2014: 198). In my case that meant offering the women coffee, *panecito* or fruit to share while talking. The principle of sharing will also be about sharing the results once the study is done, something highlighted and encouraged both within feminist and Indigenous research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).[30]

A further ethical dimension to pay attention to is the one about legitimation and representation. My way of addressing these concerns was to hold myself accountable, reflecting on if and how the research could potentially benefit the women involved. For this reason I framed my questions in such a way as to emphasise and invite reflection on the women's experiences, knowledges, opinions and personal performance narratives, rather than their stories as victims of injustices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). This framing made the research into a potentially strengthening or therapeutic process - for the participants as well as for myself (Scheyvens, 2014).

Another ethical dilemma here is the one of interpretation, i.e. how to interpret and present voices of those interviewed without misrepresenting them or colonising their stories (hooks, 1990). One way of addressing this was through my methodological approach, in which the center of attention is the discourses of resistance and strategies of the women, and then build an analysis close to their accounts by extensively using illustrating quotes, minimising the risk for my interpretation to be inconsistent with the participants' accounts (Bryman, 2012).

Lastly, it is important to mention that interviews were conducted and recorded only after getting oral informed consent from all participants, who were also given time to ask questions before we began. Although anonymity was not a concern for many of the participants, I felt that a disclosure of their identities was not appropriate given that we sometimes dealt with personal and painful experiences of resistance, suffering and violence. I also figured that conducting the interviews anonymously made the women relax and be able to speak more openly about their experiences and opinions (Scheyvens, 2014). I therefore asked the participants what pseudonyms they would like me to use. Some had preferences, others were randomly assigned a pseudonym.

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[30] For this purpose I have promised to make a summary in Spanish, and intend to write it in a less academic form that will be sent to the research participants.

5. Understanding the Liberatory Potential of Critical Pedagogy

In this section, divided in two, the material is analysed through a Freirean, *mujerista* lens in order to map out the women's liberation process. The first main part gives insight into the different dimensions of conscientisation, while the second part illustrates how praxis has been facilitated and practiced, but also constrained, throughout the GAMMA and *chaski* project.

5.1 Dimensions of Conscientisation

As already indicated in relation to the analytical model, conscientisation has various subsets of interdependent and interrelated processes. Below I take you through the components that have been important for the women participating in the project in order to further their critical social awareness and strengthen the belief in their transformative capacity.

5.1.2 Generative Themes: Constructing Place Based Learning

An overarching important theme that the women were highlighting is the importance of having the project evolve around *generative themes*. In this context, it meant constructing knowledge based on the often previously suppressed personal experiences, realities and histories, but also the emotions, relations and spirituality, of the women participating. In this way learning and capacity building was made meaningful, engaging and organic (Benmayor, 1991). For the women, it has been important to not only work on conventional women's rights issues such as gender based and intrafamilial violence, but to balance the strengthening of individual women with a commitment to the Saraguro culture and community, for example through engaging with the protection of nature, spiritual rituals and ancestral knowledge. Kuri Kinti expressed how GAMMA's culturally engaged and long-term approach had strengthened them:

> It hasn't been about just coming here to the village and say "well, how great that you are continuing doing these things, congratulations", but rather about supporting us with the publication of the books, showing to people from the outside that this is Saraguro. It's not only the group of chaskis, it's Saraguro. It's a better way to show that they haven't only been concerned with women's rights, that if you're being abused you should file a complaint. Like they don't only care for that, but also to make visible things beyond that. Can you imagine, they make you see how much you have contributed to the development of the people, how much you as a woman have contributed, with your work, with your worldview, with your wisdom.

Moreover, giving importance to generative themes has implied encouraging highly participatory and collective modes of interaction. Indeed, as pointed out by Giroux (2017), Freirean CP is a political and moral practice meant to create the knowledge, skills and relations that enable learners to explore for themselves the possibilities of what it means to participate socio-politically. This was described by Suca from GAMMA in the following way:

> We've always worked with a workshop approach, always based in an analysis of reality, to see how we are doing, listen to them, contribute with new elements, and from there construct new things, propose new things, but based in their own thinking and each and everyone's reality […] We, the technicians, don't go there in order to teach them, rather, we go there in order to *discover together* how to pave the way forward. (emphasis added)

This approach is further confirmed in project related documents. An illustrative example is that the *Chaski Warmikuna* stand as co-responsible in project reports together with GAMMA (2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019) and as co-authors in the books produced throughout the project (see Appendix 1).

Throughout the analysis, it will become further evident how generative themes, i.e. building the process around the realities, preferences, experiences, spirituality, culture and emotions of the women, rather than building "rootless" knowledge has shaped and added not only to the conscientisation but also praxis dimensions of the project.

5.1.2 *Sanación*, *Apoyo* and *Cariño*: A Pedagogy of Support, Love and Care

Part of paying attention to the emotional, spiritual and relational resources that Saraguro women can draw on in their different struggles against injustices has been support for personal healing (*sanación*). The women highlighted the therapeutic elements and dealing with personal sufferings as a crucial aspect of gaining a clearer and more critical understanding of society:

> Wayra Warmi: […] if we don't see the cause, our roots, I believe that society won't change. […] So, if there's no therapy, a process of healing for every person from the roots, it could be a man or it could be a woman, I think that we will not progress. Things become worse and well, that for my part is something that I thank GAMMA for, that they helped us with that part. It helped us a lot, at least me as a person, to obtain a bit of a higher level, because I didn't know where I came from, what I depended on and that it's something that is passed on from generation to generation.

