6-1-2014

Opening Our Eyes: How Activist Women in Ecuador Learn Critical Political and Self-Aware Consciousness

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to answer two questions: “How are different aspects of consciousness learned and relearned by members of women’s organizations in Ecuador?” and “How do women’s critical political and self-aware consciousnesses impact their organizations and their ability to build relationships based on solidarity?” Critical political consciousness is defined as awareness of hegemonic social structures and their relationship to intersectional embodied identities, accompanied by a desire for equality and justice. Critical self-aware consciousness is understood as awareness of: one’s own public and subjective identities; agency; how life experiences affect different aspects of the self; and the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and the Pacha Mama (Kichwa for Mother Nature or Mother Universe).

I combined participant observation, interview, focus group, survey and photovoice methods to research local, regional, and national level organizations in Ecuador between 2010 and 2013. To examine how activists can better conscientizar (raise the consciousness of) their members, I draw on sociocultural learning theory to analyze how identity, consciousness and epistemological ignorance are learned, unlearned and relearned. I interrogate how women learn to code their surroundings; attain language and other tools as they become part of communities of practice of girls, women, and organizations, oppressed or privileged communities; and as they learn different types of consciousness. I examine how learning is facilitated by individuals’ openness to new perspectives and pedagogies that teach the whole person (including mind, body, emotions and spirit) in connection to her community.

I find that consciousness is contradictory. People think and act from the social location corresponding to their intersectional embodied identities, internalizing hegemonic social forces’
teachings at the same time they resist them, often appropriating both oppression and privilege. I explore the contradictions created by this and how they impact individuals and their communities of practice. My research recommends that academics interested in social change attend to ideas such as self-aware consciousness and sumak kawsay wisdom. It suggests that organizations facilitate critical self-aware consciousness in addition to critical political consciousness to further the development of empathy and solidarity between organizational members with different as well as similar intersectional embodied identities.
OPENING OUR EYES: HOW ACTIVIST WOMEN IN ECUADOR LEARN CRITICAL POLITICAL AND SELF-AWARE CONSCIOUSNESS

by
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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Science

Syracuse University
June 2014
Gratitude – Agradecimientos
Thinking of who to thank I am humbled by the amazing teachers who accompany and guide me in this life. I can no longer count how many times my eyes have been opened on my travels through Syracuse and Ecuador and this PhD. Along the way I have encountered such wonderful Teachers, and my community has grown, and I am grateful for the communal process which writing this dissertation has been. It has been such a part of my life and questioning of life. My thank yous:

I begin by recognizing and honoring my ancestors, in gratitude for all you have given me. Thank you especially to my grandparents who have always encouraged me to write. I promised you, Granny, that when I had something to say I would write. Grandma Margaret, thank you for teaching me about literature and for nurturing my love of language and writing, for all your encouragement, love and the laughter we’ve shared.

Mom and Dad – you are my cornerstone. From founding Cornerstone School so I and other children could grow up being ourselves and learning to love learning, to your unwavering and incredible support through all the stages of my (formal and informal) education, you have always encouraged my love of learning – thank you! Thank you also for your tag team copy-editing, cooking for me, and general taking care of me in the final stages of writing this dissertation. Thank you most of all for your unconditional love.

Gracias a todas las mujeres tan bellas que compartieron conmigo, que confiaron en mi para contar sus historias, que me recibieron en sus casas, organizaciones, en sus vidas. Gracias por su amistad, cariño, confianza. Me han enseñado tanto.
Thank you to my incredible committee: John, Chandra, Jackie, Angela and Gioconda. All of you inspire me with your commitment to make this world a better, more just place, with your integrity, clear-sighted perspective of the world, and your amazing ability to teach. Your classes opened my eyes, gave me words and ideas to say things I’d always thought but didn’t know how to verbalize, and helped me find one of my communities of practice. I have grown not just intellectually, but in all senses, thanks to your presence in my life. Thank you for all you have taught me. A special thanks to John for being such an amazing advisor, for your patience, encouragement, mentorship and sense of humor.

Anya, my amazing one-woman writing group. Thank you for always finding the time to read what I wrote, for your enthusiasm, encouragement, insight, analytical creative thinking skills. Thank you for acompañandome in this writing process. And thank you to Dave and Isa for entertaining each other so Anya could help me. Thank you to Vernon and Mary for your support of my work. I am very grateful. To Stars, thank you for sharing life with me, for understanding and teaching me so much. Thank you for your role in this piece of writing – for your insight, questions, thoughtful listening. Thank you for editing, and inspiring me to frame this dissertation in terms of learning.

Para mi Ceci, mi amiga tan querida. Gracias por ser parte de mi vida tantos años, por inspirarme, por hacerme enamorar de tu país. Te admiro y te quiero tanto. Para Magui y Carmelina, mi equipo hermoso. Gracias por recibirme en sus casas y corazones con tanto amor. Gracias por compartir su sabiduría, amistad, y cariño. He aprendido tanto de Uds.; mi vida jamás será igual. Les quiero mucho y espero la próxima colaboración. A Thais y Bernarda por ser mis hermanas, compañeras, mi familia en Ecuador. Gracias a ti Thais por desarrollar tantas ideas conmigo. ¡Sin duda estás en esta tesis!
Lucía, Nancy, Lucy, Carolina, María, Dani, Monica, Kate, Emily, Emma, Stalin, Antonio, Carmen, Marco, les agradezco tanto por escuchar y darme sus ideas sobre mi trabajo, por prestarme libros, sus casas, por presentar conmigo en conferencias, por opinar sobre mis ideas y ayudarme a desarrollarlas. Gracias por ser mi comunidad y mis amig@s del alma. Es algo muy lindo saber que siempre cuento con Uds. y espero los futuros colaboraciones. Gracias a mis amig@s de la AUCC por recibarme para colaborar con Uds. Que linda experiencia. Leo and Cumandá por adoptarme como su hija, por su generosidad, cariño, sabiduría. Sol y Daniel, por ayudarme a encontrar mi voz, superar mis muros y decir mi verdad. Por ser mis maestros y guías.

Thank you to Julie, Patrick, my sweet Brynn Pop and Keenan for your unconditional love and support. To my whole extended family – you are all lights in my life and I love each one of you. Uncle Fink, thank you for our conversations about writing, for your interest in my work, for inspiring me with your work and your observations about life. To my Syracuse friends and professors - Alexandra, Griselda, David, Cory, Kwame, Marj, Clorise, Hannah, Rob, Shana, Jesse, Bill, and the St. Andrew’s community – thank you for all you taught me and for your friendship; I treasured my time with you. To Diane and Peter Swords, for your hospitality and feedback on my work!

Gracias a tod@s que asistieron a mi presentación en la Flacso, por compartir sus ideas sobre la tesis – he intentado incorporar sus ideas aquí. A Maritza por transcribir – te agradezco mucho.

Thank you to the Fulbright Foundation and Syracuse University for financially supporting my work. Gracias a FLACSO también por todo el apoyo.
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levantamiento

rough rock whispers green
ten million years tall
tas tas tas
rainbow
   children dance
breathing
birthing ancient
   life
Chapter One: Mountains, Manifestations and the Micro-Movements of Learning Consciousness

El Camino: This Project’s Path

She handed me a picture of herself 20 years ago, standing where we were standing, but when the house had a dirt floor and bamboo walls. Isaac, her oldest son, a toddler in the picture, was sitting at her feet. Ceci’s husband was out working and her children at school; we were the only ones home. It was 2004 and I had recently moved to Guayaquil, Ecuador, to co-coordinate a children’s rights program for Movimiento Mi Cometa, a community development organization. Cecilia Sanchez was my host family mom, and we were quickly becoming close friends. This particular day, she had taken out the family photo album to show me pictures of her kids when they were little.

From that photograph Ceci’s life story unfolded – the series of abusive stepfathers, dropping out of school to help her mom support her two younger sisters, the evangelical pastor’s vision that Manuel was the “man of her life” and her subsequent marriage to a small-minded man she came to dislike. Her three children each of whom came two years apart, and how she believed her role was to cook, clean and raise her children, until the day she attended a women’s workshop at Mi Cometa, in Guasmo Sur, her neighborhood. That workshop “opened her eyes” to herself as a subject of rights. She transformed at home and in her community as she began working with children in Mi Cometa and with battered women in Cepam,¹ an organization committed to ending violence against women.

It was the moment of transformation in Cecilia’s story that captivated me. I wondered what in that workshop had provoked such a dramatic change in her. In hindsight, I realize that was the moment which birthed my interest in critical consciousness and its transformative potential, especially among women. That moment when dust clung to my sweaty skin Guasmo Sur where I had moved to work with Movimiento Mi Cometa (My Kite Movement), a grassroots rights-based community organization. That moment, in the largest city in the small South American country of Ecuador, where the images in the photograph and the stories shared etched themselves into my memory. I felt admiration, love and respect for this amazing woman. During the eight months I was there, I lived with Cecilia’s family, co-led a children’s empowerment program and produced a photo essay for which I took pictures of and conducted interviews with Mi Cometa members. The interviews also impacted my curiosity about consciousness as friends elaborated their theories on the differences between the social groups we

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2 Following Gloria Anzaldúa’s lead, I do not italicize Spanish or Kichwa words. In the introduction to The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader AnaLouise Keating explains that Gloria felt strongly that non-English words should not be italicized. She writes, “As Gloria often explained, such italics have a denormalizing, stigmatizing function and make the italicized words seem like deviations from the (English/’white’) norm” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, p. 10-11). In cases where a word does not translate well, I put it in Spanish and translate it in a footnote. Also, all translations from Spanish or Kichwa to English in this article are mine. The interviews that were conducted in Kichwa by Magdalena Fueres were translated to Spanish by Christian Flores and then to English by me. My deepest gratitude to Magdalena and Christian.
represented and talked about how they dealt with and tried to change the conditions of
violence and marginalization that weighed on them. They worked long hours at Mi
Cometa and elsewhere to change the mental and material conditions of their
community, and they told inspiring stories of personal and community transformation,
of the cascading changes stemming from organizational participation and relationships
built with neighbors and friends.

Upon returning to the United States, I eventually enrolled in a PhD program and when
the time came to decide where I would conduct my dissertation research, the critical
consciousness I had witnessed and the solid friendships I maintained in Ecuador led me
back. Six years after my stay in Guasmo, I moved to the Sierra region of Ecuador, and
four years later I am still here. Though we live in different parts of the country, Cecilia
and I are still close friends who support each other in our work and in our lives.

The Project

That initial interest in the transformative potential of critical consciousness has led me
to this dissertation where I seek to answer two questions: How are different aspects of
consciousness learned and relearned by members of women’s organizations in
Ecuador? and How do women’s critical political and self-aware consciousnesses
impact their organizations and their ability to build relationships based on solidarity? I
define critical political consciousness as: awareness of hegemonic social structures and
their relationship to public identities (externally-assigned), awareness of the
intersectional nature of these, and belief that the inequality caused by these structural
factors should be replaced by equality and justice. Critical self-aware consciousness is
defined as: reflexive awareness of one’s intersectional public and subjective identities
(who one understands oneself to be); awareness of the relationship between experience
and the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual parts of the self; awareness of the relationship between the individual, communal, and universal; and knowledge that one is an actor, that one’s own thoughts, actions and feelings influence and shape one’s life and the world.

The idea to talk about these two “types” of consciousness emerged from my data and literature review as I noticed how attention is often paid to one or the other but emphasis on both seemed to have the best outcomes for individuals and organizations. I chose my research questions with the idea that if we can better understand how critical consciousness is learned and how it influences relationships, then organizations can use the information to rethink spaces of conscientización\(^3\) to better serve their members and their goals.

The story I tell in this dissertation begins with the epistemological assumption that hegemonic structures shape society and attempt to maintain the status quo, through normalizing, disciplining, and punishing those who ignore its dictates with both subtle and overtly violent techniques (M. Foucault, 1977; M. Foucault, 1988, 1978; Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 1972, 1971). This is contested by the agency, or power, of every person and community to either learn or resist what those hegemonic forces attempt to teach (see Mohanty, Foucault). Hegemony teaches people with powerful public identity characteristics to appropriate privilege and epistemological ignorance, while it teaches those with less powerful public identities to appropriate oppression and to live in their world as well as in the world of those they serve (Du Bois, 1994, 1903; Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971; Hill Collins, 1991; Tappan, 2006). As many people have some privileged and some oppressed identity characteristics, they often appropriate both simultaneously. While this gives conflicting information to individuals about their

\(^3\) The act of creating consciousness, roughly translates as consciousness-raising.
value and worth, the underlying messages, ordered by hegemonic reasoning, are consistent. Hegemonic forces are responsible for creating *violence* which affects the holistic self in various ways, including subjecting it to *trauma*. This, in turn, influences how people relate to other individuals and groups and affects their self-aware consciousness.

Consciousness is formed in the middle of the tug-of-war between structure and agency, and because people are influenced by both forces, their *consciousness is contradictory* – it contains elements which accept (Gramsci’s common sense) and reject (good sense) the dominant perspective. People think and act from the social location corresponding to their *intersectional embodied identity*, influenced by their appropriated oppression and/or privilege and their contradictory consciousnesses. All of this plays out in individuals comprised of *mental, emotional, physical and spiritual* parts, who are also part of *communities of practice*, including the social, familial and organizational groups of which we form part. I understand the individual and communal as part of the *Pacha Mama*, the universal.

A second assumption which undergirds my work is that all we know is *learned*. Drawing on sociocultural theory I look at how learning is synonymous with becoming part of a community of practice. I examine the micro components of learning which include: learning to see by *coding*, learning *tools such as language, critical thinking skills, highlighting* certain things as important. I assert that openness is necessary for learning new things and that humans learn best when their whole selves (mind, body, emotions and spirit) are included in the learning process.

*Critical self-aware consciousness* integrates concepts from western and the Kutacachi Pueblo’s cosmovision. It requires intersectional awareness, a prerequisite for loosing
epistemic ignorance and creating relationships based on solidarity. It includes a holistic knowledge of the self and awareness of the reactions of different aspects of the self to experience as well as the connections between the self, communal, and Pacha Mama. Finally, it necessitates the hope that one can change one’s own life and the world. In that it requires awareness of the “internal” workings of the self, self-aware consciousness means that people have greater awareness of the effects of structural violence on themselves and others, and how their perspectives on others and the world have been shaped by those same structural forces.

Self-aware consciousness is connected to critical political consciousness, a form of “good sense” (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971), formed drawing on the inner resources of agency, resistance and sumak kawsay wisdom. Critical political consciousness requires learning the tool of critical thinking and learning codes that make visible hegemonic social structures and their intersectional nature. It also requires hope and a commitment to justice. How critical political consciousness is created has been written about in social science, social movement and feminist literature. The formula for “consciousness-raising” typically involves comparing personal stories, looking for commonalities between them, revealing those to result from social structures, thus denormalizing those structures and everyday violence. Finally, it seeks to replace old ways of seeing with new “liberating” ideas. It has been shown to create consciousness, change behaviors, and to have therapeutic effects on participants (Tappan, 2006; Warren, 1976). I have found this formula to be very powerful for the women with whom I worked, but would like to add three things I think have been overlooked in the literature and organizational practices.

I observed that facilitating critical self-aware consciousness, which has not typically been considered, is important for individual and communal wellbeing. Concientizando
in groups with diverse public identities is also important. In those settings, it is crucial to not just look for similarities but also differences in people’s stories. When only similarities are referenced, those in the group lowest on the hegemonic power ladder generally feel their needs are being invisibilized, and also, listening for differences can be a powerful tool for learning intersectional analysis, generating empathy and solidarity. Finally I would like to add that different consciousness-raising techniques are needed in order for people to unlearn appropriated privilege versus appropriated oppression, and thus create space for critical consciousness. Most of the literature on consciousness raising takes for granted that the group members have the same public identity characteristics. Not only have the groups I have worked with had more diverse membership, but taking into the consideration the uniqueness of intersectional embodied identity, I argue that it is important to be conscious of different identities and experiences even where on the surface it appears that everyone “is the same.” While many times organizations facilitate critical consciousness, I have observed that critical political and self-aware consciousness can also be impeded by organizational practices which do not facilitate critical thinking skills, teach discriminatory and hegemonic ways of perceiving and relating to others, and ignore or minimize a person’s individuality or the needs of her whole self.

The world I hope for is one in which people and groups would live in harmony with the earth and one another, treating all living beings with dignity and respect. I see solidarity as one of the most important tools for achieving that goal, but recognize true solidarity as something very difficult to create as it requires high levels of awareness. The question then becomes what vision of the world and what tools does a person need to be capable of constructing it? My research has led me to believe that the following factors facilitate the creation of relationships built on solidarity:
1. Healing from violence and/or trauma. The repercussions of violence on the holistic self impact how people relate with themselves and one another, in general creating distrust and distance between people. Sometimes this step makes easier the types of learning listed here.
2. Unlearning epistemological ignorance, appropriated privilege and/or oppression.
3. Learning critical political and critical self-aware consciousness.
4. Learning empathy.
5. Learning listening skills and reflexive speaking skills.
6. Learning critical thinking skills.
7. Having hope.

These characteristics are related to or part of critical political and self-aware consciousness. Some are taught in organizational communities of practice, as part of consciousness-raising and other workshops, others happen as unintended consequences of activities carried out for other reasons. Others are not cultivated in the spaces of Ecuadorian women’s organizations. I recommend that they should be.

**Roadmap**

Before introducing these theories I discuss Ecuador, my relationship to this place, and offer a brief overview of some of the social, geographic, cultural and political events I understand to be relevant to the consciousness of women living here. In the second chapter I define how I understand the self, knowledge, consciousness and learning, providing my theoretical framework for analysis. In the third chapter I explain the methodologies used for this research and discuss some methodological dilemmas in the light of my own consciousness. Chapter Four offers an overview of what and how organizations intentionally teach their members and connects this teaching with the learning of consciousness. Chapter Five describes how the women included in my study have learned their identities by accepting and resisting the normalized ideas which structure Ecuadorian society and how those concepts shape their consciousness. In the sixth chapter I examine how identities are relearned in organizations and how critical political and self-aware consciousnesses are learned in organizational and non-
organizational spaces. Chapter Seven looks at the relationship between the two types of consciousness, conflict and solidarity in organizations, and Chapter Eight will offer some ideas for organizations and ask questions for further research.

I conduct this analysis in the context of women’s organizations in Ecuador, where I have lived since 2010 and collaborated with women’s organizations at local, regional, and national levels, using participant observation, interview, focus group, survey and photovoice methods for my research. If I count the number of women with whom I have interacted over the past four years and whose ideas have informed me through participant observation, there are approximately 800 whom I need to thank. I draw heavily on the interviews conducted with 80 women from the organizations with which I collaborated.