The idea put forward by the women is that we all need to heal from violent experiences of dominating structures in order to lead a well informed struggle against the same injustices. Moreover, it became clear that to heal is to overcome the internalisation of dominant gender ideologies, i.e. an idea that women, and especially Indigenous women, are inferior and submissive. Thus, in turn, healing is a precondition for personal and political action, to initiate it and sustain it:

> Yoly: So I think that to be able to work like this, in these different ways, helps a lot in the process of becoming more aware. That is, it's not only about "I come, I talk, talk", a small lecture and then it's over, rather it's about living, sharing, experiencing, in our bodies, because if I change, if I heal my wounds, I can even help others. […] So above all, letting us heal first permits us to work.

In line with the *mujerista* notion (Dyrness, 2008; Trinidad Galván, 2006) personal transformation and healing has been crucial for more public forms of action. That is, in the women's theory for liberation, individual healing is an important part of stepping out (*salir*) from limit situations and the culture of silence. Healing, care and love permits speaking, and speaking with other women, also permits healing. Together healing and speaking feed into each other, laying the groundwork for a strengthened belief in one's capacity to act socially and politically. However, it is also worth highlighting how personal healing is not a sudden event, rather, it seems to be a continuous process and an important tool for continuous socio-political involvement. Expressing one's feelings and emotions was described as a release, a way of *desahogarse*. In this sense, healing is a way of going from the personal to the political and the collective, and back.

In order to further personal change and healing processes there were especially two dimensions that were stressed as important by the women in the project's methodological approach: love/care, especially self-care (*auto-cuidado*), and support/accompaniment. In practice, it meant healthy and delicious food, group massages and candles being important components of many activities, far away from the typical workshop:

> Maga: So it hasn't been only a cold workshop with political guidelines, but with delicious food, in a place where we all feel happy, with a lot of love and affection for example. So it has made the process into something delightful, we have felt loved, we have also learned how to love ourselves better […].

Moreover, the accompaniment spoken of had been felt on the one hand from GAMMA, whose inputs had served as motivations to learn about new thematics, recreate ancestral knowledges and practices, and encouraged them in their struggles for personal and collective self-determination. On

the other hand, the project has created spaces for mutual support and learning between the women themselves:

> Kuitsa: So the group has been.. the purpose is to support one another. And that's what it has meant to me, a support. And for me to be able to.. gradually learn how to face up to the things that are going on in society. Like knowing how to defend myself. It has helped me a lot with that.

Support between women is thought to have importance for women's liberation on a macro level as well, with many of the participants calling for a greater sorority and unity between women in general.

5.1.3 Denouncing Domination through *Testimonio*

Another part of the process of mutual support, healing and care has been the sharing of life experiences, problems, sufferings, feelings and hopes through the discussions being held throughout the formative process. These acts of *testimonio* have served to help the women "[…] *keep going, for others' testimonies to help you, in order to see how they have flourished and that you also can do it*" (Pájara Carpintera).

Moreover, acts of *testimonio* have gone hand in hand with dialogue, i.e. a reflective process of analysis and diagnosis of the current situation of the women's lives and communities. In line with Freirean/*mujerista* conscientisation theory (Freire, 1970; Dyrness, 2008; Madriz, 1998; 2000), these acts of testimonio and dialogue seems to have made the participants see their experiences in a different light and contributed to an awareness of the systemic character of issues such as patriarchal, physical, psychological and patrimonial violence against women. Many participants account for how the discussions carried out between them made them realise that they were not alone, that their circumstances were not unique, accidental, or product of their own faults:

> Lola: We're talking about your experiences, about my experiences, where I'm at, what I'm learning. My personality changed, from a harsh and rude person to a sensitive person who started to understand that there are more women who suffer from violence and whose hands are tied and sometimes they cannot do anything.

The participants also told me how they had started to denounce other oppressive social structures, lamenting the internalisation of the culture of silence in which people, especially women, believe that they do not have the capacity to step out of their current situation or realise their aspirations. Through the process, the women had been able to see that women do not have to be "submissive" or "tough it out", these things were not "normal" but had become "normalised". The *chaskis* also

accounted for other forms of domination, such as the challenges that one has to face participating in local politics as a woman; the detrimental effects on nature of consumerist and globalised society; and the existence of a formal educational system of banking education, reinforcing the previously mentioned behavioral and thought patterns.

In this way, the sharing with other women and having a space for analysis, reflection and learning has added to the knowledge and awareness of the social, environmental, cultural and economic context in which the women find themselves in. Throughout the analysis it will become further obvious how the *chaskis* have denounced domination, especially in section 5.2.3. Moreover, it should be added how *testimonio* and dialogue have been liberatory acts, in making the women believe their actions can change oppressive situations:

> Samantha: Yes, in one way or another violence has been, in our case it has been passed down from generation to generation, making one believe that I should also live like this, that's one's belief, but when when we entered the process, we approached each other, sat down, talked, we were in the workshops, so we start to think that we can change, we can put an end to the abuse.

Clearly, Samantha's observation ties into the process of conscientisation, which is dealt with subsequently.

5.1.4 Conscientisation: *Abrir los Ojos, Despertar, Surgir*

All of the above aspects seem to be interwoven in a two-fold process of conscientisation. Firstly, through collective testimony and learning around generative themes, the women have developed a critical awareness of one's position as a woman in the system they live in and the forces contributing to maintaining this situation. Secondly, this, paired with personal healing, strengthening and supporting practices, has nurtured a belief in one's transformative capacity, as well as the realisation that this capacity is needed in order to change the injustices one has become aware of. Learning more about the world has thus been a basis for intervening in it (Freire, 1970).

Indeed, all of the interviewees describe a kind of conscientisation being developed throughout the project, mentioning concepts such as having "woken up" (*despertar*), "emerged" (*surgir*) or "opened their eyes" as a result of the formative process. One even humorously described it as having had her chip "reset": "[…]*soy una mujer reseteada* [*laughter*]" (Kuri Kinti). Others, such as Paula, describe a personal change process in their way of thinking, understanding and acting on their reality:

> […] the first time that I went to one of the workshops I was thinking differently, I was thinking very differently. Me, how could I know that women should not be abused, I think I was 17 when I

went the first time, and from there my way of thinking changed, my way of looking at things. Because I was thinking, since we experienced quite a lot of violence, from my father that is, so at that time I was telling myself "I'm also going to get married, have a husband, I'm going to do what he tells me to do so that he doesn't get angry"[…]. But later I started to see, understand and learn that that was not the way.

However, the conscientisation process has not been a homogenous one. While for some it seems to have been a radical change in the way of reading the world, some women describe how they have always, since being young girls, been conscious about social injustices affecting them as women, as Indigenous, poor or living in rural areas. Rather than becoming aware then, the process had provided them with the tools - knowledge, skills and social relations - to be able to name these concerns, understand them better and act on them (Giroux, 2017). For example, for one woman, an already very politically and socially engaged teacher, the conscientisation process had been specifically about gender issues, about recognising and seeing the systematicity of the injustices and violence affecting women:

> Maga: I denied that the patriarchy existed, I denied that feminist action was necessary. I didn't understand, I didn't know that part. In other words, despite being a conscious person, despite doing social work, I didn't have that kind of understanding. […] And for me feminism seemed strange, like, I don't like it, I don't like the way they're exaggerating that. That's how it was, but then I started to understand that yes, I started to mature in relation to that. It's been fundamental in my personal and political life, and for my leadership.

As already mentioned, the conscientisation process also includes an awareness of one's transformative and creative capacity in relation to social reality - going from object to subject. Freire (1970) refers to this with the notion of humanisation. Interestingly enough several women describe a process of personal transformation in which they feel they have become more human. Becoming more human is mostly referred to as becoming able to express oneself, go out (*salir*) and participate in their communities or in public events, intervene in their families or give workshops. Initiating the project, many describe themselves as having gone from "quiet (*calladas)"*, "shy (*tímidas)"* and "submissive (*sumisas*)*"* to being able to speak and act differently. It also involves learning how to value and care for oneself, "[…]*to recognize ourselves as legitimate human beings*[…]" as put by one of the GAMMA staff (Suca). For Kuitsa, humanisation is a liberatory process. Here she described her idea of the purpose of the *chaskis'* group:

The purpose is to… reach more women, and that each and everyone realises that she's capable, that each and every woman can fulfill whatever we truly want to do… the purpose is that we learn how to value ourselves, to not limit ourselves, to not stay silent. Of course with the amount of violence out there, we cannot stay silent, we have to expose the things that are going on, the injustices that affect us. Above all to fly, all of us.

Thus, conscientisation in its twofold sense seems to have inspired the women's action, something that can be referred to with Freire's (1970) notion of praxis. Turning to the second part of the research question, I subsequently take you through the characteristics of the women's reflectively informed actions and how they have been fostered through the project.

5.2 Praxis According to the *Chaskis*

The perhaps most characteristic dimension of the women's praxis is being messengers, to share (*compartir, replicar*) newly created or recreated knowledges and experiences around the issues discussed in the meetings, workshops and study groups. Even the women that were not from Saraguro who had only participated in parts of the activities considered themselves *chaskis*. For instance, in the group discussion exercise various drawings referred to the practice of learning and sharing. Looking at the photo below we see the the family/community level of change with drawings of a notebook with knowledge to share, a woman with a *quipa*[31] summoning the community for collective work and a text saying "strengthening in the *raymis*" and "community support", and up in the right corner, a drawing of a Saraguro woman holding a workshop about the importance of protecting natural resources:
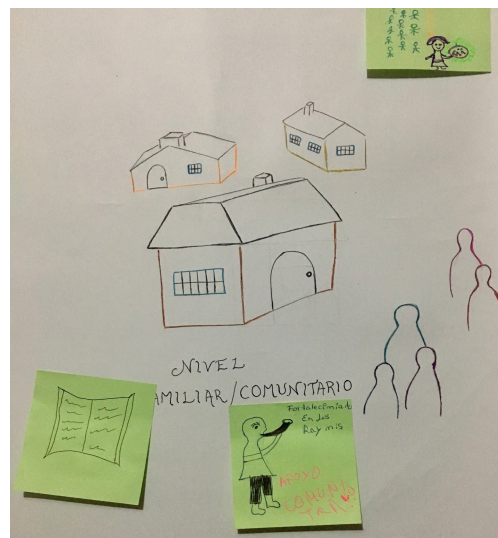

Figure 4: Collective Drawing

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[31] In Kichwa: a type of trumpet. The drawing of the *quipa* also makes reference to the strengthening of ancestral practices through the project.