Translating ideas into a format that can be put on paper is challenging, and in my attempt to do that here I have included poetry and photographs as well as academic writing. I include these more creative formats, inspired by feminists who have brought creative production into academic spaces,⁴ as they offer ways to express ideas in different ways and help me achieve my goal to decolonize academic spaces by valuing “other” forms of knowledge and expression, and simply because expressing things with beauty brings me pleasure. I have included photographs of many of the people whom I cite and write about frequently in this text for practical reasons as well: to further personalize what they say and to make it easier for the reader to remember the people about whom I write. Unless otherwise mentioned, the pictures were taken by me, and the person photographed has given me permission to use that specific image in my dissertation (unless you cannot see their face). The poetry, unless otherwise cited, is also mine.

⁴ See work by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Jackie Orr, to name just a few.
La Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y Diversas del Ecuador

As it turned out, Mexico City was where I connected to Ecuador’s women’s movement. In 2008 I attended the Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe, the regional biannual “encounter” of women’s and feminist organizations that began in 1981 (Nash, 1986, p. 3). After a breakout session on Ecuador’s 2008 constitution, I introduced myself to Judith Flores, one of the presenters, we exchanged contact information, and when I went to Ecuador in 2009 to define my dissertation topic, I contacted her.

We met on sunny July afternoon at the Casa Feminista de Rosa in Quito, to talk about the newly formed Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y Diversas of Ecuador (AMPDE) – the Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador. Judith explained that the Casa Feminista was a house shared by various feminist and leftist collectives to provide a physical space for organizations to meet, hold events, and generate income with their restaurant thus remaining independent of NGO funding. Sitting in the common area of the Casa, walls decorated with crayoned drawings of women and an African wall hanging, Judith explained that the members of the Casa Feminista had recently, in conjunction with other women’s organizations from other parts of the country, founded the AMPDE. She described it as an organización de segundo grado – a “second grade” organization, a sort of network which brings together primer grado (local) organizations. She described the women in the participating local organizations as
urban, rural, from the coast, Andes, Amazon region, mestiza, indigenous, Montubia, Afro-Ecuadorian, transgendered women, young women and older women. She said that in the AMPDE they all come together to intervene in politics.

We talked a lot about the process of creating Ecuador’s new constitution, which was ratified in 2008, just a year earlier. Judith described the many meetings women’s groups organized which brought them together to prepare their arguments and to lobby the Constituent Assembly, the legal body which wrote the constitution. It was from this ongoing encuentro – coming together – that the idea for the AMPDE was born. This was of particular importance because following the passing of the new constitution, social organizations dispersed. Judith explained her theory that people are more conscious and more educated about their rights as a result of the work organizations did leading up to the Constituent Assembly. She also talked a good bit about the philosophy of her work which is internal growth as a model for change, which resonated with me. I left the Casa fascinated by the AMPDE. The idea of such diverse people finding common goals and working in solidarity to achieve them was inspiring and I wanted to be part of that, to learn how they did it. Judith’s emphasis on consciousness also caught my attention, bringing to mind my experience in Guayaquil and how that contrasted with what appeared to be a lack of consciousness in other spaces.

After our meeting I emailed Judith proposing that when I returned to Ecuador the following year I would work with the AMPDE, and she suggested that we meet again with Nancy Carrión. Nancy was also an active member of the Casa Rosa and the AMPDE, whose paid job was at the same organization as Judith’s – the Instituto de Estudios Ecuatorianos (IEE) – the Institute of Ecuadorian Studies – an organization that

5 In Ecuador, people of African descent are referred to as afroecuatorianos or afrodescendientes. I translate that in this dissertation as “Afro-Ecuadorian”
does research and training with social movement organizations. Little did I know that 3 years later I would be a member of the Casa Feminista, which would no longer refer to a physical house, but instead the collective of women who comprise it, having decided to stay in Ecuador after completing my dissertation research. I didn’t yet know I would work at the IEE, and be drawn into the friendships and conflicts of the women I had just met.

The meeting at Nancy’s house was enlivened by Judith’s three-year-old son Matías interjecting his observations of the world into our conversation, asking questions, and bringing us “meals” of leaves and sticks from the yard as we ate orange slices and talked. My fieldnotes about that meeting say that I felt at ease with Nancy and Judith. I felt they liked me, that we spoke the same language. I wrote how they inhabit academic as well as activist spaces and had, like me, read and been inspired by US women of color feminist writing. I also wrote down how Judith paraphrased my dissertation idea, summarizing it as “estrategias de resistencia, como concientización” – “resistance strategies, such as concientización,” which I liked, although I wasn’t sure if that was exactly what I meant. I left with a list of books and websites to read, and a satisfaction at the thought of working with and learning from such an amazing group of women.

Over the next year I continued to read and write about Ecuador, focusing especially on the realities of Ecuadorian women, public identities, and social movements in Ecuador.
Ecuador: An Introduction

Ecuador sits between geopolitical neighbors Colombia and Peru, the Andes Mountains connecting them, and dividing the country into three distinct geographical and cultural regions.

To the west of the mountains lies the Pacific coast and to the east, the Amazon rainforest.
There are 14.5 million people in Ecuador, of whom 71.9% identify as mestizo, 7.4% as Montubio, 7.2% as Afro-descendent, 7.0% as indigenous, 6.1% as white, and 0.4% as “other” (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011c) although activists claim that minority populations are grossly underrepresented. The three pueblos⁶ officially recognized in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution are indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio (Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008, Art. 56). There are 13 nacionalidades (indigenous nations) listed by el Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador (CODEMPE) – the Development Council of Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador, the public institution that is supposed to oversee public policy directed at indigenous pueblos and nations. The Kichwa⁷ nationality is divided into 19 Pueblos (CODENPE, Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador), although those divisions are debated. For example, the 45 indigenous communities in the canton Cotacachi are formally classified as part of the Otavalo Pueblo thought they have officially stated they consider themselves a separate group – Pueblo Kutakachi (UNORCAC, Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas de Cotacachi, 2010). Many Ecuadorians understand “indigenous” as a racial category (and I have always heard discrimination against indigenous people referred to as racism in Ecuador). Others differentiate between ethnicity, based on language, customs, culture, and where people live and race which is understood as...

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⁶ I had an extended conversation with Magdalena Fueres and her husband about how to translate “pueblo.” The word literally means “town” or “people” according to the Merriam-Webster’s Spanish-English dictionary (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2009), but we decided that in the Ecuadorian context it is a group of people defined by ethnicity, that is larger than a single indigenous community (which is geographically bounded), but smaller than a nationality (which seems to be defined by language and culture, but broadly). Within the Kichwa Nationality, for example, are many pueblos, one of which is the Kutakachi Pueblo.

⁷ In Ecuador Kichwa is the correct spelling of the language, as opposed to other Andean countries where it is spelled Quichua or Quechua (DINEIB, La Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe del Ecuador & ALKI, La Academia de la Lengua Kichwa del Ecuador).
phenotypical. Montubios are campesinos and campesinas\textsuperscript{8} from the coastal region of Ecuador of indigenous, Afro and European descent (S. Latorre, 2013; Mathewson, 1998).\textsuperscript{9}

62.8\% of Ecuadorians live in urban and 37.2\% in rural areas (Villacís & Carrillo, 2012). According to the government’s census bureau, in 2010 32.76\% of Ecuadorians lived in poverty measured by income, with 22.45\% of the poor living in urban and 52.96\% in rural areas, and Ecuador had a GINI coefficient (a measure of the inequality in income distribution) of .50 (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011b). These numbers have fallen over the past few years according to the Ecuadorian state, which conducts periodic poverty estimates in urban areas. According to INEC’s September 2013 “poverty report” 15.74\% of urban inhabitants live in poverty, 4.08\% in extreme poverty, and the GINI coefficient has fallen to 0.463 (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2013).

The falling rates of poverty in urban areas have their ugly side, however. The current government bases its budget on money earned in the extractive industries, particularly oil extraction and mining, which have devastating impacts on the communities who live in those places, especially women, indigenous pueblos, and rural campesinos, and cause conflicts between individuals, organizations and the state (S. Latorre & Herrera, 2013). Poverty has always also disproportionately affected women (Lind, 2005), and women of indigenous or African ancestry are particularly vulnerable. This poverty is part of systematic marginalization of and discrimination against people of color in Ecuador and the devaluing of women’s work – both paid and unpaid.

\textsuperscript{8} The word campesino does not translate well into English. It refers to someone who lives in the countryside and works the land. Campesino refers to men and campesina to women.

\textsuperscript{9} I do not go into great detail about Montubia culture or identity in this dissertation as a minimal number of participants identified as Montubia.
Ecuador has survived a colonial past and neocolonial present, exporting migrants, oil, bananas, cut flowers, shrimp, wood, and cacao (U.S. Department of State, 2011) and other raw materials for the world at the expense of those who live here. Behind the dollar bills flowing into the country lie the consequences. Economic migration: families separated by oceans, life in poor urban neighborhoods both here and abroad. Behind those dollar bills lie burnt and poisoned rainforests, cloud forests, farms; children born disfigured to mothers who die young from their exposure to chemicals and abuse at these sites of export-oriented production and its consequent GDP growth. This neoliberal pattern of exploitation and sending the spoils to the West and North is not new, it adds the “neo” to the colonial, when and where it began. The peoples whose bodies and lands are poisoned and exploited are typically the darker-skinned people, the women, the poor; their intelligence, humanity and culture systematically dehumanized, tokenized, invisibilized, and eradicated.

Cotacachi

When I returned to Ecuador in 2010 to begin my dissertation research in collaboration with the AMPDE, Nancy suggested I live in Cotacachi, where women’s organizations have a long and interesting process of organization. I took her advice and was enchanted by not only the landscape but by the people I met and the friends I made in the little town nestled between Mama Cotacachi and Tayta Imbabura, two volcanoes along the Andean cordillera. I soon learned from my indigenous friends that while for some people the

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10 You can find discussions of the environmental and human impacts of these industries at the website of Accion Ecologica, one of the oldest and most critical environmental organizations in Ecuador: [www.accionecologica.org/](http://www.accionecologica.org/). Ecuador’s staple economy and some of its ramifications is analyzed in: [[1005 Rochlin, James 2011]]. Ecuador’s staple economy and some of its ramifications is analyzed in: (Rochlin, 2011). More on the flower industry: (Korovkin & Sanniguel-Valderrama, 2007), shrimp industry: (Jermyn, 2000), and oil: (Graydon, 2007; Sawyer, 2004; Widener, 2007).

11 Tayta means “father” in Kichwa. I looked up spellings of Kichwa words at kichwa.net, the official site of unified Kichwa run by the Academia de la Lengua Kichwa, or consulted Dr. Carmen Chuquin, linguistics professor at the University of Otavalo. As Kichwa is an oral language how to write it is debated.
mountains are just volcanoes; they are also known as masculine and feminine, husband and wife. They are living mountains and have power and energy like other beings. People are attentive to them, many aware of the importance of caring for and respecting them.

Illustration 5: Mama Kutacachi

Cotacachi is the name of the mountain, the canton, and its capital city. The canton has a population of 40,000 of whom 40% identify as indigenous, 53% as mestiza, 3% as Afro-Ecuadorian, and a little over 2% as white (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011a). 78% of inhabitants live in the rural regions (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011a).

The canton is divided into four geopolitical zones: (1) the city of Cotacachi is the urban zone; (2) the Andean zone is composed of 43 mostly-indigenous rural communities
surrounding the city; (3) Intag is the sub-tropical zone to the west of the city of Cotacachi; and (4) Manduriacos, the most remote region of the canton, is also sub-tropical and lies further to the west of Intag (AUCC, Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi, 2010, 26 August).

Cotacachi turned out to be an ideal place for me to study consciousness. First, because the organizational, political and environmental history of the region has birthed various social processes and organizations which have been fertile ground for its creation. Second, the strong political presence of the Kutacachi Pueblo has not only influenced the critical political consciousness of cotacacheños and cotacacheñas. Its culture and cosmovision also influence self-aware consciousness, particularly how people’s relationship to nature is conceptualized. Living life surrounded by this cosmovision has shifted my consciousness and changed how I see the earth and how I understand the self. Had I not lived in Cotacachi for almost three years, my conceptualization of self-aware consciousness and sumak kawsay wisdom would have been very different, if present in this analysis.

In Cotacachi, I little by little wrapped my head around the history of organizational and citizen participation that Nancy had mentioned and observed how those processes have

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12 Men and women from Cotacachi
created certain spaces where both types of consciousness, but especially critical political consciousness has been and is fomented. In 1977 UNORCAC, the Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas de Cotacachi (Union of Campesino Organizations of Cotacachi) was founded, and as part of it, but independent from it, the Comité Central de Mujeres de UNORCAC (The Women’s Central Committee of UNORCAC) – CCMC was established. The CCMC is a “second grade” organization that brings together representatives from women’s groups existing in the different communities. Since 1979 there has always been at least one member of UNORCAC holding an elected position in the municipal government. In 1996 UNORCAC allied with the Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indígenas (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities, the largest national-level indigenous organization) – CONAIE, to have their candidate, indigenous leader Auki Tituaña, elected as the mayor of Cotacachi (Baez, Garcia, Guerrero, & Larrea, 1999, p. 19-20). Electing an indigenous mayor was an historic first for the canton, and Tituaña was the second indigenous mayor in the country (Cevallos, 2013). He served as mayor for 12 years (three terms) before he lost the 2009 election to one of the founders of UNORCAC, Alberto Andrango, of Alianza País, the political party of Rafael Correa, the current president of Ecuador.

The first year Tituaña was elected, Cotacachi’s first indigenous woman – Magdalena Fueres Flores, one of the founders of the CCMU, was elected as consejala\(^\text{13}\) in the

\(^{13}\) Representative in the canton’s local government.
local government. According to many, having a powerful indigenous mayor significantly changed how mestizos related to indigenous people in Cotacachi. In combination with UNORCAC’s political and organizational strength, this has nurtured an environment where, in contrast with many other regions of the country, taking pride in one’s indigenous identity is slowly becoming common sense. As well as older generations, many young people maintain traditional dress, hair styles, language (Kichwa) and other visible identity markers. Projects and programs run by UNORCAC and the CCMU – traditional seed fairs, projects to fortify and (re)teach organic farming, to provide traditional health services, etc. also maintain and promote indigenous customs and knowledge. All of these things affect how indigenous and mestizo people understand their ethnic identities and the power relations between the different groups, discussed in later chapters.

Cotacachi underwent significant changes under the leadership of Tituaña and his team, including the 1996 founding of the Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal Cotacachi – AUCC (Assembly of the Canton of Cotacachi). This was in response to a “plan for government” proposed by UNORCAC and Pachakutik (the indigenous political party) calling for popular assemblies as a governance mechanism, a strategy long used in cabildos, the indigenous communities’ governance system. At its inception the Assembly of Cotacachi was a 3-day assembly where citizens discussed and prioritized their needs as a way to determine the municipal government’s budget. In 2000 the AUCC was formalized as an organization, and now functions year-round to respond to the priorities set at the annual assembly. It is directed by a board comprised of representatives of organizations and the local government. The fact that for the past 18 years citizens of Cotacachi have been attending assemblies and setting priorities for local government has also had an impact on their critical political
consciousness. In Cotacachi much more than in other small towns, citizens are involved in critical political debates and discussions.

The organization of women’s groups in Cotacachi has also been tied to UNORCAC, as mentioned, and to the AUCC. Although women participated in the first Assemblies in Cotacachi, it was not until 2001 that they participated as women to voice women’s needs in an organized manner. Emerging from the space of the AUCC, the Coordinadora Cantonal de Mujeres de Cotacachi (CCMC) was founded in 2005 as a space for “planning, support, evaluation, accounting and representation” of Cotacachi’s women’s organizations and to strengthen and represent their interests. The CCMU coordinates the organizations’ initiatives, advocates for the rights of women in the canton Cotacachi, and attempts to increase the awareness of women’s issues in the canton (AUCC, Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi, 2013). It is currently affiliated with the national-level AMPDE. Its work was supported by the coordinator of gender issues at the AUCC, Carmelina Morán.

The CCMC is made up of representatives from:

- Comité Central de Mujeres UNORCAC/ The Central Committee of Women UNORCAC – CCMU
- Coordinadora de Mujeres Urbanas de Cotacachi (Coordinator of Urban Women from Cotacachi) – MUC
- Coordinadora de Mujeres Intag (Coordinator of Women from Intag) – MI

Similarly to the CCMU, the Coordinadora de Mujeres Intag is a “second grade” organization that represents the many local women’s groups that exist in the various towns in Intag. These organizations are marked by a 20-year fight to keep mining companies out of the region, a fight that has involved not only massive social organization in the zone of Intag, but has involved organizations in the Andean and urban zones of Cotacachi as well as the local government.
Thus, for women in Cotacachi, there are many levels of organization and many spaces for dialogue. For example, Magdalena is a member of Muyu Sara, the local women’s group in her community La Calera, and she is also an elected representative in La Calera’s cabildo, the indigenous community’s governing body. As Muyu Sara’s representative in the CCMU, she meets bimonthly with the other representatives of the women’s groups in Cotacachi’s other communities. As the vice-president of the CCMU she sometimes fills in for the president who represents the CCMU as part of the governing boards of the AUCC and UNORCAC to debate issues at the level of the canton and the 45 indigenous communities, respectively. The CCMU also elects someone to represent them as part of the CCMC; this representative meets periodically with the representatives of the women’s groups from urban Cotacachi (MUC) and Intag (MI) to discuss the needs of women in the canton as a whole. Because these groups are affiliated with the AMPDE, Magdalena also attends meetings and workshops of the AMPDE, at times representing the AMPDE in national and international events. I give this somewhat mind-boggling example to illustrate the diversity of spaces to which activist women in Cotacachi have access and to emphasize that in these spaces they are dialoguing with women and men with very similar and very different intersectional embodied identities about a variety of topics. The opportunities for teaching critical political consciousness are plentiful.

During the two and a half years I lived in Cotacachi, I collaborated with the AUCC, CCMU, MUC and MI, as well as the AMPDE. From June 2010 until May 2011 I attended the weekly meetings of the Mujeres Urbanas, the monthly meetings of the CCMU and the periodic meetings of the CCMC and the Coordinadora de Mujeres de Intag. Since May of 2011 my participation has been more sporadic.
Colonial history, neocolonial legacy

The individual’s embeddedness in what is always a collective, and contentious, history is one important way to understand self-other interdependence. Not only are the historical narratives that claim us collective processes, their intelligible meanings emerge only in light of substantive cultural values and available discourses… Part of what the collective praxis creates are aspects of the self. Our preferences, our dispositions toward certain kinds of feelings in certain kinds of situations, what typically cause fear, anxiety, calmness, anger, and so on, are affected by our cultural and historical location (Alcoff, 2006, p. 115).