According to the *chaskis*, the practice of sharing takes place on various levels: within their families or among friends, in their communities and local organisations, or in national networking events. The idea is to inspire changes in attitudes and behaviours when it comes to for example intrafamiliar violence or the use of plastic. A useful distinction, however, can be made between the women's individual praxis as messengers, and their collective one.

5.2.1 Individual Praxis: Personal Self-Determination and Living the Change

Starting with the individual one, the personal sphere seems to be where the women consider themselves to have the most potential for transformative action. They give examples of how they have been working on overcoming oppression in their personal lives, sharing stories of how they have succeeded in changing patriarchal structures in their families, in relation to their husbands or how they educate their children. Some left abusive relationships during the course of the project, while others had separated from their spouses before entering the process and see the formative space as a place for support in a decision that goes against the norm, according to which a woman should stay with her husband no matter what. In that sense, the project has facilitated and increased the women's personal self-determination, which is just what Maga voiced:

> So, self-determination. Rather than having to face up to challenges or obstacles, I've gotten a boost. In other words, it has supported me a lot in gaining more momentum in life[…]. So I couldn't say that having opened my eyes put obstacles in my way, rather I was liberated from them, I've even been able to reach a better understanding with my partner.

Personal self-determination was during the group discussion and drawing exercise related to liberation. On an individual level, the women felt the project had helped them to make choices more freely, developed a capacity to express themselves in the personal sphere, in meetings and events, in line with the Freirean understanding of freedom (Darder, 2017). Liberation was represented as a butterfly on the individual level of change:

Figure 5: Collective Drawing

In this sense, the individual praxis of the women is largely about living and embodying the change they are making together, addressing the oppression that they see through practicing a coherency in their everyday life:

> Nina: To change the world, sorry, to change the world maybe that's something we cannot do. Like, in its totality. But to make change happen from below, from our home, is something that we're already doing […]. And that is also to change the world, from the local. To change the ways, to always be mindful about what's going on with your relatives, with your neighbours.

Here it becomes clear that reality is perceived as an *untested feasibility*, i.e. being able to imagine a future that is not merely reproducing the present (Freire, 1970). This will be elaborated on in the last section of the analysis. According to the women, reality can be changed through place based politics, starting in the individual, the family, children and youth, moving over to the local community. In this sense, they also connect changes in the private and the local with structural changes in relation to, for example, sexism (*machismo*):

> Pájara Carpintera: The thing is that the men are very *machistas*, they are very possessive, they think that you are their property. And we won't change that with a small lecture, that will only change from within the household, growing with our children, studying, we should dedicate ourselves to learn how to do that.

Many of the women believed that in order to be able to act as messengers out in the public, they had to demonstrate that they were living the ideas and knowledges learned through the project in their own houses. They stressed coherency - *coherencia*. Similarly, Freire argued that as you come to see yourself as capable of affecting the course of your own life through decisions and relationships, you can also begin to experience social agency within the collective. These two dimensions are both crucial to establish solidarity and participate effectively in community struggles for liberation (Darder, 2017). Thus, the women's individual praxis within their personal lives and families ties into their collective one, which is elaborated on below.

5.2.2 Collective Praxis: The Opening up of New Spaces for Agency

So, the project has opened up new spaces for individual agency, but also for a collective one. A recurring theme was how the processes had permitted and inspired the women to *salir* - "go out", for example through regularly participate as a group in regional or national political protests:[32]

> Me: And did these trainings inspire you to take any other forms of action?

> Samantha: Through this we've been going out to protest for our rights! [Laughter]

> Ana: To shout..

> Samantha: Well it's up to us, it's up to us to fight. If we don't rise up, no one is going to care about us.

Some mentioned how the process had allowed them to give workshops on gender violence in other communities or share their experiences in universities or events on a national level. In that sense, sharing through *testimonio* is a collective kind of praxis as well: "*I think that from the individual level we've reached the national level, and from there we've been able to share a part of ourselves, how we've been working*"(Karla). Others mentioned how they had gotten the opportunity and confidence as *chaskis* to lead important Indigenous ceremonies and initiate dialogues with the mayor on gender violence. Moreover, the study groups and meetings organised through the project have served as spaces for planification for these collective projects.

Another way that the women have been doing collective praxis is through conducting local research with the support of GAMMA, as already mentioned in the background section. According to the women and GAMMA, this has been a way of recuperating and re-appropriating knowledges and values, such as sharing of knowledge and communitarian solidarity, connected to their cultural

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[32] For example, demonstrations for the protection of water, for women's or Indigenous peoples' rights.

identity: *"We're losing these values, as Indigenous people we're on our way of losing ourselves. But now we're restoring these knowledges, these values in each and everyone of us. We'll continue forward"* (Dolores).   Here, the importance of generative themes in relation to praxis becomes obvious again, as a starting point for the revaluation of the knowledges of the women. Through research on generative themes the project has succeeded in creating a collective and creative learning space in which the women are the experts. In this space, the *chaskis* can practice an agency and see the effect of this agency. For example, Kuri Kinti happily told me how they had succeeded in impacting other people through the books. A Saraguro woman living in Italy had contacted her, telling her she had been inspired to leave an abusive relationship after reading the *chaskis'* testimonial book on ways out from violence. Apparently, these elements have contributed to the women's confidence and belief in their transformative and creative capacity, both individually and as a group. Yet again, this demonstrates how praxis and conscientisation feed into each other. Indeed, *salir* was also referred to as stepping out from an old way of thinking, getting a better self-confidence and esteem. *Salir* can thus be understood in a twofold way - as a cognitive as well as material act.