As my analysis in this dissertation is centered on the relationship between individual and group consciousness, the individual and her communities of practice, one could say I’m interested in the self-other interdependence Alcoff writes about. As such, histories of different groups, including different ethnic groups, and their relationships with one another are critical for understanding how activist women act and interact in Ecuador today. I attempt to relate aspects of the country’s history that influence how women learn their identities, and thus their consciousnesses, and that affect their ability or inability to construct relationships of empathy and solidarity with one another.

Abya Yala, which means “continent of life”\textsuperscript{14} was what the region that is now Ecuador was called prior to colonization (Becker, 2008). Ecuador was long inhabited by different indigenous groups with their own languages and cultures. The Incas conquered the Andean region that is now part of Ecuador only 50 years before the Spanish arrived; they never conquered many groups in the Amazon region and the costal lowlands, and never imposed a common language, political, religious, or political institution (Torre & Striffler, 2008). It is thought that many customs were shared as well as the Kichwa language, known as the language of the Incan Empire, because of trade and other relationships (Chuquin, 2010;

\textsuperscript{14} This is from the Kuna language, from the Kuna peoples (Colombia and Panama) but is a term used more widely by the indigenous movement in Latin America to protest the colonial appropriation of their land.
Kaarhus, 1989). It is true today that the different Pueblos in Ecuador have distinct cultures and customs, and also that there are certain similarities between them.

With the Spanish invasion of South America came new ways of seeing the world, both because they brought the European culture and cosmovision, and the colonial mentality which saw “indios” and “negros” as inhuman, justifying their exploitation, torture, rape, murder and the stealing of their land. Scholars trace the practice of calling people of African descent “negro” or “black” to the 1300s, although it did not become a racialized ethnic category until the late 1400s when it was established as a characteristic of human property (Whitten, 2007). Calling indigenous peoples “indios” began after Colombus’ first voyage to the Americas in the 1490s and the term quickly came to be synonymous with Spanish labor force (Whitten, 2007). Many of the stereotypes that were used to dehumanize indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples in colonial days have made their way into Ecuadorian common sense thought (Rahier, 1998; Rahier, 2003b), epistemological ignorance, appropriated privilege and appropriated oppression. In the following paragraphs I trace how colonial imaginings remain part of Ecuador’s current racial imagination.

**Indigenous peoples**

Under Ecuador’s colonial system, indigenous people were subject to the “Indian policies” of the Spanish crown which legally divided the colonies into Spanish and Indian republics, each with different rights and responsibilities. These policies gave Spanish settlers rights to indigenous labor. It excluded indigenous peoples from commerce and politics and encouraged the dehumanizing perspective that indigenous men were “bearded children” in need of protection, guidance, and religious conversion (O’Connor, 2007, p. 10-11). It was the indigenous peoples in the Andes region who were most affected by these policies as
those who lived in the Amazon region were largely ignored during the colonial period.

Utilizing another typical colonial strategy, “dominant groups… manipulated gender
constructs to justify and legalize the marginalization of the poor and nonwhites as well as
women” (O’Connor, 2007, p. 193). The fact that “feminization” of men of color was used
as justification for their oppression indicates how ingrained women’s inferiority and
subjugation was in the minds of Spanish colonizers.

In Ecuador’s current racial imagination, indigeneity is frozen in time and seen as antiquated
and anti-modern (see Whitten). Stereotypes of indigenous people as rural, dirty, drunk,
unintelligent, subservient, and men as violent to their spouses are rooted in colonial
imaginings. Indigenous women have been treated as second-class citizens, seen as
inherently passive and in need of patriarchal protection (O’Connor, 2007, p. 191-193).
They have also been seen as “more indigenous” (de la Cadena, 1995) than indigenous men,
responsible for indigenous cultural preservation and that aspect of national identity/culture
through their dress, child-rearing, food preparation and language (O’Connor, 2007, p. xii;
Radcliffe, 1996). Their bodies have been exploited throughout history, whether through
forced labor, structural violence or rape. Indigenous women are, statistically speaking,
more likely to live in poverty, to face exclusion and discrimination in employment, wages,
and access to social services, particularly health and education (M. Prieto, Cuminao, Flores,

Afro-descendent peoples

Africans were brought to what is now Ecuador as slaves in the 1500s (Whitten, 2007) many
of whom were taken to large plantations in the Chota-Mira Valley in the central highlands
after colonizers had decimated the indigenous population. There was also a large
concentration of escaped slaves in a maroon community on the northern Pacific coast that resisted Spanish rule for over a hundred years. While Afro-Ecuadorians were nominally included in the Spanish republic, in reality they were not (O'Toole, 2006).

Through the present-day hegemonic perspective in Ecuador, Ecuadorians are seen as mestizos, and blackness is invisible. “In this imagination of Ecuadorianness, there is logically no place for blacks… Afro-Ecuadorians constitute the ultimate Other, some sort of a historical aberration, a noise in the ideological system of nationality” (Rahier, 1998). Dominant ideas of ethnicity and race also place geographic boundaries on indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians, who are seen as “belonging” to rural areas and “out of place” in cities, where many people of indigenous and African ancestry now live (Rahier, 2003b). Afro-Ecuadorian women face similar discrimination and are often assumed, particularly if in urban spaces, to be prostitutes or domestic workers (Rahier, 2003b). These particular stereotypes and assumptions can be traced directly to the systematic rape and sexual abuse of Afro-descendent and indigenous women in the colonial system (Davis, 1983; Nelson, 1999; O’Connor, 2007; Premo, 2008). Racist stereotypes of Afro-descendants as unintelligent, criminal, dirty, violent, athletic, and hypersexual are pervasive.

Mestizaje

The ideology of mestizaje, defined as “race mixture” (Godreau, 2006), occupies a central role in the racial imagination in Latin America, including in Ecuador. Ecuadorian sociologist and historian Hernán Ibarra understands mestizaje in Ecuador as a “colonial product” that biologically creates “racially mixed castes,” that culturally produces “acculturation” which varies based on the time and historical circumstances under which it happens, and that in “an ideal sense” should result in a “cultural exchange” that enriches all
parties, but that “frequently encounters the barriers of racial prejudice and discrimination” (Ibarra, 1992, p. 97). As the figure below illustrates, race in Ecuador is conceptualized similarly to breeders’ understandings of animals intermixing. This mentality is clearly rooted in colonial conceptions of interracial unions and is captured in the vocabulary used in Latin America to denote people of different “racial mixtures.” The word *mulato*, for example, comes directly from the word *mula-ta*, or “muled,” referring to the mule, the offspring of a horse and donkey (Whitten, 2007, p. 360).

**Illustration 8: Race in Ecuador (Whitten, 2003, p. 57)**

Despite the “plurinationality” proclaimed in the constitution and the multiplicity of racial formations in Ecuador today, the absence of the word “mestizo/a” in that same constitution indicates how deeply it is assumed that Ecuadorians are mestizos/as. The normalized hegemonic national identity has become synonymous with being mestizo, which in Ecuador means a mix of white and indigenous ancestry (Rahier, 1998, p. 422), and “the ideology of the mestiza nation has been one of the foundations of the nation-state” (Ibarra, 1992, p. 111).

In the late-nineteenth century, Latin American and Caribbean scholars influenced by Social Darwinism promoted the idea of race mixture in the region, arguing that blanquemiento,
“whitening the race,” would improve the population. The racial constructions of mestizaje have since been used to create distinct national identities based on racial and ethnic mixture (Safa, May, 1998). As an idea, “the whiter the better” is still part of people’s understandings of their own and others’ public identities, as will become evident in later chapters. At the same time in Ecuador, the upper class explained racial and ethnic differences as biological, defining indigeneity “as an expression of savagery,” that had negative implications for mestizos. These ideas’ main authors thought that in rural societies mestizo people acquired more and more “white culture” over time (Ibarra, 1992, p. 100).

The hegemonic mestizo norm is tightly intertwined with notions of “modernity,” developed in the nineteenth century along with blanquemiento ideologies. Mainstream Latin American society conceives of itself as “white and modern” (Godreau, 2008, p. 3), thus excluding afrodescendant and indigenous peoples. When they do become visible in the normative national consciousness outside the negative stereotypes described above, they are expected to appear in certain “folkloric” spaces. Within this normalized construction of Ecuadorian Others, Afro-Ecuadorians are expected to dance and sing marimba or bomba, and play soccer if they are men. Indigenous peoples are expected to be artisans and/or play traditional wind instruments, wear traditional traje, or dress, and have a mystical relationship with the earth.

Normalized ideas about modernity are based on assumptions that time is linear, that societies progress, evolve and develop as they move from the past to the present and into the future, when not impeded by “uncivilized,” “irrational” and “backward” peoples or

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15 Marimba is an African-influenced style of music popular on the coast of Ecuador. Bomba is the African-influenced music that is prevalent in Ecuador’s Sierra region, or Andean highlands.
cultures (Lugones, 2008a; Lugones, 2011). Modern and developed peoples are understood as able to tame and conquer nature, unlike indigenous peoples who were untamed like the natural world in which they lived prior to colonization (Radcliffe, 1996). These ideas were developed in Europe at the height of the colonial era and serve to maintain neocolonial structures in the present; they devalue, invisibilize, criminalize other ways of knowing; undergirding the continued discrimination against women and ethnic minorities and the destruction of the natural environment (Lugones, 2008a; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005), all topics mentioned as important by the women included in this study (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

**Gender, race, and ethnicity**

Hegemonic perceptions of sexuality are also rooted in colonial understandings. In Ecuador, as in many societies, women are typically encouraged to be sexually “pure” and men to have sexual conquests. While Afro-descendent women are hypersexualized (Hill Collins, 1991; Lugones, 2008a), and white-mestizo men often see them and indigenous women as available for “sexual liaisons.” The children begotten by these unions are seen as a triumph for the blanqueamiento project. For white-mestizo men, marriage is usually a category reserved for white-mestiza woman (Nelson, 1999; Rahier, 2003b), whose sexuality is often “violently policed” in order to maintain purity of the family’s bloodlines (Nelson, 1999, p. 215). These ideas are rooted in

pre-Conquest Spanish notion of purity of blood: “A child’s substance was provided by the mother’s blood. Hence, purity of blood meant descent from Christian women”... And, hence, mestizo and ‘impure blood’ mean descent from an indigenous women (Nelson, 1999, p. 222).
This has meaning not only at the familial but also at a social level. As women are also seen as “as the nation’s reproducers and as the caretakers and nurturers of the family… the symbol of national identity,” their actions are highly monitored by men (Stanger, 2002). They “symbolically [mark] the boundary of the group” and thus their “movements and bodies are policed, in terms of their sexuality, fertility, and relations with ‘others,’ especially with other men” (Stanger, 2002, p. 20, quoting Pettman). In other words as women (re)produce people they (re)produce social structures: workers who drive capitalism, raced individuals who maintain (or not) the separate racial, ethnic and class groups on which the society is structured and ordered. As it is the man with whom women reproduce that determines the race, class, culture of their child, women’s partnerships have always been tightly controlled. These double standards and the violence surrounding women’s sexual “transgressions” will be apparent in the lives of the women whose stories I tell in the following chapters.

Decolonizing knowledge

“Bodies are viewed with greater and lesser degrees of power dependent on race, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability, and bodily knowledge reflects the social power associated with the individual. Consequently, acceptable ways of knowing are defined by those with the most power” (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012, p. 123).

In addition to contributing to the structure of hierarchical relationships based on public identity categories, colonial mentality extends to how knowledge itself is understood.

Maria Lugones, an Argentinean feminist philosopher, brings the concept of intersectionality into conversation with Quijano’s concept of “the coloniality of power,”16 to name the “modern/colonial gender system” (p. 77) as a system which structures the modern world

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16 Lugones explains that Quijano uses this term to analyze “global, Eurocentered capitalist power” and think about things like race and gender (Lugones, 2008a; Lugones, 2008b).
according to colonial concepts of gender and ethnicity/race in the service of capitalism (Lugones, 2008b, p. 77). As she explains the dichotomous colonial schema, which permeates the modern capitalist system, heterosexual white men are understood as rational historical agents who govern the public realm and modernize their society, accompanied by heterosexual white woman, seen as pure, passive, and tied to the home and the reproduction of the race and future capitalist (white male) workers. Non-white (indigenous or Afro-descendent) peoples are not considered men and women, but male and female (less than human); seen as savage, sexual, superstitious (Lugones, 2011, p. 106). Lugones writes that “the imposition of these dichotomous hierarchies became woven into the historicity of relations, including intimate relations… the interwoven social life among people” (Lugones, 2010, p. 743).

Knowledge and its production are affected by these hierarchies. The “production of a way of knowing, labeled rational” emerged “since the XVII century in the main hegemonic centers of this world system of power (Holland and England)” (Lugones, 2008b). This history is important for revealing how the assumptions undergirding rational ways of knowing and positivist research methods come from the same place where male European colonial capitalist power was rooted (also discussed in Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). Since that time non-rational ways of knowing have been dismissed as “superstitious,” “savage,” “primitive,” “witchcraft;” they have been invisibilized, devalued, and those caught relying on traditional non-Western knowledges have for many years been punished and sometimes killed. For example, until fairly recently in Ecuador indigenous women caught practicing midwifery were jailed, traditional Andean dishes made of quinoa and other very nutritious (and delicious) food was disparagingly looked down on as “Indian’s food,” and energetic
healers and spiritual leaders such as yachaks and fregadores were demonized and persecuted.

**Violence and the sociocultural terrain of Ecuador**

Gender violence is a global phenomena of astounding proportion, one that affects people of all nations, social classes, ethnic and racial backgrounds, revealing the pervasiveness of patriarchal power relations and their interconnectedness with other oppressive social forces such as racism, homophobia, ablism, etc. Violence is not a topic I intended to address in my dissertation, but because of its prevalence in the lives of the women with whom I have worked and the number of stories of violence I was told in interviews (without having asked about it), I concluded that it would be impossible to talk about women’s lives or to understand their identities or consciousness without attention to both violence and its effects, such as trauma. As multiple types of violence frequently accompany the process of learning identities, I observe that violence and trauma have become entangled with what is learned and what some women later attempt to unlearn about themselves and others.

I very generally define violence as any action that is harmful to any part of the self (body, mind, soul, etc.). I recognize that it emerges from power inequalities, where one person, group or institution uses his/her/its power over another in a way which causes harm or injury. Here I briefly describe the different types of violence that I include in this general definition.

The literature on violence tends to classify it into different types. It is categorized as “(1) *direct violence*, or personal injury; (2) *structural violence*, where structures of social injustice violate or endanger the right to life of individuals or groups of people in society”
(Hyndman, 2009) or restrict their agency, and where “people suffer harm indirectly, often through a slow and steady process with no clearly identifiable perpetrators” (Menjívar, 2008, p. 3). The third type is “(3)… cultural violence, in which any aspect of culture, such as language, religion, ideology, art or cosmology is used to legitimate direct or structural violence” (Hyndman, 2009, emphasis in the original). Another important theory is that of symbolic violence, which

in contrast to the overt violence of the usurer or the ruthless master… is “gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, all of the virtues honoured by the ethic of honour” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 24).

Modern society has been built with structural and symbolic violence as its foundation, and while they may be subtle, they are constantly felt.

The types of violence typically referred to in Ecuador when discussing gender violence would be understood as direct violence: physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. There is also political violence, violence exerted by the state and in political spaces. The Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas (FIMI) – International Forum of Indigenous Women – adds to the discussion by naming types of violence specifically affecting indigenous women. They define spiritual violence as “violence against women and the systematic attack against the indigenous spiritual practices” (Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas, FIMI, 2006, p. 20), and ecological violence as:

the destruction of Mother Earth, the natural world which is the essence of the indigenous cosmovision and the base of the form of life for the Pueblos, the source not just of food, medicine and work but also of life and well-being, that is very affected by the practices and politics that don’t protect but rather destroy nature (Hill, Morán, & Fueres, 2012).
All of these types of violence are very real in the everyday lives of Ecuadorian women, and I have seen that denormalizing and thus making them visible is necessary for critical consciousness. Learning to see hegemonic social structures, part of having critical political consciousness, implies also learning to see the ways in which they exert their power, which includes violence. The aspect of self-aware consciousness which necessitates understanding how experiences are connected to one’s physical body, feelings, thoughts, and spirituality implicates seeing violence, as it by definition impacts the self on multiple levels.

*Trauma*

The traumatic effects of violence in women’s lives will make its appearance in later chapters where I examine how women learn public identities (Chapter Five) and learn to see how experience affects the self (Chapter Six). I will also look at its role in conflict and the construction of relationships built on solidarity (Chapter Seven). Trauma is defined in the DSM-IV\(^\text{17}\) as having “three symptom clusters” which are:


2. People who have suffered trauma often feel “anger, sadness, shame, and fear….hopeless and helpless” in relationships and tend to “focus on personal safety and on protecting themselves rather than connecting with the other” (Johnson & Williams-Keeler, 1998, p. 25-26).

3. Psychologists have also observed that “psychological trauma can become embedded in the body and manifested through physical symptoms” (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012, p. 123); an observation that makes sense given the interconnected nature of different aspects of the self (examined in Chapter Two).

\(^{17}\)The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – the book which officially defines all psychological disorders.
The notion of trauma has been critiqued, as have many ideas related to psychology, for taking the focus off of structural factors such as patriarchy and focusing only on psychological or internal dynamics (Ovenden, 2012). While I agree that a structural perspective is crucial when looking at the effects of violence, I think that perspectives which prioritize the structural to the extent of ignoring the individual, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual effects of violence are disregarding aspects of an experience to which any person who has lived through violence will attest is urgent and present in her or his life. I suggest that Ecuadorian organizations, international organizations which fund projects, and academics interested in identity, social movements and social change consider violence and trauma’s repercussions on the different aspects of the individual. Also affected is people’s ability to engage with others, participate in organizations, develop empathy and relationships based on solidarity, and to learn critical consciousnesses.

**Violence against women in Ecuador**

With this understanding of violence and trauma, I will look here at some of the most common and normalized forms of violence enacted specifically on women in Ecuador. The government’s statistics bureau reports that 60% of women report having been victims of gender violence (including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence). The most common type, with 53.9% of women reporting having experienced it, is psychological violence (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas y Censos, 2012a). According to the same survey, 38.0% of women report experiencing physical violence and 25.7% sexual violence (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas y Censos, 2012a), putting Ecuador’s violence against women in line with global trends. In a recent study of over 80 countries the World Health Organization reported that 35% of women who have been in a relationship have
been victims of physical and/or sexual violence by their partner (World Health Organization, October 2013).

The following drawings were made by groups of women from the CCMU for a workshop that Magdalena Fueres, Carmelina Morán and I led as part of a research project we did on domestic violence in the indigenous communities in Cotacachi. Here the women mapped where they have experienced violence on their bodies. The physical as well as emotional consequences of violence appear in these drawings: black eyes, sexual violence, cuts, tumors, hurt hearts and sadness are all present.

![Illustration 9: Social Cartography drawings of violence as experienced in women’s bodies. From a workshop with the CCMU in Cotacachi.](image)

In stories about violence, its relationship to intersectional public identities is evident. For example, some women from poor and especially rural families whom I interviewed began working (often for no pay) when they were still children. Women of color with oppressed identity characteristics experience structural violence from the time they are small.
Sexual violence in Ecuador

Also a global problem which has its particular manifestation in each local context where it takes place, sexual violence is a topic that emerged as a common experience among my interviewees, and as something which deeply impacts all parts of the self. While INEC estimates that roughly one in four women in Ecuador have experienced sexual violence (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2012a), based on conversations and various research projects conducted, I estimate the numbers to be higher. This is particularly true if it were understood that any sort of coercion (physical, verbal, emotional, etc.) into having sex by one’s own partner is rape (Hill et al., 2012). A local leader from Cotapaxi said that in a study done in the rural communities where she works, the first sexual experience of more than 90% of young women was rape. If unwanted commentary of a sexual nature were taken into consideration, then I have never discussed this topic with a woman who has not been subjected to this type of harassment in Ecuador.

The violence experienced is compounded by girls’ and women’s ignorance about sex, sexuality and their bodies. A country steeped in Catholic tradition and sexist beliefs around sex, Ecuador has a poor system of sex education and a culture where it is taboo to talk about sex, especially outside of one’s peer group. This is reflected in the adolescent pregnancy rates which are the second highest in Latin America. 17.2% of 15 to 19-year-old

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18 For INEC’s study, sexual violence was defined as “The imposition of sexual activity of a person who is obligated to have sexual relations or practices with the aggressor or others, through the use of physical force, intimidation, threats, or whatever other coercive measure;” Originally: “la imposición en el ejercicio de la sexualidad de una persona a la que se le obligue a tener relaciones o prácticas sexuales con el agresor o con terceros, mediante el uso de fuerza física, intimidación, amenazas o cualquier otro medio coercitivo” (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2012)
19 I have not yet been able to get a copy of this study from her.
20 This is almost a constant in the lives of many women. I understand the argument that it is cultural, but that something is cultural does not mean it is not violent.
girls and .9% of girls between 12 and 14 are mothers (Ministerio de Salud Pública del Ecuador, 2012), even with an estimated 125,000 illegal abortions (by women of all ages) carried out each year (Arana, 2013). This is part of a global problem where conservative views about sex education and birth result in abortions being declared illegal. The entire region of Latin America is affected by a colonial Catholic past: the World Health Organization estimates that 95% of abortions carried out in the region are unsafe (WHO & Guttmacher Institute, 2012). The issue of abortion is one around which there is much coalition work carried out by feminist, especially urban, groups, and one which has inspired many creative actions.

Despite this work, the pervasiveness and institutionalization of sexism is powerful, as can be seen in the following example. In October 2013 when a congresswoman introduced a bill to legalize abortion in cases of rape, Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa called those considering the bill “traitors” and said he would renounce his presidency if the bill passed, effectively pressuring the sponsor to withdraw the bill. This has left in place the law that only legalizes abortion if the life of the mother is in danger or if the pregnancy is the result of the rape of “demented or idiot women.” All other abortions are illegal. Women who abort can be sentenced to between one and five years’ incarceration and doctors and others involved in abortions are also subject to prison time (Estado de Ecuador, 2013).

The high rates of sexual violence, the normalization of this violence, the repressive position on women’s sexuality taken by the Ecuadorian state and the taboos which prohibit discussing these topics influence how women understand what it means to be a woman. These conditions impact their emotional, bodily, spiritual and mental health as well as their relationship with themselves. As the literature on trauma suggests, these experiences also affect their relationships with others. Violence and trauma have ramifications on women’s
ability to learn, to hope, and their desire to participate in organizations, all important factors in processes of concientización.

Other Histories: Social Movements in Ecuador

Countering the many types of violence that are present, Ecuador has a long history of social movements in which women have played an important role as they have resisted simultaneous multiple oppressions. Many women’s voices perspectives been minimized within social movements as the officially recognized women’s movement has primarily been represented by and spoken for the interests of white/mestiza middle/upper class women while leftist, indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and other movements have been dominated by male perspectives and leadership. Separate organizations have been founded where woman pursue their particular interests and needs, and coalition organizations attempt to overcome these divides. They are active in organizations, coalitions, and mixed-gender organizations, making important contributions and gaining ground in diverse spaces. Given the importance of social movements in addressing the multiple and intersecting types of violence that plague women and minority communities in the neocolonial world, Ecuador’s history as a country with a strong social movement tradition makes it a fitting place to study social organization and concientización.

Social movements have a significant history in the political and social construction of modern-day Ecuador. Political scientist Augustín Cueva argues that because Ecuador’s independence from Spain was orchestrated by local elites, colonial structures of domination were not significantly altered upon independence (Cueva, 1982, p. 3). On the other hand, writes sociologist Carlos de la Torre, the traditional weakness of the national government
and the fragmentation of elite classes have created political space for popular movements to have an influence and have resulted in activists’ demands being met with dialogue rather than repression by the state (De La Torre, 2006, p. 250-251). This is an interesting analysis in light of the relative strength of the current government compared to past administrations, especially given its authoritarian and repressive nature.

The women’s movement

What has been formally recognized as the women’s movement in Ecuador did not begin, as it did in many countries, with women organizing for the right to vote. That was granted in the 1920s in the absence of a social movement (M. Prieto, 1986, p. 188), although only to literate white/mestiza women, and some suggest, with the intention of weakening feminist and socialist movements (Becker, 2003). Women’s issues were taken on in unions and leftist political parties in the 1960s, where they were generally understood as problems of the working class. In that decade the Ecuadorian state began recognizing women’s equality in its laws, although this was contradicted in other legal instruments, notably the civil code (M. Prieto, 1986). In the 1970s conservative women’s organizations emerged with the goal of helping the poor and achieving equal access to political participation, women’s organizations formed within unions, campesina and student organizations, including ECUARUNARI Pichincha, an important indigenous organization (Herrera, 2007; M. Prieto, 1986), and the state expressed interest in “integrating women in development” and in 1980 created the Oficina Nacional de la Mujer – National Office of Women (M. Prieto, 1986, p. 189-191).

In the 1980s the recognized women’s movement focused on expanding women’s citizenship rights in an era of political re-democratization. In urban areas, women from the
popular classes organized to collectively survive the effects of neoliberal reforms (Herrera, 2007; Lind, 2005), around what some would call “practical gender interests” in contrast with feminist organization’s “strategic gender interests” (Molyneux, 2001). Women’s thinking and activism was influenced by the international context of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the prevalence of violent dictatorships across the region, as well as recently-developed popular education methodologies (Herrera, 2007), which are in effect consciousness-raising techniques. It was also a decade where Ecuadorian women encountered feminist theory upon meeting European feminists when they travelled internationally representing their leftist organizations (Carrión Sarzosa, 2013, p. 8-9), because Europeans were arriving to live in Ecuador, or because they went to Europe to study (Herrera, 2007). Ironically, this new knowledge often led to ruptures with their male comrades (discussed in Chapters Four, Six and Seven). Ecuadorian women’s participation in the Encuentros Feministas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe were also important, as was their collaboration with the intellectuals and activists from the Southern Cone countries who migrated to Ecuador in this time period fleeing repressive dictatorships in their countries (Herrera, 2007, p. 29). These historical facts support what I will discuss in

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21 Maxine Molyneux defined strategic gender interests as women's interests which “are derived... deductively... from the analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory, set of arrangements to those which exist... They are the ones most frequently considered by feminists to be women's ‘real’ interests. The demands that are formulated on this basis are usually termed ‘feminist’, as is the level of consciousness required to struggle effectively for them” (Molyneux, 2001, p. 43). In contrast, practical gender interests are defined as women's interests which “arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gendered division of labor…. [They] are usually a response to an immediate perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality” (Molyneux, 2001, p. 44). She asserts that there are class implications in this formulation, writing that, “It is... usually poor women who are so readily mobilized by economic necessity” (Molyneux, 2001, p. 44). Molyneux has received much criticism for this formulation because of the dichotomous thinking and policies inspired by it, to which she has responded by explaining that she formulated this distinction in the 1986 in the Nicaraguan context to emphasize that common interests could not be assumed based on a person’s “sex,” and that women’s interests were “politically and discursively constructed” (Molyneux, 2001, p. 152).
Chapter Four – the importance of seeing and experiencing new ideas and meeting people with different perspectives on life.

In general activist women in the 1990s focused their efforts on: gaining access to formal politics; working with NGOs, international and state agencies to insert women into public policy; or working for the demands of women emerging within other social movement spaces, such as the powerful indigenous levantamientos.22 These and other aspects of the Ecuadorian women’s movement in this decade are evaluated as influenced by the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Discussions about the feminization of poverty, the productiveness of domestic work, sexual rights, and the ethic and cultural crisis were also part of the movement. Various women’s institutions were created as part of the state apparatus, and women’s rights were recognized in various laws and in the 1998 Constitution. The emphasis on constructing legal documents often created tension with women’s leftist understanding of the state as an apparatus which maintains unequal power relations (Carrión Sarzosa, 2013; Herrera, 2007). The emphasis on social policy also limited the movement from demanding structural changes; some have suggested this was because leaders were urban mestiza middle-class professionals (Carrión Sarzosa, 2013).

In the 2000s “the political context of the women’s movements is more complex with the greater presence of women from popular sectors, whose public presence shows that their processes had developed at the same time as the women’s movement, but without being recognized as part of it” (Carrión Sarzosa, 2013, p. 12). Over these years, the diverse women’s organizations have become visible, articulating demands for urban, rural, indigenous, Afro-descendent, Montubia, popular and middle class women, as well as the

22 “Levantamiento” literally means a “rising up.” That is what the massive protests that brought the country to a halt were referred to.
GLBTIQ community. Several national-level collectives have emerged in an attempt to articulate these diverse perspectives. The AMPDE, formed in 2008, is one of these organizations. Sometimes it forms alliances with other national-level women’s organizations to work together on certain issues. Other times there are tensions between groups because they don’t agree with other organizations’ leaders, have different perspectives or political leanings, or because they feel their space or funding is being encroached upon by the other group. The AMPDE also allies with mixed-gender organizations for political work on issues such as food sovereignty, environmental rights, etc.

Since it was founded in 2008, the AMPDE has primarily focused on bringing together diverse local women’s organizations to debate laws and public policies that are being discussed in the national government. Their slogan “Not one more law without us” reveals the organization’s emphasis on intervening in political issues. They have been active around national laws on: food sovereignty, popular and solidarity economy, water, land, equality, COPISA, the penal code. They have also formed part of a coalition of environmentalists to convoke a national referendum to keep the government from drilling for oil in Yasuni Park, one of the most biodiverse regions in the world and territory of two indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation.

The AMPDE has used four primary methods for its political advocacy: first, it holds meetings and assemblies in different parts of the country, hosted by different organizations,

23 Conferencia plurinacional e intercultural de soberanía alimentaria – The plurinational and intercultural conference on food sovereignty.
24 More information on this issue here http://yasunidosinternational.wordpress.com/, or in this article: http://upsidedownworld.org/main/news-briefs-archives-68/4811-ecuadorian-military-breaks-yasunidos-blockade
and (mostly the urban mestiza) women present information on the law or issue up for debate and the assembled women discuss and give their opinions about it. Second, that information is compiled, usually by the same women who presented, and put in a format for mass diffusion. Using email, facebook, twitter, and other social media formats, declarations, letters, written opinions are circulated to the general public. Third, public protests are staged, when there is funding the AMPDE hires transportation to bring interested women from different provinces to Quito, the capital, to participate. Fourth, the AMPDE uses its social connections to hold meetings with politicians to lobby. In addition to this political advocacy work, the AMPDE has held several formación schools.

The problem with a lot of the literature on the women’s movement in Ecuador is that it rarely identifies the intersectional identities of the women who participated in these organizations. Entire articles and books are written about “the women,” or “women from popular classes” (Lind’s book, for example) without offering any explanation of how the experiences of women with different intersectional identities are embodied differently and without considering women’s activism within indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian or other mixed-gender organizations part of the women’s movement. This is perhaps an indication of how the recognized “women’s movement” in Ecuador does not center the realities and needs of women of color (discussed in Chapter Seven), many of whom have played important roles in the indigenous and Afro-descendent movements, which I will now discuss.

The indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian movements

Indigenous groups began to organize in the 1960s when oil discoveries in the Amazon region opened the doors to territorial invasion by oil companies, missionaries, and then colonists encouraged to settle there by the 1964 agrarian reform (Gerlach, 2003, p. 51-54).
Their focus on ethnicity was strengthened by NGOs, churches, government agrarian development programs. Once they were formed, indigenous organizations were well-positioned to fill the power vacuum left by 1960s and 1970s agrarian reform (De La Torre, 2006, p. 250-251). In 1986, three federations representing indigenous groups in the Amazon, Andes, and coastal regions joined to form the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), a national indigenous organization with a grassroots organizational structure (Gerlach, 2003; Sawyer, 2004). CONAIE organized a series of levantamientos (uprisings) in the 1990s and 2000s that through mass mobilization brought the country to a standstill, toppled presidents, and earned it a reputation by the turn of the century as “the strongest indigenous rights movement… in Latin America” (Weismantel, 2003, p. 330).

The Afro-Ecuadorian movement took root in the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by Catholic missionary work, regional Afro-descendent groups (Rahier, 2012), and, as has been explained to me in interviews, the powerful indigenous movement. It has never been as strong as the indigenous movement itself, but has made important policy gains in recent years. The 2008 constitution is the site of some of the most important advances, as it not only includes communal rights for Afro-Ecuadorians living in rural areas who can claim a distinct culture, but also promises affirmative action and reparations to Afro-Ecuadorians. The official leaders of this movement have primarily been men, although some women also currently hold positions of power. Many of the organizations are currently suffering power vacuums as the current government absorbed many of the movement’s strongest leaders.

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25 At least one central Afro Ecuadorian thinker, Pablo Minda, told me in an interview that in his opinion there is no “movement” – he states that the organization among black Ecuadorians is not strong or cohesive enough to be called a movement.
Women have always played a role in indigenous organizations, where many argue that gender differences are conceptualized as complimentary rather than hierarchical (M. Prieto et al., 2006). Many, if not most, indigenous nationalities and pueblos have a women’s secretariat or committee to specifically address gender concerns, but overall the organizations remain male dominated. Many indigenous women contest the patriarchy that exists in their communities, wanting greater power and equality. As leader Carmelina Morán (CCMU) repeatedly argues, “Without equality there is no complimentarily.” An attempt in the early 1990s to form a national-level indigenous women’s organization, CONMIE, met such resistance from male counterparts saying the women would divide the indigenous movement that many abandoned the organization, leaving it defunct (M. Prieto et al., 2006).

Afro-descendent women organized in a different context, beginning in the 1990s (Medina & Castro, 2006). While remaining involved in Afro-Ecuadorian organizing, many have formed groups specifically for Afro-Ecuadorian women, which now exist at the local, regional and national level. The goals of these organizations range from supporting Afro-descendent culture to protecting black women’s human rights (Radcliffe, 1997, p. 69). The Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras – the National Coordinator of Black Women (CONAMUNE) is well-organized with regional chapters that seek to coordinate and provide resources for local Afro-Ecuadorian women’s groups.

Women have increasingly participated in government agencies and NGOs over the past 20 years as the fields of WAD (women and development) and WID (women in development) influenced Ecuadorian policies. Neoliberal capitalist thought undergirds Ecuador’s recent economic and political decisions as well as the international development projects that have
played such a role in the country’s “development” since the early 20th century. There is a
debate among feminists surrounding this influence, as Amy Lind (2005) explains:

Some feminists view the last two decades as transformative, since it has been a
period of increased political visibility for women’s rights; others see it as a time of
economic deterioration and an erosion of women’s social and political rights. Some
view the increased presence of WID institutions and research programs, feminist
NGOs, national educational campaigns, and feminist policy-making and advocacy
as a product of successful feminist organizing; others protest these very institutions,
projects, and research programs on the basis that they are colonizing the realities of
Latin American women, and as Westernized gender technocracies that do nothing
other than reproduce and institutionalize Western forms of knowledge about women
and development (p. 14).

This excerpt details some of the analytic and material fractures within the various women’s
organizations in Ecuador. Differences of opinion between groups are not only connected to
discrimination and patriarchy in Ecuador, but also to the influences of neocolonial
capitalism and accompanying “development” policies which have been strongly critiqued
by the indigenous movement and other Ecuadorian activists. Their voices join those of
many others around the world who have documented and denounced its negative impacts
on Third World women and peoples (Eisenstein, 2004; C. Mohanty, Russo, & Torres,
1991; Sassen, 1998). This dissertation research has been motivated, in part, by a desire to
understand women’s activism in this context, to understand how consciousness is being
shaped in organizational and quotidian spaces.

The Constitution and Politics Since its Ratification

As mentioned earlier, one way of reading the process leading up to the ratification of
Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution was that it made many Ecuadorian citizens more aware of
their rights and what the state could offer them, as these were much-debated topics in the
process leading up to the writing of the document. The constitution itself was considered a
victory for many social movements since it was the first of the country’s constitutions to be collectively constructed (Paz y Miño, Juan J. & Paziño, 2008, p. 41) and influenced by Ecuadorian social movements (Flores, 2010). The process by which it was written and its content emerged from the long history of activism in the country; it was especially influenced by the anti-neoliberal and rights-oriented struggles of the indigenous, environmental, Afro-descendent and women’s movements. Because many members of the Constituent Assembly who wrote the constitution were advisors or leaders of activist organizations, many long-standing demands of social movements were included in the document, something evident in the first words of the first chapter. “Ecuador is a constitutional State of rights and justice; it is social, democratic, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, pluri-national and secular” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008).

Accompanying the Ecuadorian state’s legitimation of ethnic and racial difference was the significant expansion of the communal rights originally recognized in the 1998 constitution for indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio communities. It also sanctioned the inclusion of two indigenous languages – Kichwa and Shuar – not as official languages, but as “official languages of intercultural relations.” In addition, the constitution grants individual Ecuadorians the right to food, water, work, and housing, and promises numerous rights to women and the natural environment (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008).

A victory for the indigenous organizations which advocated for its inclusion (CONAIE, Confederación de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas del Ecuador, 2007), the constitution also recognizes the right to sumak kawsay (Constitution of the Republic of
Ecuador, 2008), a Kichwa term denoting a good life in harmony with the earth and one another. The term has been translated into Spanish as “el buen vivir” or “the good life,” a phrase which appears 23 times in the constitution, and has become part of the state discourse, national and local laws. It is often used as an alternative to neoliberal “development.” The inclusion of sumak kawsay in mainstream discourse, however, has distorted its true meaning (discussed in Chapter Two) and which have caused it to be associated by many with Alianza País, the political party in power since 2008, rather than the struggle of indigenous peoples. While this is observable, its entry into mainstream discourse has also made visible and valued indigenous ideals and worldview in normative (mestizo) spaces.