Furthermore, it was stressed that being messengers, individually and collectively, implies inviting more and more women to become *chaskis* themselves, creating chain processes. However, in this respect the women's agency seems to often be limited, pointing to the constraints of a CP project in liberatory processes. Following, I will go further into these limitations.

5.2.3 Limitations to CP: Internalisation, Economic and Political Constraints

Many of the participants stated that it had been difficult to broaden the project and include more women, much due to the deep internalisation and culture of silence among men as well as women within their communities. As already mentioned when dealing with denunciation, the values, ideas and practices surrounding the role and transformative capacity of women transmitted through patriarchal culture are deeply rooted within the reality outside of the group. Ana said the following about the women in her community, whom she has never succeeded in convincing to come to the coordination meetings and regular workshops:

Me: There is still a lot of resistance?

Ana: There are many barriers that remain to be broken, it's still very strong. […] What's going on is that the women are still not ready, it's a process for them to go over there, to be strong already. It's like they're afraid. I'm telling you that women from my community, we have given workshops to 20 women. And in that moment, they show up. Then later since their husbands, they continue to be submissive, they are afraid. […] Yes, because they think that they're being

disrespectful to their husbands, because they are so stuck, so stuck in thinking that the husband is one's owner.

Thus, several of the participants and the GAMMA coordinators point to a form of patriarchal domination being exercised by the men and internalised and unquestioned by the women. The internalised ideas from a patriarchal kind of culture of silence among both women and men result in the male spouses not letting their female counterparts participate in the activities and meetings, neither do the women fight for their right to do so. In this sense, it is a huge challenge to broaden the scope of the project. Sometimes the defense of these internalised forms of ideas on women's roles (*el machismo*) has turned violent. Samantha recalled a violent incident in a community where they were giving workshops and a man forbade his wife to participate, "*hitting her, but until she could not move anymore,* […] *because supposedly we were going to teach her bad things.*"

These constraints point to a kind of catch 22 within critical pedagogy processes. The approach is a way of facilitating a critical consciousness on oppressive situations and a socio-political agency in order to change that reality, but what if the same structures of domination and internalisation prohibit women to participate in CP activities? How then to allow for a personal and social transformation process to start? A more systematic way of overcoming this limitation seems to be missing.

Continuous internalisation is prejudicating the women already participating in the project as well, especially their relations within the group which have not always been without frictions, jealousy and rivalry, as accounted by GT from GAMMA: "*For me it is part of that kind of upbringing, the model where they teach us, the men, to always be super friendly with each other and women not that much.*"

Another contradiction was identified by the women in relation to the CP process. CP is an approach most often applied in work with socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Simultaneously, with an alternative approach the project is striving to go beyond economic development while the activities are also spearheaded by the women themselves. This combination, however, seems to sometimes result in constraints in the realisation of the project activities, since the women live in economically precarious situations. During the course of the project some women have had to withdraw or chosen not to participate for economic reasons. This issue was also pointed out as having contributed to the difficulties of establishing more long-term alliances between the *Chaski Warmikuna* and other organisations and authorities. Paula was one of those mentioning it:

Me: And what obstacles are in the way for achieving these broader alliances?

> Paula: I think that one of the obstacles would be the resources. I think that the majority of us do not have a stable job. We do not have a monthly salary and things like that.

Other structural barriers mentioned relate to local or regional authorities failing to take responsibility, fulfill their promises or get engaged when the *chaskis* had reached out to them or pressured them to act in relation to different issues, such as gender based violence. With local institutions controlling access to resources and space for engagement, broader change seems difficult to achieve (Keahey, 2019).

5.2.4 Praxis as a Continuous Process for Liberation, Fueled by Hope

The fact that the women identify several limitations within their liberation process and the approach of the project should not be seen as a limitation in itself. Rather, it is part of the probably most characteristic aspect of the women's theory for liberation in which transformation, struggle and conscientisation is seen as a continuous, collective and personal (learning) process (*aprendizaje*) towards liberation. It is a long term goal and a path to walk*: "And the children are also waking up, we're on this path representing a process of learning, we're learning every day, of course we have many faults but we keep on learning*" (Nina). Along this path, limitations and obstacles, and the critical awareness of these, are a natural part:

> Kuri Kinti: So, in this process we still need to..maybe not make perfect, but continue to change. It's not like we've already liberated ourselves or have become ideal role models with this whole process. It continues to be a hard kind of work, it continues to be a complicated task, to be able to meet, to be able to agree on things. But yes it's pretty different from what we were living before. That's for sure.

I would ask the *chaskis* about the obstacles that they had encountered throughout the process and they would express concern for the themes mentioned above. Then, when asked whether they thought that women had the capacity to change things in society they would give me a strong, affirmative answer. Many mentioned and showed understanding for the importance of contributing with their "little grain of sand" (*granito de arena*) in the struggle for a more just and equal future, illustrating the greatness and humbleness of their theory for change. A determined and critical form of *hope* is thus characterising the women's theory for liberation:

> Christina: This is a process of unlearning. We've learned, practiced for so many years. So, little by little it's a process, it's a process, I don't think change happens over night. But I do believe we're

on our way, and I also think that we're given strength and encouragement by the fact that little by little people are joining in.