While not all demands considered important by social activists were included in the constitution (for example the women’s movement’s effort to legalize abortion was not obtained), it inspired great hope for activists and those concerned with social and environmental justice in Ecuador when it was ratified. Unfortunately since then it has become obvious that Correa’s government has no intention of honoring any of the constitutional mandates that might impede its power, popularity, or determination to

26 For more on sumak kawsay in the Ecuadorian constitution see Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Fernandez-Juarez, 2010; Secretaria Nacional de Planificacion y Desarrollo, SENPLADES, 2010.

27 Although Alianza País once had the support of many if not most of the organizations comprising the indigenous movement; only a few still back it. Since coming into power, political power-holders have criminalized public protest in Ecuador and the indigenous movement as a whole. Most of these confrontations have emerged around issues related to the Pacha-Mama/ natural resources such as water, land, oil extraction, etc. This criminalization of protest by the government is denounced among activists and online on websites such as this one: http://www.migrantesecuador.org/content/view/9140/256/. There are several public declarations made by Amnesty International on this issue to be found by searching “Ecuador” on their website http://www.amnesty.org/es/library. Accion Ecologica also published a strong statement on the issue: http://www.accionecologica.org/component/content/article/1487-ecuador-criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-social-en-tiempos-de-revolucion-ciudadana, as did the NGO Rosa Luxemburg http://www.rosalux.org.ec/es/analisis/ecuador/item/201-encuentro-agua and the Comite Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos CDH: http://cdh.org.ec/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=118:panel-foro-criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-social&catid=36:cdh&Itemid=55.
develop extractive industries with which it finances the social and development programs which are thought to account for its popularity. This is true in a context where the president himself has a lot of power. Alianza País, the political party of Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa, which was founded when Correa decided to run for office in 2007, has had the majority in the Assembly since that time, and votes in block to pass the laws proposed by Correa. These laws have slowly been concentrating power and resources into the hands of the executive branch, and as governmental social programs are primarily funded by resources received from extractive industries, many laws, executive decrees and other state decisions ignore the constitutional rights of the environment, indigenous pueblos, and others. The government has closed environmental NGOs and thrown environmental, indigenous and other social movement leaders in jail under charges of terrorism for opposing its extractive politics.

Over time, Correa’s government has passed laws sanctioning judicial and economic penalties for those who criticize the government and has detained and jailed activist leaders opposing his policies even without legal backing. It also charges large sums of money for organizations to obtain legal status, without which they cannot receive funding from NGOs or foundations. While Correa remains popular with the majority of Ecuadorians – he won reelection in 2012 with 61% in February of 2013 (B. Ellsworth & Valencia, 2013) – he is unpopular among many activists, social movements and organizations because of these violations of human and nature’s rights (Acosta et al., 2013).
Conclusion

Almost ten years after Cecilia’s story of personal transformation captured my attention I find myself still living in Ecuador, studying stories of transformation in a context marked by colonial hierarchies, structural, symbolic, and direct violence. I attempt to understand how hegemonic forces in this context influence Ecuadorian common sense. I also analyze how the different types of violence mentioned in this chapter, common across the globe but with specific manifestations here, affect the women and communities of practice with whom I’ve collaborated. I am inspired by Ecuador’s history of resistance, collective memory of indigenous levantamientos and other social movements that have contested unjust social structures and mobilized the population to shape Ecuadorian society. This collective memory is embodied, and called upon as activists think creatively about how to contest current injustices.

In Ecuador I have found myself collaborating at a national level with the AMPDE and their focus on intervening in state laws and processes, observing the sometimes unintended learning that happens when women from diverse backgrounds are brought together to analyze public policy. At a local level, I discovered Cotacachi to be a canton with its own particular history of resistance and citizen participation. It is a place where indigenous organization and leadership has been at the forefront of social change, reframing power structures and hierarchies, nourishing indigenous knowledge paradigms and culture. The long and important history of social organizing in Ecuador and in Cotacachi has created fertile ground for studying critical political consciousness, and the Kichwa Kutacachi Pueblo’s cosmovision has given me a richer understanding of self-aware consciousness.
Cotacachi’s history of citizen participation and the institutions that resulted from it created spaces where women have the opportunity to interact not only with people “like” them in terms of intersectional embodied identity but also with people very different from them. This same situation is present in AMPDE spaces, which has offered the opportunity to examine how relationships of antagonism versus solidarity develop. In this context I find myself surrounded by women activists who are friends and colleagues as we work together to address the problems women face and build on the strengths of organizations.
Photo 2: Taken by Jennifer Artes (photovoice), titled “Customs and Traditions” She wrote about the image: “This photograph documents a tradition that is carried out each year thanking the earth for the fruits. It is called Wawa Loa (Pinsaqui Community).”
thirst

white morning shadows
sleeping eyelids sip light
identity lost in
dream shadows – blink

sandy daytime toes imprint
sunshine mapping soul’s song
Chapter Two: The “Real” World and the Images in Our Heads: Thinking Theory

Introduction

When I tell people that my dissertation is about consciousness among members of the women’s movement in Ecuador, they usually ask, “What do you mean by consciousness?” I smile and say, “That’s a very good question.” In this chapter I attempt to answer it, drawing on the academic literature to address: (1) The contradictory nature of consciousness, (2) what consciousness is, (3) group consciousness and communities of practice, (4) critical political consciousness, (5) self-aware consciousness, (6) solidarity as an important result of consciousness, (7) the subject of consciousness, (8) learning’s role in consciousness creation, and (9) how oppression, privilege and liberation are appropriated.

I primarily base my theoretical understandings of these concepts on transnational feminist theory and sociocultural learning theory. Common to these bodies of literature is the epistemological assumption that knowledge, learning, and consciousness are all situated and partial, created in a particular place and time by specific people. I use the work of social theorists such as Foucault, Freire and Gramsci, in addition to social movement theory, therapy/psychology literature (especially emotionally-focused therapy (EFT) and initiatic therapy), and the Andean indigenous cosmovision, which I intentionally use as a theory rather than analyzing it as an interesting artifact of the indigenous other.

As the Czech-Ecuadorian initiatic therapist Vera Shiller de Kohn\textsuperscript{28} writes, “In the Ecuadorian population, in contrast to the European population, mythic or magic elements

\textsuperscript{28} Dr. Kohn is well-known in Ecuador as an important therapist and for bringing initiatic therapy to Ecuador. She studied this type of therapy with its founder, Karlfried Graf Durkheim in the Black Forest in Germany for many years, where she cured herself of schizophrenia, before moving to Ecuador and and founding a center –
persist, and many times the first contact with the self that a European person who settles in these lands has, is through these elements” (Schiller de Kohn, 2006, p. 71). Dr. Kohn reverses the analysis typically given from a Western perspective. Rather than seeing what she calls “magic and mythic elements” as superstitious, barbaric, or “interesting” she values them and argues that the lack of contact with them impedes Westerners from having contact with the self. My experiences as well as those of the women with whom I have worked have led me to recognize the truth for many people in her words.

Before outlining my theoretical model, I present the assumptions on which it is based. The italicized terms will be developed in this chapter and important tools for analysis in my dissertation. The following points explain how I understand consciousness:

1. Consciousness is formed in the interaction between an individual’s agency and the social structures which shape the context in which she lives.

2. Consciousness is formed in the relationship between the individual and her communities of practice, which actively shape consciousness through their practices and teachings. In other words, individual consciousness is interwoven with group consciousness.

3. While inextricably interconnected, it can be useful to discuss separately: critical self-aware consciousness, a reflexive awareness of identity, experience and its influence on different aspects of the self, and the knowledge that one is an actor in the world; and critical political consciousness, an awareness of hegemonic social structures, their repercussions for individuals and communities, and the belief they should be eliminated. “Appropriating liberation” is another way to talk about acquiring critical political consciousness.

4. Consciousness is contradictory as the individual constantly absorbs and rejects conflicting messages she is given by society, her communities and her own changing perceptions and desires. I want to move away from the dichotomous idea that people either “have” or “don’t have” consciousness, instead understanding it as multiple, contradictory, partial and situated. Thinking of it this way allows for more imaginative and flexible understanding of it and sees it as something capable of fitting into uneven spaces where it can transform even in inhospitable environments.

the Center for Integral Development (CDI) – where others can be trained and treated in this type of therapy. For the past year I have been in an initiatic therapy course.
5. I use the term *intersectional embodied identity* to refer and draw attention to the experiential and material ramifications of the particular intersection, or interwoven combination of public identity characteristics in a person’s holistic (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional) self. This term also underscores that each individual’s subjective interpretation of their identity also has an impact on the “ramifications” of an intersectional identity on the embodied self.

6. In the consciousness of their own identities and their relationship to the world, some individuals and groups appropriate oppression, others appropriate privilege, and many, because their intersectional embodied identity includes both privileged and oppressed public identities (indigenous men, white woman, mestizo people), appropriate both.

7. Appropriated privilege is almost always accompanied by *epistemological ignorance*, as privilege prevents individuals and groups from knowing the reality of non-privileged sectors of society. Critical consciousness and ignorance are both learned, and are often learned simultaneously by the same person. They are also learned differently by every individual in the interaction between her complex self and her context. To understand how critical consciousness can be learned and ignorance can be unlearned it is important to consider each person and group’s intersectional embodied identity.

8. *Empathy*, the ability to put yourself in another’s shoes while being aware of your differences and respecting their positionality and yours, is an important building block of solidarity.

9. *Solidarity* is one of the most powerful tools individuals and communities of practice have to confront and overcome *hegemonic structural forces* and the *ignorance* they teach.

Consciousness as an idea treks varied landscapes and is considered important by social activists, spiritual seekers, and academics of varying disciplines, among others. In the next section I review how consciousness is generally understood in the context of the Americas (North and South, in English, Spanish and Kichwa). As my dissertation aims to have practical applications for organizations and individuals, I look at meanings and applications from popular as well as academic sources, while organizing my discussion around critical political and self-aware consciousness.
The contradictory nature of consciousness

My research has shown that most individuals’ and collectives’ consciousnesses are incomplete, multiple and contradictory. After encouraging her compañera\(^{29}\) to run for president of the local mixed-gender organization, arguing that it was time for women to be represented in the presidency, Gloria\(^{30}\) stands in front of the hundreds of voters to talk in favor of the male candidate. Another woman relates how her family rejected her because of her indigenous heritage only to make negative comments about indigenous people. People say things they do not follow through with in their actions. They critically analyze how a woman was discriminated against by a man only to, in the next sentence, make a racist or homophobic comment. They verbalize organizational problems and then behave in ways they criticized.

How can these contradictions be explained? There is a lot written about the contradictory nature of consciousness especially for the oppressed, who live in a world dominated by others, a world whose prejudices contrast so drastically with their own experiences of humanity that their writings often describe the sensation of living live in more than one, or in-between worlds. Du Bois’ double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1994, 1903), Hill Collins’ outsider-within status (Hill Collins, 1991) and Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987a) all point to this reality.

\(^{29}\) Compañera can mean friend, colleague, or girlfriend/partner. I mostly use it in Spanish in the dissertation to talk about women are organizational or work colleagues but who are also friends, as the word conveys a certain warmth when used to talk about someone else.

\(^{30}\) Invented name
My understanding of consciousness’ contradictory nature comes from Gramsci’s discussion of the topic as explained by Circe Dawn Sturm. In her words this contradictory consciousness:

has a dual nature whose aspects are always in tension – one aspect being implicit, critical, and… possibly counterhegemonic ‘good sense,’ which arises from lived experiences and material conditions of oppression; the other being explicit, hegemonic ‘common sense,’ which is uncritically absorbed and arises from ideological domination by a more powerful class (Sturm, 2002, p. 20).

This explains how the information from the two (or more) worlds in which oppressed people live influences their consciousnesses. I observed that contradictory ideas, beliefs and practices coming from conflicting knowledge sources (hegemonic, experiential, resistant, agential) are processed, accepted and rejected in a multiplicity of ways by diverse people living in different communities and contexts. Chela Sandoval’s idea of differential consciousness as a consciousness that allows mobility between and among oppositional ideologies articulates well the agential nature of this mobility and seeming contradiction (Sandoval, 1991).

It is perhaps for these reasons that Paulo Freire argues that:

As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors (Freire, 1970, p. 42).

**What Is Consciousness Anyway?**

*The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads (Anzaldúa, 1987b, p. 109).*
Defining consciousness

In Spanish, consciousness translates as both “consciencia” and “conciencia.” The online Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary (2013) defines consciencia as (1) conciencia, (2) “the immediate knowing that a subject has of herself, her actions and reflections; (3) the capacity of humans to see and recognize themselves and to judge this vision and recognition” (Real Academia Española, 2013b). These definitions correspond to the reflexive awareness I include as part of self-aware consciousness, as does the definition of conciencia as “(3) reflexive knowing of things; mental activity that only the subject herself can access.” Related to the idea of consciousness’ relationship to subjective identity (who one understand oneself to be) and also part of self-aware consciousness is the idea that there is something essential about each individual that makes us who we are: “(1) the property of the human spirit to recognize itself in its essential attributes and in all the modifications that it experiences” (Real Academia Española, 2013a).31

31 The last definition of consciencia has more to do with the conscience: (2) inner knowing of good and bad.
While consciousness is an important concept in many disciplines, it is the psychological understanding of the concept which seems to be most present in common sense understandings of the word, as psychological definitions are present in both English and Spanish language dictionaries. In psychology consciousness is awareness that one observes the “self and others and knowing the choices that are being made” (Woldt & Toman, 2005, p. 87-88). This coincides with the Real Academia’s (2013a) definition of conciencia as, “(5) psych: the mental act by which a subject perceives himself in the world,” while Merriam Webster (2013) includes, “(5) the upper level of mental life of which the person is aware as contrasted with unconscious processes.” These ideas rest on Freud’s notions of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, represented as an iceberg to illustrate how little we are reflectively aware of our motivations, behaviors, etc. The basic insight from psychology that has made itself into common sense thought about consciousness is that we have desires, needs, emotions, etc. that drive our behavior of which we are not fully conscious. This insight is included in how I understand self-aware consciousness.

The idea of “awareness” is central to English-language definitions of consciousness. The first (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2013) definition has three parts:

a) “the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself,
b) the state or fact of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact
   c) awareness; especially: concern for some social or political cause”
This definition includes consciousness of things “external” to us, particularly political and social causes (parts b and c), which I have categorized as part of critical political consciousness, and of things “internal” or “within us” (part a) which I include as part of self-aware consciousness. I think it interesting that no Spanish-language dictionary includes the political aspect of consciousness, as conscientizando (consciousness-raising) is an important part of Latin American history. The other definitions are “(2) the state of being characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, and thought: mind, (3) the totality of conscious states of an individual, (4) the normal state of conscious life <regained consciousness>” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2013). These definitions refer to the other aspect of consciousness in common parlance, that of physiological consciousness or “the state of being aware of sensations, reacting to them, and experiencing thoughts and emotions, while the unconscious brain does not exhibit these features” (Unconscious. 2006). I do not consider this understanding of consciousness in my work.

Anthropologist and neurotheologian Michael Winkelman (2010) explores the Indo-European roots of the word and writes that, “These meanings of consciousness are based upon the Latin root *conscius*, which means ‘knowing something with others.’” He reflects that consciousness as “critical awareness of one’s own identity and situation… has its basis in the relationship between individual and community” (p. 125). He emphasizes, along with the dictionary definitions, “awareness” as an important aspect of consciousness, and adds the insight that neither identity nor consciousness develops in a vacuum; but rather are relational and respond to the environment (Winkelman, 2010, p. 126).
According to indigenous linguist Carmen Chuquin, the closest translation of consciousness in (highland) Kichwa is shunku kuyuy. Shunku literally means “heart” and kuyuy means “to move.” Dr. Chuquin explains that shunku kuyuy means

To be conscious of oneself and especially of one’s surroundings including the family, with the children, and the society in general. [It means] to give rights to others, to let other people give their opinions. It also means to share and collaborate in life with people and animals. Maybe we have lost this consciousness because of the European’s presence. When my great-grandparents went to look for more land for their future children, since they were leaders and bosses, they obtained a lot of land. These lands were shared with the future people who came to a new place. Today in this era they would never give free property to people who don’t possess anything. This is to have consciousness of yourself for the same act that hits you in the heart. “Shunku kuyuyta” charishpa shina rurashka nin.” If their consiousnesses were seared “Shunku chakishka” “Mana pinkakkuna kashpaka,” they never would have done this (Chuquin, 2013).

Contained in the words is an understanding that consciousness is not just individual, nor is it group consciousness as understood in the West. Rather consciousness is something that takes into account the natural world, future generations, and people without material possessions, demonstrating the very different relationship between people and the world as understood in the Otavalo Kichwa cosmovision.

In sum, basic definitions of consciousness can be placed in one of four groups. First is the understanding of consciousness as awake-ness, or aliveness – the opposite of being unconscious as in sleeping, in a coma, etc. Second, it is seen as the tip of Freud’s famous iceberg as the conscious, as opposed to the unconscious or preconscious, part of our psyche or self. Third, it is understood as awareness of things “internal” (to know and see oneself, including one’s identity, psyche, body, mind, soul, etc.) and “external” to us (other people, events, objects, states, facts, social or political causes), where aware means “having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary,
Fourth, consciousness is understood as either formed in a group of people or as part of a community of living beings including people, animals, land, past and future generations. The last three definitions will in some way be incorporated into my analysis.

**Group Consciousness, Formed in Communities of Practice**

It is important to emphasize that awareness of ourselves and the world is never formed in isolation, but always in relationship to others. In other words, consciousness is not created individually but in communal spaces, specifically in communities of practice, understood as any group which requires learning certain skills in order to attain membership. In Chapter Five I specifically look at how one’s community teaches one the practice of girlness in how one moves the body, washes dishes, talks, etc., and how that community is closely linked to the community of practice of womanness. I also examine how, through their practices as part of a group, communities of feminist and activist women influence one another’s behaviors. Together, women learn and invent how they will organize their group, behave during protest marches, lobby, analyze and respond to the sexist behavior of male colleagues. I look at this co-learning and how, together, these women acquire (or hamper acquiring) critical political and self-aware consciousness. The success of the consciousness-raising groups made famous by feminist organizations in the 1970s was based on the collective analysis of prejudice, discrimination and sexism, which allowed women to see that they were not crazy or “the only ones,” but rather that their experiences resulted from structural inequalities (S. K. Sowards & Renegar, 2004; Warren, 1976).