Likewise, during the group discussion and drawing exercise it became clear that the women conceptualise the struggle as this organic process of becoming. On a group level, they let the change that has come about through the project be represented by a tree and a flower. They also highlighted the need to care for these in order for them to flourish. The broken heart on the other hand, represents how both failure and progress is part of a liberation process. A crash or a fall (*caída*) can strengthen you, empower you (*fuerza, fortaleza*). Nina explained the drawing of the broken heart: "[…] *I drew cracks...because sometimes one has to break, feel it, make mistakes. Because if we don't make mistakes, we can't continue. We're not perfect.*"

Figure 6: Collective Drawing

Seeing the struggle as an ongoing, political process means history is understood as an opportunity, an untested feasibility. It also implies that the constant companion along the road must be hope. Hope in this understanding is not naive, rather, as brought up in the theoretical framework chapter, it is a radical kind of hope guiding action against different forms of oppression, suffering and discrimination (Freire, 1997). In this sense, alternative education processes, and the hope and political creativity that they can give way to, are important preconditions for (Indigenous) women's liberation and transformative action:

Mariposa: Spirituality. So the formal educational system, it won't know about it, it won't care about it at all. So that's where the alternatives come in.

Me: So it's important to have these alternatives in order to..?

Mariposa: In order to recreate. Because we don't have any hope anymore in formal education […]. So in that sense it's very good, it's very good to have alternative processes, processes that let you revitalise, let you recreate, facilitate accompaniment. And we have to continue doing it, we have to continue doing it.

6. Summing up and Reflecting on a Theory for Liberation

The purpose of this study was to create a greater understanding for how critical pedagogy projects can facilitate conscientisation and praxis among Saraguro women. Through analysing the knowledge, resistance and liberation patterns produced by the women participating throughout the project with a Freirean, *mujerista* lens I have been able to: 1) map out the *chaskis*' theory for liberation, i.e. what aspects that are important in order for critical learning processes to contribute to conscientisation, praxis and liberation; and 2) reflected on the most important limitations and what fuels the continuation of the project. In this last section I will sum up the most striking parts of the analysis and position these findings in relation to ongoing debates about gender inclusive capacity building and transformative education, especially within development. In other words, what critical insights can be grounded in the experiences from the project, in order to strengthen and promote local proposals in similar contexts?

6.2 Theory and Practice Feeding into Each Other

A central aspect in the *chaskis*' theory for liberation through CP is the deep intertwinement between theory and practice, in which individual and collective praxis and conscientisation reinforce each other, creating a dynamic relationship in constant experimentation. The women stress how practicing the theoretical knowledge in their families, communities and in contact with authorities, or through their books, have strengthened their belief in their transformative capacity. It has also furthered a critical awareness of the nature of oppression in their surroundings, or at least helped them to name this oppression. Conversely, this critical awareness and belief in a transformative capacity have inspired the women to participate further in the project activities, change their personal lives, engage in demonstrations or hold their own workshops. It has also helped them to lead a more well-informed struggle. In this way, through combining theory with practical

engagement the GAMMA project managed to get around the issue of individualisation and depoliticisation in relation to capacity building, focusing on both an individual's personal sense of agency, as well as the actual practice of this agency within the personal as well as the collective sphere.

6.3 The Mind and the Heart Ally in the Quest for Agency

Furthermore, the experiences from the project show that through combining academic ways of knowing to community and Indigenous knowledge that is affective, spiritual and political, a major flaw in critical pedagogy, as well as development practice, can be overcome: the overemphasis put on the the cognitive at the expense of the feeling realm. In this view, agency is not solely instrumental, about mastery, control and "doing", but also about community, creativity, expressiveness, feelings and connection with others (Darder, 2017; Riger 1993). It remains clear that good critical pedagogy must encompass the whole person, including but also going beyond the intellect and the cognitive, in order to facilitate greater socio-political awareness and agency. In highlighting this, the *chaskis* are confirming the importance of the mujerista dimension of CP theory. In relation to that, the *chaskis* illustrate how humanisation is not only the process of going from object to subject, rather, humanisation should also characterise the pedagogical process *in itself*, through mutual support, love and care.

The chaskis' focus on socio-political, as well as emotional, learning processes and agency can be put in relation to feminist scholars calling for alternative social imaginaries and multiple value-systems within transformatory education and development (Aguinaga et al., 2018; Harcourt, 2014; hooks, 1994). These are imaginaries and values that go beyond economic well-being and scientific targets (Escobar, 2005) and beyond Western conceptions of intellectual formation in which the mind and the body, as the mind and the heart, are deemed antagonists (Darder, 2017).

6.3 A Space of Becoming: Continuity, Rupture and Hope

Another critical insight from the case is how a CP methodology, in order to facilitate conscientisation and praxis in a liberation process, cannot be viewed as something static. It is not a capacity building approach moving people towards a predetermined direction (Escobar, 1995), nor is it an already-made set-up of methods. Rather, it should be seen as an organic, dynamic and experimentative space of becoming, in which people's existing, but often suppressed, knowledges and resources (spiritual, emotional, relational, political etc.) are recognised and incorporated. In this sense, CP as a participatory and capacity building approach is about learning how to foster generative themes and co-move with learners. Thus, the process is a means, but also an end in itself.

However, CP as a way of facilitating conscientisation and praxis has its limitations. While conscientisation and praxis had been fostered through the project within the women, their group and families, the project has been facing many structural barriers, such as behaviours and attitudes in communities and authorities and limited economic resources, when it came to broadening the liberation process. This is in line with some earlier research (Keahey, 2019; Selwyn, 2009). What can be added to this from the *chaskis*' theory for liberation is that while these limitations and adversities are indeed challenging and sometimes discouraging barriers for (Indigenous) women's liberation, they are also a natural, even important part of a broad, very long-term transformation and learning process. It might be that when critical pedagogy is being criticised for not being capable of producing structural change it is done looking at shorter periods of time. The *chaskis* however, have a larger, more patient vision than that. While it is true that many Indigenous women live in situations of oppression and domination controlled by forces outside their reach, it is also true that in relation to those structures it is possible to create strategies and alternative practices of resistance, transformation or mitigation within the family, the community and in relation to oneself. These acts all represent small steps taken along a path towards liberation. It is a path that might take decades, perhaps centuries, to walk. Along this path, the *chaskis* are responsible for walking their part, then it will be up to their children to take over. In this context, critical pedagogy is a crucial form of continuous preparatory work, necessary to be able to take steps in the right direction.

Summing it up, what is characterising the chaski theory for liberation is continuous learning, healing and action, the importance put on daily life and its practices, but also deep patience and hope. Critical pedagogy is thus not only capable of facilitating a critical awareness on the causes of oppression, but also, a belief that these structures can be changed through long-term individual and collective action, and a capacity to put these ideas into practice in everyday life. In other words, the form of critical pedagogy that we have seen illustrated in the analysis contributes to Indigenous women's liberation process through fostering hope and rejection of fatalism, creating the notion that through collective knowledge production, awareness-raising and solidaric agency we can keep on fuelling the fire of social transformation.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Finally, it is important to take into consideration the fact that I am an outsider to the project and to Indigenous Saraguro culture. While I have been trying to engage deeply with Saraguro culture and with the activities in the project, building an analysis close to the accounts of the participants, there are some aspects in relation to cultural specificity and locality that I did not have the time nor the space to delve deeper into. For example, the project is specific in the sense that it is mainly working with a group - Indigenous Saraguro women - whose cultural identity is strong, and so are their

organisational networks and the importance they pay to the collective, the family and to spirituality. For this reason it would be important to further understand how cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, class or national identities serve or hinder conscientisation through critical pedagogy. What role do community networks play in translating individual agency into collective agency?

Moreover, the scope of the study did not allow to further delve into the structural limitations of the broadening of a CP approach (the catch 22), making it impossible to draw any conclusions on how these barriers could be overcome and improve access to reflective spaces. This is also something I have not found Freire to theorise anything about. Future research could thus build on the findings in order to explore deeper how critical pedagogy practices are constrained by wider social, cultural, economic and political structures.

7. References

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7.2 Project Documents

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Project Investigations and Publications

Author(s)	Year	Title in Spanish	Title in English
Chaski Warmikuna	2011	*Documento de propuesta de plan de gobierno desde Chaski Warmikuna para el Pueblo Saraguro*	*Government plan proposal by the Chaski Warmikuna for the Saraguro people*
Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2011	*Nuestras semillas, nuestra vida: Inventario de semillas de 16 comunidades del cantón Saraguro*	*Our seeds, our life: Seed inventory in 16 communities in the Saraguro canton*
Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2012	*Nuestras recetas: Un aporte para la soberanía alimentaria*	*Our recipes: A contribution to food sovereignty*
Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2013	*Buen vivir y soberanía alimentaria: Comercialización y alimentación en el pueblo Kichwa-Saraguro*	*Buen vivir and food sovereignty: Commercialization and nutrition among the Kichwa-Saraguro people*
Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2014	*Buscando nuestro lugar en la tierra: Algunas plantas medicinales de Saraguro*	*Looking for our place on earth: medicinal plants from Saraguro*
Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2015	*Tecnología ancestral: Un aporte del Pueblo Saraguro*	*Ancestral technology: a contribution from the Saraguro people*

Chaski Warmikuna and GAMMA-CEN	2017	*Cómo aprendimos a volar: Testimonios de mujeres Indígenas que han caminado hacia una vida libre de violencia*	*How we learned how to fly: Indigenous women's testimonies on setting out for a life free from violence*

Appendix 2: List of Interviews

	Interviews GAMMA Staff						
No.	Pseudonym	Type (Group/Single)	Date	Location	Length	Ethnic identity	Sex
1	GT	Single	2020-01-13	GAMMA office, Cuenca	0:50h	Mestizo	M
2	Ducu	Single	2020-01-13	GAMMA office, Cuenca	0:48h	Mestiza	F
3	Gañal	Single	2020-01-14	GAMMA office, Cuenca	0:52h	Mestiza	F
4	Suca	Single	2020-01-14	GAMMA office, Cuenca	0:35h	Mestiza	F