The social science literature discusses “group consciousness” or “collective consciousness” as a particular awareness by a group of people with similar public identities formed in
collective spaces. Patricia Hill Collins gives an example of how black feminist consciousness is formed in community. “Individual African-American women have long displayed varying types of consciousness regarding our shared angle of vision. By aggregating and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, a collective, focused group consciousness becomes possible” (Hill Collins, 1991, p.26). In other words, women together can form an “equal and common conception of the world” (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971, p. 349). They engage in “a collective, interactive approach to recognizing, labeling, coming to understand, acting upon” (Ollman, n.d., p. 5) situations that affect the whole group, especially situations of oppression based on their common public identity. Part of the answer to the question, how is group consciousness formed? involves verbalizing often unarticulated individual consciousnesses, allowing for a common reinterpretation based on many people’s embodied experiences, an interpretation which often challenges the hegemonic interpretation of the world by validating the lived experiences and perspectives of non-power-holding groups (p. 26).

**Shared angles of vision: How privilege limits and oppression enables seeing**

The creation of group consciousness often relies on a shared angle of vision by members of the group. Shared public identities mean that people have similar social positions and thus similar spaces from which to observe and experience structural forces (influencing political consciousness) and similar experiences of oppression or privilege to interpret and internalize (which are observed with self-aware consciousness). The characteristics of the angle of vision depend greatly on whether the shared identity is one which occupies an oppressed or privileged position in the society. The feminist idea of standpoint epistemology not only articulates the importance of one’s social position based on public
identities in determining one’s perspective, but also values the angle of vision held by people with oppressed public identities over other perspectives.

This is because, as Mohanty (2003, p.232) puts it:

Beginning from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women, I am able to access and make the workings of power visible – to read up the ladder of privilege. It is more necessary to look upward – colonized peoples must know themselves and the colonizer. This particular marginalized location makes the politics of knowledge and the power investments that go along with it visible so that we can then engage in work to transform the use and abuse of power.

The idea that people with less power have a better perspective for analyzing social structures and violence in a particular society has been written about convincingly by many scholars (see also Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, W.E.B. Du Bois).

The opposite is also argued. As Harding explains:

In societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what the persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them (Harding, 1993, p. 54).

This idea is complimented by theories of epistemological ignorance, which argue that people with privileged identities maintain a certain level of ignorance because their privilege isolates them from the realities of people with less privileged identities, who are often the majority of the population. Mills (quoted in Frye, 2007) writes about this ignorance as a racial contract to which all whites are beneficiaries and some are signatories whereby they have “an agreement to misrepresent the world.” Whites must learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority… Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to
understand the world they themselves have made. Part of what it means to be constructed as “white”… is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities (Frye, 2007, p. 2, emphasis in original).

Group consciousness and shared public identities

One risk of basing the creation of group consciousness solely on a shared angle of vision founded on common public identities is the desire to homogenize experience and talk about things such as “women’s oppression” or “class oppression.” Sometimes this has been done in a cognizant manner, a tactic of strategic essentialism, but most of the time it happens because group leaders presume to know the needs and realities of all people who share some aspect of their public identity.

This happens despite the fact that “groups in a genuinely heterogeneous society have complex, nonfragmented persons as members; that is, they are heterogeneous themselves” (Lugones, 2003, p. 141). Lugones contrasts the idea of fragmented persons as those who are divisible into separable parts “taken for wholes” (p. 127) with the idea of multiplicity which she also talks about as mestizaje (I do not define mestizaje as she does in this paper). This multiplicity “defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure…multiple states and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts… [It] is unclassifiable, unmanageable” (p. 123). The idea that individuals have multiple parts which cannot be cleanly divided (fractured) makes a similar argument to intersectionality theory. Both explain why a campesina indigenous woman can participate in “women’s,” “indigenous” and “campesina” organizations and feel that her reality is not taken into consideration in any of them.

Members of Afro-Ecuadorian women’s organizations have felt excluded from discourses about “women” by members of women’s organizations in Ecuador. Members of the Casa Feminist in Quito felt their experiences and needs were ignored by their male compañeros
in the leftist organizations of which they formed part. These situations were not only painful for the women who described them, but led to a distancing between them and the organizations which ignored their realities, weakening those groups them in numbers and relevancy. It is simultaneously true that group consciousness is formed in organizational communities of practice, and that every person has a distinct embodied intersectional identity which makes her reality different from everyone else’s.

**Situated learning, situated knowledge, situated ignorance, situated consciousness**

There are several theories which are relevant to this reality and its repercussions for learning, knowledge, ignorance and consciousness. Situated learning theory, which I explain in detail below, argues that learning cannot be divorced from the person doing the learning, nor from her context (Lave, 1991; Webster, 2013). It is an interesting parallel to the feminist idea of *situated knowledges*, which emerged as a critique of both the idea of “objective” knowledge and relativism in the sciences as well as the uncritical privileging of the “vision of the less powerful” (p. 584) in standpoint theories. Haraway argues that all of these knowledges should be deconstructed and critically analyzed, and that what are most important for knowledge production are situated knowledges conscious of the particular social location from which they emerged. She says,

> We seek…the knowledges… ruled by partial sight and limited voice… for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

It is important to imagine knowledges that are created by a “split and contradictory self” (p. 586), a self which has an incongruent consciousness and which is part of its context and its communities. As discussed above, ignorance is also learned based on one’s community. In
spaces of knowledge production, epistemic ignorance is that which is incapable of recognizing other “epistemes grounded on different conceptions of the world and ways of knowing” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 60). The consequences of this ignorance for knowledge production are serious. For example, Kuokkanen argues that because of this ignorance in the academy “indigenous people ‘cannot speak’; that is, when they speak from the framework of their own epistemic conventions, they are not heard or understood by the academy” (p. 60).

If knowledge and ignorance are situated, it seems obvious that consciousness is too. This idea sheds some light on the difficulties of learning an empathetic intersectional kind of consciousness, especially for people with more power in a society. As “people who are oppressed usually know it” (Hill Collins, 1991, p. 10), those lower on the “ladder of privilege” don’t have the epistemological ignorance of those from the dominant classes. It is much easier for privileged people to accept the hegemonic ideas which maintain unequal social structures as they don’t feel the negative effects of stereotypes and discrimination and are often socially isolated from the “others” who do.

If where consciousness is situated is based in large part on one’s intersectional embodied identity, the question arises: is consciousness is only available to those with the identity category in question. Can only women have feminist consciousness? Many women I know make this argument. Marxists have argued that the bourgeois, because of their experience resulting from their class position, can never have a real (class) consciousness (Lukács, georg (1885-1971). 2010). In the literature on feminist or class consciousness, belonging to the group is often assumed. In other spaces the relationship between identity and identity-
based consciousness is debated and there is disagreement over who can claim what kind of consciousness.

I look to Patricia Hill Collins’ work to resolve this debate in the context of my dissertation. She emphasizes the importance of personal experience to developing critical thought and consciousness while making it clear that those without a particular public identity can also be conscious of its ramifications. While more women than men are feminists because women have more experience with “the negative consequences of gender oppression” (p. 27), personal experience of oppression alone does not create consciousness (Hill Collins, 1991, p. 24-25). So while consciousness is not completely dependent on experience – being a black woman does not automatically mean you will have black feminist consciousness – that type of consciousness cannot be generated without black women.

Another kind of knowledge: Sumak kawsay wisdom

I am using the term “sumak kawsay wisdom” to describe a certain type of knowledge, important for resistance and social struggle, which I have observed in many people with whom I have collaborated while conducting research for this dissertation. It is perhaps easier for people with oppressed identities to access, but it is available to the privileged as well. I define it as knowledge that all living beings should live in balanced harmony, that we all have equal worth and that every being should be treated with dignity and respect. It is an embodied knowledge that emerges from our holistic self in connection with the community of living beings, the Pacha Mama (discussed below). To explain, I must first explain the meaning of sumak kawsay, a Kichwa term denoting a good life in harmony with the earth and between living beings.
As the meaning is grounded in a different cosmovision, or paradigm, I quote at length from Magdalena Fueres, an indigenous leader from Cotacachi, as I think her complete explanation is important for grasping the depth of the term.

Sometimes people think that sumak kawsay means something superficial – like having cars, money, and that’s all. But for us sumak kawsay is life itself – a life of harmony, peace, it encompasses many things... Sumak kawsay describes an ideal life, and the phrase sumak kawsay is used in many settings – when there’s a marriage, it is said, “sumak kawsay mutakcha rinkisi” – “that you live well…” If we eat healthy food, it is to attain a sumak kawsay. We say how beautiful, how lovely, how pretty – sumak – sumak warmi, what a beautiful woman, what a beautiful harvest, what beautiful animals, what beautiful land. This word, this language, has always been in our lives.

Sumak kawsay includes being well physically, not sick; having education, specifically a moral education. These days formal education often teaches us how to be capitalists, it is not an education that encourages solidarity, to help one another so that we are all well. This should be part of education as well. Sumak kawsay is about changing our mentalities, to think in terms of solidarity, to live in harmony with other people, to help out, to nurture; to not only think about how I can accumulate more money for myself. In economic matters, sumak kawsay doesn’t mean to have extra, it means to have enough and to share what we have so no one is lacking. Being spiritually, mentally, emotionally well is also part of sumak kawsay… Sumak kawsay for me means to be well oneself, to be able to eat, to be with your family and not have problems with them, to get along well with your neighbors, your community, to be in solidarity with one another, to take care of our Mother Nature and your relationship with her, to respect one another – including to respect elders, children. Sumak kawsay is all these aspects of life put together.

In agreement with Magdalena, Enrique Cachinguango, yachak (shaman) and anthropologist from Otavalo writes that sumak kawsay is “the life paradigm of the original Andean pueblos” and that it includes the divine, ancestral, natural and human beings (L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2010a, p. 65). As such, Luis Maldonado Ruiz writes that based on the Kichwa meanings of the words, “literally Sumak Kawsay would be life in plentitude, full/complete life, beautiful existence” (Maldonado Ruiz, 2010, p. 83), and that it will only be possible to construct when countries have “profoundly decolonized” their social, economic, political, and religious realms.
With that understanding in mind, I will use the term “sumak kawsay wisdom” to describe this knowledge that leads both oppressed and privileged people to think and act in ways which demand dignity for all living beings and foment solidarity, often in opposition to the dominant messages that surround them. Closing their ears to oppressive messages they open their eyes to look inward and there see what is for many of them a truth: the interconnectedness of and the dignity of Life.

Concientizando people with different public identities

One thing the discussion about identity and knowledge makes clear is that different methods must be used to concientizar those with “oppressed” public identities versus those with privileged identities who wish to be in solidarity with them. This is because building consciousness-knowledge from lived experience is different than cultivating it in someone lacking that experience, and epistemological ignorance must specifically be addressed.

Organizations must be creative in their efforts to concientizar where people’s intersectional embodied identity includes both oppressed and privileged public identities (for example an indigenous man, a lesbian white-mestiza woman, an urban middle class Afro-Ecuadorian woman, or a trans mestizo man, etc.) as they will likely have internalized contradictory messages and behavioral patterns.

In the following chart I attempt to summarize some of the tendencies in learning for people with oppressed versus privileged public identity characteristics.

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<th>Privileged public identity characteristics</th>
<th>Oppressed public identity characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Common sense</td>
<td>1. Epistemic ignorance</td>
<td>1. Better perspective (standpoint epistemology)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Learned privilege</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Community of practice of</td>
<td>2. Learned oppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good sense (important components for critical consciousness, and solidarity)</td>
<td>privilege</td>
<td>Community of practice of oppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Awareness of their own tendency to have the common sense factors listed above</td>
<td>1. Awareness of hegemony’s way of structuring society</td>
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<td>2. Agency</td>
<td>2. Agency</td>
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<td>3. Resistance (reject privilege)</td>
<td>3. Resistance (demand dignity, justice, rights, equality)</td>
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<td>4. Sumak kawsay wisdom</td>
<td>4. Sumak kawsay wisdom</td>
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People tend to learn and appropriate oppression related to public identity characteristics as part of communities of practice composed of people with similar public identities. How oppression is learned and resisted thus often depends on how it is seen within that group. It is also learned in relationship to the community of practice of privilege. Fanon gives a graphic example, “It has been said that the Negro is the link between monkey and man – meaning, of course, white man” (Fanon, 1967). In these societies, communities of “black men” [sic] appropriating oppression would teach new members of the group, typically children, that they are inferior to “white men.”

It is easy for dominant groups to diffuse hegemonic messages such as these as they control “the ideological apparatuses of society,” making it difficult for oppressed groups to express their own “a self-defined standpoint” (Hill Collins, 1991). Counterbalancing learning these messages are the forces of agency and sumak kawsay wisdom, both of which lead “the oppressed” to resist the unfair circumstances which frame their lives and demand equal, fair, dignified treatment.

Those who appropriate privilege learn behaviors of the dominant, and are socialized to be ignorant of the world’s realities. Sumak kawsay wisdom in people with privileged
identities offers the knowledge that they, and people “like them” are not better or more deserving than anyone else. This knowledge contributes to resistance for social change and encourages agency to reject social privilege and its advantages, and demand equality and dignity for all living beings. Because of the important differences in the dynamics between these two (overlapping) identity groups, we must think about the learning and unlearning of privileged and oppressed identities and about consciousness-raising differently depending on the intersectional embodied identity of the person or group in question.

Critical Political Consciousness

Just as individual and group consciousnesses are inextricably intertwined, so are “critical political” and “self-aware” consciousnesses. I discuss them separately in order to better illuminate certain aspects of each, and to show how certain academic disciplines and organizations emphasize one to the detriment of the other. My definition of critical political consciousness, which captures how “consciousness” is generally understood in activist organizations, feminist and social movement literature, emerged based on a literature review combined with my observations. As explained above, my working definition of critical political consciousness has three parts:

- Awareness of hegemonic social structures and their role in constructing inequality, inequity, injustice, exploitation, etc. and their relationship to public identities.
- Awareness of the intersectional nature of structural forces.
- Belief that the inequality caused by structural factors should be replaced by equality and justice, living beings should co-exist in balance and be treated with dignity and respect.

In the last part of the definition sumak kawsay wisdom appears, suggesting that for critical political consciousness to be present the individual must be able to access that knowledge which resides within her/himself.
Consciousness in the social science literature

What I am calling critical political consciousness is the aspect of consciousness focused on almost exclusively in the social science literature, which I review in this section. In Latin America, la concientización\(^{32}\) has been a central activity for social organizations, movements and their members for many years. It has been part of leftist, Marxist, and other struggles in the region, part of the methodology of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire’s adult education, of Comunidades Cristianos de Base – CCB (Christian Base Communities) and other processes linked to liberation theology in the Catholic church, of Investigación Acción Participación – IAP, Participatory Action Research (PAR),\(^{33}\) of women’s, worker’s, student, and campesino\(^{34}\) movements, to name a few of the spaces where it has been central to the methodology of social lucha\(^{35}\) and organizing by people working for positive social change and justice. Consciousness-raising groups were well-recognized as central to feminist and women’s organizations and organizing processes around the world, including in Latin America, where la concientización is still an important part of women’s organizations’ activities. The relationship between consciousness-raising and activism is close because of the understanding, by both organizations and academics, that some sort of critical or resistant consciousness is a necessary precursor to collective action (McAdam, 1999, for example).

\(^{32}\) The act of creating consciousness, roughly translates as consciousness-raising.
\(^{33}\) I include IAP in both languages, because the two currents in Latin America versus the United States is radically different, I wouldn’t necessarily consider it the same thing.
\(^{34}\) Campesino means rural person or small farmer. It has a certain (often politicized) meaning in Latin America which doesn’t translate well to English.
\(^{35}\) Luchar is another word which does not translate well into English – it is a verb which means to fight or to struggle, and it is used often in a social context to mean working for, struggling for, fighting for social change or justice. La lucha is the noun, and it means “the struggle” or “the fight.” The term “la lucha” is often used to refer to whatever social struggle in which a certain person is engaged.
A close review of how consciousness is written about in the social movement and social science literature reveals that most of it focuses on consciousness’ capacity to generate resistance to inequality, injustice, and oppression. It is perhaps best understood in contrast with its opposite: the lack of critical consciousness that accompanies unquestioning compliance with an oppressed or dominant social position. Agger offers a summary of this consciousness and the forces which shape it in his description of critical social theory:

CST argues that structures of domination are reproduced through people’s false consciousness, promoted by ideology (Marx), reification (Georg Lukas), hegemony (Antonio Gramsci), one-dimensional thinking (Marcuse), and the metaphysic of presence (Derrida)... CST pierces this false consciousness by insisting on the power of agency, both personal and collective, to transform society (Agger, 1998, p. 4-5).

Here he emphasizes the two forces that I hold in tension in my work: the social forces that create and reproduce oppressive relationships, and human agency or personal power as a transformative force for social change.

The idea behind consciousness-raising and concientizando in social movements is to teach people to see these oppressive social forces (however named), made invisible by their constant normalized presence and motivate them to organize to change the system. As Freire writes, “the radical requirement – both for the man who discovers himself to be an oppressor and for the oppressed – that the concrete situation which begets oppression must be transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Different authors have emphasized different aspects of consciousness and have offered different insights about how this process works. Here I review some of the important contributions to the social science and social movement literature about different types of consciousness which contribute to resistance that have informed my definition of critical political consciousness.
Important conceptualizations of consciousness which focus on generating resistance are:

*political consciousness* which Antonio Gramsci defined as “consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force” (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971, p. 333); *critical consciousness*, defined by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as the ability to interact with the world critically, to see the context of one’s life, realize it is constructed and that one is a Subject capable of making decisions and rejecting others’ prescriptions (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1974); *insurgent consciousness* written about by social movement theorist Doug McAdam as “cognitive liberation” obtained when one no longer sees “the system” as legitimate, sheds fatalism to demands rights, and believes that it is possible to change one’s reality (McAdam, 1999).

Also from the social movement literature comes the idea of *oppositional consciousness* defined specifically as “identifying with members of a subordinate group, identifying injustices done to that group, opposing those injustices, and seeing the group has having a shared interest in ending or diminishing those injustices” (Mansbridge & Morris, 2001, p. 4-5). *Stratum consciousness* is another “consciousness” identified by Gurin et. al., as “a sense that one's fate is linked to that of other members of a stratum group (e.g., women, older adults, African Americans), discontent with the power and influence of the group, a belief that power differentials are a result of structural rather than individual factors, and a collective orientation toward redressing these inequities” (Duncan, 1999, p. 615).

Central to Marxist theory is *class consciousness*. Marx talked about how workers are made into a “class in itself” because capitalism divides people into different classes which then have commonalities based on their position in the social hierarchy. He alludes to the fact that when the working class is aware of their subjugation and is ready to organize to fight against it (once they have class consciousness), do they become a “class for itself” ready to
defend class interests (García Cosco; Marx, 1847). The idea behind this shift could perhaps be applied to any of the consciousnesses written about in terms of identities: we are placed in categories based on our public identities and then treated a certain way based on them. When we learn to see this and judge it as unacceptable, then we can resist.