	Interviews Participants						
No.	Pseudonym	Type (Group/Single)	Date	Location	Length	Ethnic identity	Sex
5	Lola	Single	2020-01-10	GAMMA office, Cuenca	0:53h	Mestiza	F
6	Yoly	Single	2020-01-16	Office of Fundación María Amor, Cuenca	0:27h	Mestiza	F
7	Ana Samantha	Group	2020-01-20	Hostal Saraguro, Saraguro	1:27h	Saragura	F
8	Maga	Single	2020-01-21	Friend's house, Gunudel community, Saraguro	0:47h	Saragura	F
9	Pájara Carpintera	Single	2020-01-21	Pájara Carpintera's shop, Saraguro	0:48h	Saragura	F
10	Karla Paula Dolores	Group	2020-01-22	Hostal Saraguro, Saraguro	1:30h	Saragura	F
11	Nina	Single	2020-01-22	Hostal Saraguro, Saraguro	0:49h	Saragura	F
12	Rosa Roja con Espinas	Single	2020-01-22	Rosa Roja con Espinas's house, Gera community, Saraguro	0:56h	Saragura	F
13	Lojana	Group	2020-01-23	Christina's house, Loja	1:06h	Mestiza	F

	Christina							
14	Kuri Kinti	Single	2020-01-27	Kuri Kinti's house, Ñamarin community, Saraguro	2:23h	Saragura	F
15	Rebeca Alejandra	Group	2020-01-27	Rebeca's house, Ilincho community, Saraguro	0:27h	Saragura	F
16	Kuitsa	Single	2020-02-03	Cousin's apartment, Loja	0:50h	Saragura	F
17	Mariposa Wayra Warmi	Group	2020-02-05	Mariposa's shop, Zamora	1:27h	Saragura	F

Discussion and Drawing Exercise							
No.	Pseudonym	Type (Group/Single)	Date	Location	Length	Ethnic identity	Sex
18	Jenny Nina Rosa Roja con Espinas Samantha Paula Karla Kuri Kinti	Group	2020-02-29	Mashi Pierre Foundation, Saraguro	2:00h	Saragura	F

Appendix 3: Interview Guides

3.1 Semi-structured Interview: Participants

1. *Personal information*
   - Name/age
   - For how long have you been involved with the chaskis or in the GAMMA project?
   - Are you participating in other organisations?

2. *Generative themes*
   Example questions:
   - What themes within the project are important to you? What do you want to change in your life and your community?
   - Do you feel these issues have been covered in GAMMAs spaces or within your organisation? Can you talk about them in all spaces?
   - Why is GAMMA a women-only project? Do Indigenous women encounter specific barriers in terms of participating at meetings or in society? Are there common issues that unite/divide women?

3. *Conscientization*
   Example questions:
   - What problems do you see in society? How have the reflective, communitarian spaces provided by GAMMA helped you understand these problems?
   - Do you feel you, or women as a collective, have the potential to change things in society? Are your strategies different from others?

4. *Individual praxis*
   Example questions:
   - What has it meant to you to have a space for reflection/formation between women?
   - Did the workshops inspire you to take any kind of action?

5. *Collective praxis*
   Example questions:
   - What have you been able to transform/change through the formative project as a group?
   - Do you have alliances with other groups and movements? How did these occur?

6. *Limitations*
   Example questions:
   - What difficulties are there in establishing alliances?
   - What obstacles have you had to face in order to practice what you have learned throughout the formative process?

3.2 Semi-structured Interview: Facilitators from GAMMA

1. Personal information
- Name/age
- What has your role been within the project? For how long have you been involved?

2. Generative themes

Example questions:
- How did you become involved in GAMMA?
- What themes are important to you in relation to GAMMAs work? What themes are important to the women participating in the activities?
- Why is GAMMA a women-only project? Do Indigenous women encounter specific barriers in terms of participating at meetings or in society? Are there common issues that unite/divide women?

3. Conscientization

Example questions:
- What have the study groups and workshops been about?
- What problems do you see in society? How have the reflective, communitarian spaces provided by GAMMA helped women understand these problems?
- What has it meant for the women to have a space for reflection?

4. Individual praxis

Example questions:
- Do you think the workshops inspired the women to take any kind of action?
- How do you think that the women's participation in the project has made a difference in their life?

5. Collective praxis

Example questions:
- What have you succeeded in transforming or change through the spaces of reflection?
- How is GAMMA's methodology different from the one of other organisations?
- Have alliances with other groups and movements been established through the project?
- Have the women you've been working with been involved in influencing any local or national government policy? What have these proposals been about?

6. Limitations

Example questions:
- What difficulties are there in establishing alliances?
- What obstacles have the women had to face in order to practice what you they have learned throughout the formative process?
- Are there sometimes unintended/negative effects of educational projects?

3.3 Discussion/Drawing Exercise: Contributions and Challenges of a Formative Approach

Purpose: To create a visual representation and lead a collective discussion on the changes that have come about as a result of the formative process. What difficulties/challenges remain?

a) *Group drawing exercise*

Explain the different levels of the big drawing. Explain exercise: Discuss in pairs, make drawings on post-its representing your answer. Put them up on the corresponding level on the big drawing. Discuss the following in pairs:

- On what different levels have they been strengthened to act through the formative process? How?
- What change has been achieved on the different levels through the project activities?

b) *Discussion*

Discuss and explain the drawings in the group:

- Where do they agree/disagree?
- Where is it more difficult to achieve change through formative processes?
- How do they believe the Indigenous women's movement should move forward?
- What role will collective spaces for reflection play?

(Interview guides translated from Spanish by the author)