*Gender consciousness* can be understood as how one understands gender in society (Gurin and Townsend in (Baird, 2001, p. 43) or how one thinks about the world “in terms of gender” (Heung Wan, 1998). *Feminist consciousness* is defined along the following lines in the literature: as “gender identification...with women” (Duncan, 1999, p. 615), as “awareness of women as victims of social oppression in the patriarchal world order” (Das Dasgupta, 1996, p. 178), or thinking that “all struggles for equality must be connected to a broader, strategic struggle for women's rights” (Pessar, 2001).

Das Dasgupta adds that feminist consciousness also includes the “complexities of race, class, sexuality, and culture into this awareness” (p. 178), which I agree is fundamental not just for feminist, but for any sort of critical consciousness. For this reason I included intersectionality in my definition of critical political consciousness. *Mestiza consciousness* was conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldúa as the consciousness that results from being from and in various cultures and none at the same time (Anzaldúa, 1987a), and *black feminist consciousness* has been discussed by Patricia Hill Collins as awareness of the particular conditions of being a black woman, a consciousness developed from black women’s standpoint in the world (1991). These are just some of the many kinds of critical consciousnesses that can emerge from shared experiences of oppression based on public

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36 I will not use the term mestiza consciousness in this dissertation as mestiza has an entirely different meaning in Ecuador.
identities about the hegemonic social structures and relations of power that structure and shape society.

*How does it work to conscientizar?*

The question of how critical consciousness is created, or raised, has also been subject of much study; it is an important question as it promises to explain how people can be motivated to actively work to change the hierarchical and unjust aspects of the world in which we live. While Marxist discussions are limited by their exclusive focus on class, the relationship drawn between consciousness and experience is important. Karl Marx wrote that human consciousness, conceptions and ideas are interwoven with man’s [sic] material “activity,… intercourse” (Marx, 1846, 1978) (Marx 1978: 154), and “existence” (Marx & Engels, 1848, 1978, p. 489), proposing that consciousness springs exclusively from material experience. In the (1948) Manifesto of the Communist Party he argues that as material conditions change, consciousness does too (Marx & Engels, 1848, 1978, p. 489). He classifies “politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics” as types of “mental production,” or ideologies, which have “corresponding forms of consciousness” (Marx, 1846, 1978, p. 154), and argues that neither ideology nor consciousness is independent from material conditions. In fact, he writes, “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx, 1846, 1978, p. 155). He reasoned that because of the horrible conditions capitalism created for workers, (1) class consciousness was inevitable, and from it (2) class revolution would follow.

Later generations of Marxists, rethinking these ideas in light of the fact that the “inevitable” class revolution did not occur, returned to the idea of consciousness as a possible
Antonio Gramsci recognized that experience was not enough to create class consciousness, and emphasized the role of history and context as shaping individuals’ thoughts, identities, self-perceptions and levels of social engagement, many times in ways that inhibit collective action. He proposed that processes of self-transformation and the creation of (critical) consciousness are necessary to bring about lasting social change (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971; Rupert, 2009). He emphasized the importance of critically and consciously choosing one's conception of the world and therefore one's activity. He writes, “The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is... as a product of the historical process to date” (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971, p. 324), arguing that in order to be critical we must first be conscious of how the external world and its history has shaped our thinking.

Consciousness-raising as a technique was not invented by, but made popular by the women’s movement in the 1970s in the United States, where it was “a rhetorical strategy…cultivated to enable women to share personal experiences of gender discrimination in conversations and meetings” (S. K. Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p.535). It was based on personal testimonies shared in small groups of women. The idea was that these women could related to one another, “generalize” their experiences, learn to see that “their individual experiences were not isolated events and to eliminate self-blame” (p. 535-536). Recognizing personal oppression was at the heart of the practice (S. K. Sowards & Renegar, 2004), which was recognized as transformative for participants.

It is important to note that consciousness-raising does not always raise consciousness. Some people’s consciousness doesn’t seem to change no matter how many workshops they attend or books they read. Others actions contradict the consciousness they appear to have
when they talk; still others appear be born with critical consciousness in contradiction to all
they are taught. In this dissertation I examine what experiences both in and outside of
organizations people report as transformative and attempt to discern what actually “works.”

Self-Aware Consciousness and “The Personal is Political”

An important feminist insight, “the personal is political,” “lo personal es politico” calls
attention to how what happens in our personal lives is political, how all of our behaviors
including and especially those that happen in spaces typically conceptualized as “personal,”
such as the home, family, kitchen, bed, have important political ramifications. But what
about how the political – the structures that shape our world – affect our emotions, our
mental frameworks, our spiritual beliefs and connections? For example, feelings of
inadequacy or superiority about oneself are emotions typical for people who have
appropriated oppression or domination (Pheterson, 1986).

Because I want to center the emotional, corporeal, spiritual as well as the mental aspects of
the self and look at how the political is also personal, I have emphasized these aspects of
human experience in my definition of self-aware consciousness, which draws on
psychological understandings of the word examined above, and a holistic understanding of
the self, discussed below. My definition has four parts:

1. Reflexive awareness of one’s intersectional public and subjective identities.
2. Awareness of the relationship between lived experiences and the reactions of the
   emotional, mental, corporeal and spiritual parts of the self to them.
3. Awareness of the relationship between the individual, communal and the Pacha
   Mama.
4. Knowledge that one is an actor and that one’s own thoughts, actions and feelings
   influence and shape one’s life and the world.

In this dissertation I look at this self-aware consciousness as an aspect of consciousness
touched upon but not often prioritized by women’s organizations which tend to focus on
concientizando for political consciousness. While political consciousness looks outward, focusing on the self’s relationship to the world and the power structures which organize it, self-aware consciousness is a layered knowing turned inward, a focus on how the context in which we live and our experiences have influenced our internal lives and perceptions. These two aspects of consciousness are intertwined in two obvious ways.

First, understanding hegemonic and hierarchical power structures which order society typically emerges from an analysis of one’s own experience of how those structures have affected the self. Second, this type of in-depth analysis reveals that the self has in fact felt repercussions emanating from these social structures on mental, emotional, spiritual and physical levels. The individual, her community, and their relationship to the Pacha Mama have been impacted. In a way, self-aware consciousness allows for critical political consciousness to be embodied – to be felt and lived in the body, and critical political consciousness allows people to understand how what they might have interpreted as individual issues are actually communal problems issuing from structural forces. I separate these two “types” of consciousness in order to analyze the different ways they are learned and their repercussions on individuals and organizations but will attempt to point out their interconnectedness in subsequent chapters.

One aspect of my definition of critical self-aware consciousness is awareness of how one’s experiences have impacted different parts of the self, which implies being cognizant of the relationship between self, experience, identities, and the world. Because this aspect of consciousness emerged for me in the data-analysis phase and was not anything I had in mind before beginning my research, I did not include interview questions directed at it, and so have less information about it. The same is true for sumak kawsay wisdom, which is
connected to self-aware consciousness. People who have both often have a certain
familiarity with themselves and the ability to observe rather than identifying completely
with thoughts, emotions, or reactions and are often more able to suspend judgment of self
and others. This creates space for compassion and empathy, which I regard as self-aware
building blocks of solidarity.

In sum, the personal is political and the political is personal. What we know is determined
by where we stand and what we learn based on where we are situated. Consciousness itself
is both situated and contradictory, learned and relearned in the tension between individual
agency, social structure and organizational teaching. Certain situations must be more or
less useful for conscientizando people with different social positions and for creating
relationships of solidarity.

Solidarity

As mentioned above, one of my goals in this dissertation is to think through the relationship
between consciousness and solidarity, and how relationships of solidarity can be created. I
focus on this for two reasons. First, I think that relationships of solidarity can strengthen
social organizations and collaborative action, forming relationships that are most likely to
avoid reproducing patriarchal hierarchical patterns between people with common goals.
Second, if organizations are seen as and understand themselves as communities of practice,
they will understand their agential power to teach empathy and solidarity and make it part
of organizational culture. No matter how apparently homogenous the public identities of
organizations’ members are, people are different, and so for everyone to feel heard and
included, all organizational members must learn to listen and to respect their differences
and diversity. This is even more true for collaborative relationships between organizations and women with very different intersectional embodied identities. Solidarity provides a model for this practice.

I take my understanding of solidarity from Chandra Mohanty, who writes:

I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7).

The emphasis on constructing relationships on common interests and conscious decisions by different communities to work and fight together is important. It makes less important the idea of the “sameness” of oppression, and the problematic tendency to homogenize experience. It is an empowering definition because the decision to act is based on agential choices and subjective identities rather than on externally assigned public identities. This is in line with the idea of communities of practice as spaces of decision and action which create themselves and teach practices to the people who join them.

I also draw on the pragmatic definition of solidarity given by Freire:

The oppressor is [in] solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice…when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis (Freire, 1970).

As Freire points out, people with privileged public identities, particularly those who have appropriated privilege and are epistemologically ignorant, have work to do in order to be able to be in “true solidarity” with people with oppressed public identities. He argues that
they must be led and taught by those with oppressed identities, much as Hill Collins suggests that black feminist consciousness comes from black women. If relationships of solidarity of the kind described by Mohanty are to be created, it seems that women must develop self-aware consciousness in conjunction with critical political consciousness. Why? Critical political consciousness allows one to see how hegemonic social structures shape the world, public identities, and their intersectional nature. It includes a belief in equality, justice and balance. It does not necessarily, however, recognize the negative impact of the violence endured by individuals, their communities, the earth, or the repercussions on the self of that violence. It does not necessarily relate to all four parts of the self or recognize the relationship between the individual, the communal and the Pacha Mama (Mother Nature/Universe). In addition to the obvious deterioration of people’s quality of life, negative experiences can provoke self-defense mechanisms that impede listening, sharing, loving and accepting oneself and others. Given this, I argue that awareness of this aspect of the self and belief that one is an agent in one’s own life are essential for solidarity as well as for individual and organizational wellbeing.

*Empathy, solidarity, and the golden rule*

I understand empathy as an important component of solidarity especially for people who have appropriated privilege and who are epistemologically ignorant, although it is also important if people with oppressed identities want to have patience with the often bumbling unlearning of privilege of their counterparts. While the term has been criticized as “perpetuating the status quo and/or colonising the experience of the marginalised” (Gray, 2011, p. 208), I attempt to revert to its meaning that links it to solidarity, using it as does Brenda Gray in her (2011) article on empathy’s role constructing feminist solidarities. Like
her, I attempt to “recuperate empathy’s more progressive, ethical and transformative moments” (p. 207) and look at how it can facilitate solidarities constructed through processes which incorporate ethics, politics and emotion. I use it to mean entering into the “act of love” Freire writes about, in contrast to acting in pious, sentimental, pitying, sympathetic ways with their patriarchal undertone of superiority.

These ideas about critical self-aware consciousness, solidarity and empathy are related to the teachings of the major spiritual traditions in the world, all of which have some version of the golden rule to love others as we love ourselves (Dossey, 2007). Because solidarity is an important tool for working for justice in the world, these concepts and their combined effect are important for my work. As I mentioned in my discussion of trauma, I am curious if organizational attention to healing and critical self-aware consciousness would have a positive impact on individual and collective processes of critical consciousness creation and members’ wellbeing.

The Subject of Consciousness

The self and self-awareness: What are they?

How the self is conceptualized is socially constructed, influenced both by the culture and historical moment when it is imagined (Dunning, 2007). Keeping in mind the constructed

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37 In an article on the effects of compassion on healing, MD Larry Dossey explains that some version of the golden rule is present in all major spiritual traditions, revealing the centrality of compassion for religion and spirituality. His explanation of the origins of this emphasis on compassion is interesting: “Most of these traditions came into being… during the so-called Axial Age, about 900 to 200 BCE… a period of history [when] people worked as hard to find a cure for the spiritual ills of humanity as we to find a cure for cancer… [and when] religion was… about behaving in a way that changed you. What the Axial sages put forward was that compassion was the key” (Dossey, 2007). Things such as compassion and the mind-body connection are finally being taken seriously in Western societies, as Western medicine has found “proof” of what many have long known – that what happens in our bodies affects our minds and psyches and vice versa, and the energy that we direct at ourselves and at other people has real effects on their health and well-being (Dossey, 2007; Halifax, 2011; Horrigan, 2007).
nature of the self, in this section I present some of the ways it is understood in Ecuador and explain the model I will use, which understands it as having physical, psychological, mental and spiritual aspects. While I separate them to better analyze them, I understand these “parts” of the self as indivisible, and this individual self as always existing in relation to and being part of its community and context.

The self is constructed in the Western world today as explained by Dunning:

In psychology, the notion of the self refers to a person’s experience as a single, unitary, autonomous being that is separate from others, experienced with continuity through time and place. The experience of the self includes consciousness of one’s physicality as well as one’s inner character and emotional life (Dunning, 2007, p. 785).

Dunning describes an individual self with physical and emotional aspects. This differs from descriptions given by people from other parts of the world, especially in more communal cultures, where the self is described in terms of one’s place in the world and interdependence with other people and living beings (Dunning, 2007). If we think of Ecuador’s culture as comprised of a multiplicity of cultural practices and beliefs from Western, indigenous and African cultures, we can understand how Ecuadorians’ conceptions of the self will depend on their community and its culture within the nation-state of Ecuador. Because of the large presence of multiple cultures, even in normative mestizo culture, both individualistic and communal understandings of the self are present to varying degrees.

*Consciousness and the body*

“The body” is the terrain where we live our lives; it is from this space that we experience, feel, think, know. It is our context: I live this life, in this place, in this time, in this body.
Our identities are stamped on and in our bodies; growth moves through our bodies, changing them on many levels over time. When we interact with others we do so with our bodies. We are our bodies. Consciousness is embodied, it has no choice.

Said in another way, “Our capacities for language and consciousness are contained within, are part of, and are limited by our bodies” (Shilling, 1993, 2003, p. 8). This is because “bodies cannot be divorced from their lived experiences” (Mascia-lees, 2011, p. 2), experiences which are gendered and racialized (Alcoff, 2006, p. 103). A body cannot be divorced from the self, nor from the individual’s interpretations of experiences and relationships with others. Everything that happens to a person happens to that person in their body and it is recognized that “the senses, emotions, and affect” are central to our physical self (Mascia-lees, 2011, p. 2). Embodiment theory itself can be understood as “a methodological standpoint in which bodily experience is understood to be the existential ground of culture and self, and therefore a valuable starting point for their analysis” (Csordas, 1994, p. 269). Anyone who looks critically at relations of power and identities cannot help but see the body at the center of the debate (Alcoff, 2006; Fanon, 1967; M. Foucault, 1977; M. Foucault, 1988, 1978; Nelson, 1999; Stoler, 1995).

**Psychological borders and consciousness**

Lived and embodied experiences are also impossible to divorce from how they are interpreted and the psychological ramifications of these understandings. Psychological life is not clear cut. As Jackie Orr describes it, it is more of a borderland, a ‘between-space’ where the question and human confusions of what is ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are repetitiously experienced, and consciously and unconsciously lived. Indeed, the space of psychology is the very site where everyday sensations of what’s ‘inside’ and what’s ‘outside,’ what’s ‘them’ and what’s ‘us’… are culturally
(re)produced or resisted; it is an intensely border-conscious space (Orr, 2004, p. 456).

In this part of the self, a place where the boundaries are so porous, we can imagine that “consciousness is like an ever-moving stream that cannot be divided into elements without losing its meaning” (Hergenhahn, 2009, p. 482); it inhabits all parts of our selves.

*Holistic models of the self*

One model of the self which brings these component parts together comes from initiatic therapy, a type of humanistic psychology which has an important following in Ecuador, and in which I’m currently being trained. Below is a diagram representing how people and their component “parts” are conceptualized: as body, psyche, soul, and sacred core, which the mind organizes, and the self transverses and integrates. The self, represented as a small circle, can expand or shrink to encompass one or various parts of the self, depicting that individuals can identify with only some or all aspects of our selves. Consciousness is implicated in this movement, in the expansion or contraction of the self (Surkow, 2013).

From this perspective, “man [sic] needs to make a quantitative leap to consciousness. This work consists in connecting his daily life with his sacred and absolute center” (Schiller de Kohn, 2006, p. 66). I like this model because it incorporates the aspects of the life and self considered relevant to many people, including the corporeal, psychological / emotional, and spiritual. Since I did not encounter this model or the vision offered by the Kichwa Otavalo cosmovision until the data analysis phase of my research, they were not incorporated into my research design. Where possible, I try to analyze my data taking into consideration the different parts of the self highlighted by these models.

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38 Initiatic therapy incorporates elements from “Jungian Depth Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology, Gestalt Therapy, Christian Mysticism, Zen-Buddhism, meditation and bodywork” (Elbrecht).
Enrique Cachinguando, an indigenous anthropologist from the Kichwa Pueblo Otavalo has helped me understanding the indigenous cosmovision in the region of Ecuador where I have lived and worked. I first encountered the idea that both people (“runa” in Kichwa) and the universe, or nature (“pacha” means both) are comprised of “four bodies” at a workshop I attended where Cachiguango was talking about leadership; he said that in the traditional Andean indigenous vision of things, in order to be a leader, your four bodies must be healthy and in balance. He drew this image on the whiteboard, and gave examples of how the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental bodies are healthy:
There are obvious commonalities between these two models. What are understood as the sacred core and the soul in initiatic therapy correspond to the spiritual body as depicted here, and the other three bodies map obviously to the other three bodies. Cachiguango writes that these four bodies must be healthy and in balance for overall human health and for sumak kawsay. A second aspect of his explanation of the self in the Andean Kichwa cosmovision is one that looks outward. He describes runa as part of the human family, which has to be in harmony with the other three families: the nature family, the ancestral family and the divine family that together comprise the Pacha Mama, Mother Nature or Mother Universe (L. E. K. Cachiguango et al.; L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2010b; L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2011).\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{39} This is what anthropologists term a kin-ordered cosmovision (Burdick, 2013).
While analyzing the human family’s relationship to the other families is not a significant part of this dissertation, I wanted to include in my conception of the self the idea that individuals form part of a collective identity as part of the human family that is part of the Pacha Mama. In my definition of self-aware consciousness I include consciousness that individuals are part of communities, and that both the individual and her community are part of the Pacha Mama and therefore always in relationship to the other living beings that are also part of the Pacha Mama. How I understand the “self” in this dissertation comes from all the theories reviewed here. It includes this communal aspect as well as the mental, emotional, corporeal and spiritual “parts” of the individual.

I also want to note that when I refer to the indigenous, Andean, Kichwa cosmovision in this dissertation, I am making reference to my understanding of the paradigms of the Kichwa indigenous pueblos from the northern Sierra region of Ecuador, specifically from the Pueblo Kutacachi and Pueblo Otavalo. While there is a great deal of similarity between many of their beliefs and other indigenous groups in the Andean region, and even in other
parts of the world, I will limit my discussion to what I have learned from the communities where I have spent extended time and with whom I have a close relationship.

**Identity**

Feminist theorists Linda Alcoff and Paula Moya, while emphasizing that they are inseparable, both delineate two aspects of identity. The “who I am” part Alcoff (2006) calls *lived subjectivity* and Moya (2006) *subjective identity*; it corresponds with how identity is defined by psychologists as “a person’s essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual” (Identity. 2009; R. Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). The facet of identity that comes from how others see me, often based on my “social category” (black, indigenous, white, woman, man, etc.), is denominated *public identity* by Alcoff and *ascriptive identity* by Moya (Alcoff, 2006; Moya, 2006). Each aspect of identity obviously influences the other – how I see myself influences how I represent myself to others. How others perceive and treat me shapes how I understand myself, and influences identity itself as “a constantly changing relational multiplicity” (Brah, 2001). There is an intuitively-felt difference between these two aspects of identity, especially when there is a discrepancy between how someone sees herself and how others see her (Alcoff, 2006, p. 92-93). In this dissertation I will use the terms public identity and subjective identity.

40 Brubaker and Cooper, in an interesting (2000) article detailing the confusion generated by the multiplicity of meanings of the term “identity” suggest using the term “self-understanding” to mean “situated subjectivity” or “one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 17). They suggest “external identification” to denominate how others identify us particularly based on categories such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and “self-identification” to mean how we identify ourselves based on these characteristics, proposing a third category at the nexus of the two proposed by Alcoff and Moya. While I think their argument is valid and interesting, for my analysis the two terms “public identity” and “subjective identity” are appropriate.
Reflexive awareness of both aspects of identity is part of my definition of critical self-aware consciousness. By reflexive awareness I mean cognizance of intersectional public identities, how those influence social hierarchies and their impact on different aspects of the self and community. An important difference between subjective and public identities has to do with their different sources and examining this difference can offer clues as to how to resist injustice associated with them. While subjective identity can be more easily shaped by one’s own decisions and practices, public identity is generated outside of ourselves and communicated to us by others. Children remind us of this fact; no one was born thinking of him or herself in terms of these categories. As we will see in Chapter Five, consciousness is very present in this energetic nexus where identity is claimed, defined, redefined and contested.

Critical political consciousness, on the other hand, requires awareness of how hegemonic social structures produce and reproduce inequality and injustice through assigning different values and meanings to public identities. The importance of “seeing” how different public identities are valued and devalued and the social realities this creates is explained in my review of the social science literature on consciousness and consciousness-raising/concientizando above. We see the link between critical political consciousness and identity in organizations’ efforts to change perceptions of the public identities of oppressed groups. Public identities when have been historically and socially devalued are often reclaimed, reframed: “Black is beautiful,” “Amo mi parte indio,” “I am woman hear me roar,” and “gay pride” all come to mind. Clothes, hairstyles, food, and other things which have been

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41 “I love my Indian part.” This was a message sprayed in graffiti around Quito during the height of the indigenous movement in Ecuador, which many mestizas mentioned in my interviews with them as a message that resonated deeply with them, they felt proud of their indigenous heritage and wanted to reconnect and reclaim it.
denigrated by mainstream society are also reclaimed and become symbols of a new consciousness and positive public identity: “Indian food” is reframed as “Ecuadorian” and “nutritious” and produced for important events, dreadlocks and Afro hairstyles are worn with pride and defiance, women shed heels and bras, those from the GLBTIQ community publically express affection. In these examples people draw on their personal power to challenge hegemonic powers and through this change, or try to change, how their public identities are socially perceived.

Identity, intersectionality and positionality

Feminists, with the theoretical tool of intersectionality, have added an important dimension to discussions of consciousness and identity by illuminating that to understand someone’s reality we must take into account how their various identities – particularly public identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) intersect. They argue that it is only by viewing these identities together that we can understand social location and thus how others treat them (Crenshaw, 1991; C. Moraga & Castillo, 1988). Being a lesbian indigenous woman is different than being an indigenous woman, a white lesbian, an indigenous man, or an indigenous gay man, etc. Any discussion of the body, identity, experience, or consciousness must take into account the wisdom encapsulated in this concept: the sum is greater than the parts. It is impossible to fracture a human being into her woman part, her indigenous part, her lesbian part, and her middle class part. How others see us and how we experience the world are shaped by the intersection of our public identities, as well as our subjective identity and our consciousnesses.

Another important concept related to intersectional identity is positionality, defined as “social situatedness… in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of social
difference… with respect to” others (Nagar & Geiger, 2007). Positionality is where we stand in a social hierarchy in relationship to others, taking into account the intersectional identities of the people in question. Intersectionality and positionality are important concepts for thinking about consciousness as a tool for la lucha, for social change, because developing one type of critical political consciousness does not necessarily lead to developing other types, or to being consciousness of intersectionality and what it implies. This was notably pointed out in the United States by women of color feminists in the 1970s in response to white women’s feminism (The Combahee River Collective, 1983), and countless times since then. Unawareness of intersectionality can lead to the emergence of oppressive or hegemonic versions of what are supposed to be liberatory movements (C. T. Mohanty, 1988; Sandoval, 1991). Because of the importance of these two concepts, I include intersectional awareness as part of my definition of critical political consciousness and talk about intersectional embodied identities throughout my dissertation.

*Consciousness, experience and identity*

If we are to look at people in a holistic way as indivisible beings (rather than as a mind plus a body etc.), it makes sense that both types of consciousness I am describing come in important measure from embodied experiences in the world. As discussed above, experience is significantly influenced by identities and their embodied meanings. The relationship between the body, identity and embodied experiences is frequently at the center of discussions about consciousness. Our material experiences in the world influence our consciousness, which along with other factors, shapes our experience of and our actions in the world.
Obviously consciousness is not the only factor which influences behavior but the idea that consciousness changes behavior is why people interested in social change pay attention to consciousness: it is understood that people must first be aware of the injustice of the world and want it to be different, and that this “internal” awareness and desire for change will motivate them to organize and as a group work for such change. There has been evidence over the years that this indeed is the case (Freire, 1970; Warren, 1976).

Learning

Theories about learning are ultimately theories about “internal” change. They are capable of examining how people acquire certain ways of understanding the world, and how transformations happen over time. Because of this, I have framed this dissertation in terms of learning. I examine how the women with whom I have collaborated have over the course of their lives learned: identities, hegemonic norms, alternative visions, self-aware and political consciousness. By focusing on how these are learned, I avoid the fatalistic idea that all hegemonic norms and identities are simply uncritically appropriated, emphasizing instead their constructed nature and thus the capacity for change. This approach also allows me to break down into micro pieces how both normative and critical thoughts, beliefs, etc. are acquired in the hope that this information will be instructive to Ecuadorian women’s organizations’ efforts to concientizar.

Learning is understood very generally as “the process of acquiring knowledge” (Learning. 2009). Situated theories of learning, a branch of sociocultural education theory, emphasize that learning cannot be divorced from the context in which it takes place, thus claiming “that learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity in,
with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (Lave, 1991, p.65, emphasis in original). Examples are given of market vendors who do complicated mathematics calculations with accuracy at work but score low on comparable problems given on a classroom exam. In this theoretical model learning is understood as “moving from legitimate peripheral participation to increasingly central participation within a community of practice” (Webster, 2013), and mental processes and human action are understood as coming from human agency mediated by technical and language-based tools/signs (Wertsch, 1991, p. 28).

In the context of my dissertation I look first at public identity communities: how does one learn to be an indigenous woman, a mestiza or an Afro-Ecuadorian woman from a particular class? I also focus on organizations as communities of practice, looking at how the women I have worked with learn to be activists and feminists. I examine how certain beliefs about identities are unlearned and new ideas learned, and finally I try to answer the question of how critical political consciousness and self-aware consciousness are learned by women involved in women’s organizations in Ecuador.

Sociocultural theory identifies several processes which enable looking at the micro-workings of learning:

1. Becoming part of a community of practice
2. Coding and learning to see
3. Appropriating language and technical tools

In addition to these three I have added two other aspects which I consider essential to understanding how people learn and relearn:

4. Openness to learning and listening
5. Learning as a whole self experience
I will explain all five points briefly in this section and they will be further discussed in subsequent chapters.

1. **Becoming part of a community of practice**

The basic idea is that learning happens as individuals participate in the cultural and social activities of the group of which they are learning to be part. Mimicking is often important in the early stages of learning and gaining expertise, as is direct instruction and feedback from more expert others (Webster, 2013), two small examples that reveal the importance of the community to teach an individual how to be part of itself. For example, learning to be part of the community of girls (learning the practice of girlness) involves learning when to employ which ways of dressing, moving one’s body, speaking and being silent. Girls learn what they are supposed to wear, say, do and be as girls by imitating, and by being instructed and disciplined by those already fully part of the community of girls and the community of practice of women.

Becoming part of a community involves learning skills as well as behaviors that enable full participation in the community’s activities, adopting norms, values, and a perspective on the world similar to other group members (Paechter, 2006, p. 14). While communities’ practices are constantly shifting, changing and being renegotiated, it is the common practices which hold them together (Paechter, 2003, p. 71). Sociocultural theorists emphasize the interconnectedness of becoming part of a community and identification with that community, emphasizing that as skills are learned, people begin to identify as part of the group. As I learn to identify certain behaviors as “sexist,” and others as “gender violence,” as I learn to chant in marches for women’s rights, “El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!” – “The people united will never be defeated!” – and “Sacan sus rosarios, de
nuestros ovarios” – “Get your rosaries out of our ovaries!” in unison with the women in my organization, I feel part of that community and I may begin to call myself a feminist.

2. Learning to see: Sociocultural and social movement theory

“Learning to see” is an important aspect of becoming part of a community of practice. This type of seeing is called “professional vision” by anthropologist Chares Goodwin who defines it as “socially organized ways of seeing and understanding events that are answerable to the distinctive interests of a particular social group” (Goodwin, 1994, p. 606). To exemplify how seeing meaningful events is not obvious, but instead “a socially situated activity accomplished through the deployment of a range of historically constituted discursive practices” (p.606) he examines how archeology students and lawyers in the Rodney King trial used certain practices to “create the objects of knowledge” that are specific to their community of practice. Goodwin identifies three practices which enable learning to see like members of a particular community: coding, or assigning meaning to observed phenomena; highlighting, or marking certain of these phenomena as especially salient, and producing material representations of them (p. 606). I focus especially on coding in my work as I discuss how codes attach certain meanings and values to particular things, events, or behaviors. In feminist communities of practice, for example, women are expected to be able to code for sexist and patriarchal behaviors in the men and institutions around them. Many learn to re-code where they live as “private space” and compare it to “public space,” and learn to see the different gender dynamics in those spaces.

The idea of “learning to see” from the field of education is paralleled by writings on “framing” in social movement literature, where the community of practice is the social organization. Social movement literature on framing focuses on “movement actors… as
signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). Social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow writes that those who study collective action talk about “cognitive frames, ideological packages, and cultural discourses to describe the shared meanings that inspire people to collective action” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 21). Cognitive frames and ideological packages correspond to coding as they are ways of seeing and assigning value to something, while cultural discourses refer to the language learned to talk about what has been coded. Tarrow’s shared meanings are the result of actors learning new ways of seeing and the norms and values of the activist community of practice as they move from peripheral to full members of the community, identifying more and more as activists. Further, he says, “the coordination of collective action depends on the trust and cooperation that are generated among participants by shared understandings and identities… on the collective action frames that justify, dignify, and animate collective action” (p.21, emphasis in original). While I will focus more on how shared meanings are learned and how this learning is part of shifting consciousness, Tarrow’s observation that shared identities, understandings and frames (ways of seeing) generate trust necessary for collective action is important.

We learn to see from the perspective of where we stand: the world looks different from the vantage point of different intersecting public identity communities. When we enter social organizations and movements, we often relearn what was taught about our identities, and we learn new ways of seeing as we become part of the community of practice of that organization or social movement. Organizational leaders and “movement actors” attempt, as part of the goals of their organizations, to teach or conscientizar others to “see” through a
certain frame and to learn a certain language about the issue(s) around which they organize. While the greatest focus is on their own members, there is an effort to educate society at large and shift its perceptions of social issues.

3. Appropriating language and technical tools

One of the major insights of sociocultural theory is that “higher mental functioning and human action in general are mediated by tools (or ‘technical tools’) and signs (or ‘psychological tools’)” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 28). This implies that in order to understand people’s behavior one must understand how tools are learned and used by agents. Language is an important tool, and every community of practice is understood as having its own specialized language that must be learned. Aside from language there are the practical skills that are required by each community. As part of the community of girls, for example, children and adolescent girls are usually expected to learn cooking and cleaning skills, both practical tools that give them full membership in a community of people expected to grow into women who will marry men and have children for whom they will cook and clean. In activist communities of practice, the skills of critical thinking and analysis are important.

It is argued that tools are learned through the process of appropriation which involves first mastering and then owning those tools as your own. Expertise is acquired through participation in processes which take place on three levels. “Cultural participation” happens on the “social, cultural and institutional” level, “guided participation” on the interpersonal plane, and “participatory appropriation” on the personal level. This last process is that through which the new participant takes on the group’s identity as her own (Tappan, 2006, p. 2125-2126).
4. Openness to learning and listening

Based on my observations of the emotional/spiritual component necessary for learning and relearning, I add “openness to learning and listening” to the categories identified by sociocultural theory. People who are closed to a certain idea or teaching are much less likely to learn it. This manifests in different ways. Girls who are not open to being “buenas mujercitas”\footnote{A common expression in Ecuador. It literally means “good little women.”} are less likely to obey what their families and cultures teach them about girlness, and to dress and act how they want. Women who think that racism has been eliminated are much less likely to be able to see racism and therefore less likely to change their racist attitudes and behaviors. While it seems like it would be harder for privileged people to see what is wrong with the system that serves them, oppressed peoples have also shown themselves to be resistant to learning new consciousnesses.

One micro-action and skill which has transformative potential has shown itself to be listening (Meadows, 2007). People who are able to really listen to others suffering under oppressive conditions often report transformations, however small, in their perceptions of the world, justice, and their beliefs about people with certain public identities. Listening to oneself is action that emerged as important from my research. The ability to make contact with, or listen to one’s own sumak kawsay wisdom is important for many people’s transformations as they realize they already know that people have equal worth, should live lives free of violence and be treated with dignity and respect, and that as human beings we must live in harmony with and respect the earth.
5. Learning as involving the whole self

The question of how people learn is very important to my work because it has to do with the question of how consciousness happens. It is a question whose answers have important implications for how organizations carry out their consciousness-raising and other educational activities. I understand learning and consciousness-creation as whole-body experiences. Sociocultural theory claims that learning is contextual, situated, mediated, and that it involves the whole person, not just their abstract thoughts. The idea that the “whole” person learns is part of many educational philosophies, perhaps most notably Waldorf and Montessori. “Educational activities within Waldorf settings are presented with the intention of meeting the holistic needs of each child: physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual… knowing involves the whole body” (Nordlund, 2013, p.14). The implications are that educators of all types (including consciousness-raisers) need to imagine how to conscientizar holistic beings, teaching in ways that reach different “parts” of the self in the educational setting.

The indigenous Andean cosmovision adds to this understanding of learning. It conceptualizes knowledge as having two parts: yachana which is feminine knowing, or intuition; and yuyana, conceptualized as masculine knowing, or reason. Cachinguango explains that yachana was traditionally more relied upon in the indigenous culture and that the Western and colonial ways of thinking imposed on indigenous cultures were more yuyana. He argues that both are necessary for achieving yachana or “deep wisdom” (L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2011, p. 9-15).43

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43 Western knowledges have recently come to similar conclusions. Beginning in the 1970s natural scientists began writing about how different sides of the brain have different functions. The right hemisphere, which
These five aspects of learning: (1) Becoming part of a community of practice, (2) Coding and learning to see, (3) Appropriating language and technical tools, (4) Openness to learning and listening, and (5) Learning as a whole self experience will be applied to activist women’s experiences in chapters four through seven to examine how they have learned and relearned identities, critical political and self-aware consciousness.

controls the left half of the body is responsible for emotional and visual information, and the left side (right side of the body) for “language, sequential thinking, and general logic.” It is acknowledged that “consciousness and purposeful behavior was due to the integrated function of both the left and right brain” (Left brain/right brain. 2007).
Learning to Appropriate Oppression, Privilege and Liberation

Internalized oppression and internalized domination

Social theory has been insightful in revealing how the inequalities and social hierarchies in the world are not just imposed by society’s powerful, but that the behaviors needed to sustain this order are built into and taught to individuals by institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons and the family. People internalize these behaviors, disciplining themselves to conform and therefore reproduce existing power structures (see Foucault). These behaviors are often social and cultural, embedded and created by language and the body, and manifest themselves in our tastes and preferences for things (see Bourdeau). In this system, some people must learn the role of the dominant while others learn the role of the oppressed.

The concepts of internalized oppression and domination are important to discussions of consciousness as they address how people learn and internalize normative messages given by hegemonic structural forces. If consciousnesses were solid and whole, internalized oppression and domination would represent what needs to be uprooted in a person in order to replace them with critical consciousness. Because of the contradictory nature of consciousness, however, they almost always cohabit the self alongside tools of critical consciousness: agency, resistance, and sumak kawsay knowledge. Sociocultural theory offers an instructive perspective on internalized oppression and domination, renaming and reconceptualizing them as tools appropriated by learners in society. I outline this analysis here as it is fundamental for my analysis.
Internalized oppression is an interdisciplinary idea. It was developed in the works of Frantz Fanon (psychiatrist from Martinique), Paolo Freire (Brazilian educator) and Memmi (Jewish writer from Tunisia) (Tappan, 2006, p. 2118). It has been defined as “the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society… likely to consist of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive” (Pheterson, 1986, p. 148). Internalized domination “is likely to consist of feelings of superiority, normalcy, and self-righteousness, together with guilt, fear, projection, denial of reality, and alienation from one's body and from nature… One's own humanity is thus internally restricted and one's qualities of empathy, trust, love, and openness to others and to life-enhancing work become rigid and repressed” (Pheterson, 1986, p. 148).

Tappan argues that these concepts have only addressed the internal aspect of oppression and domination and excluded structural and political factors. This limited view makes it seem as though these are psychological characteristics impossible to change. He suggests rethinking these concepts as appropriated oppression, which “results from the mastery and ownership of cultural tools that transmit oppressive ideologies, messages, and scripts” (p. 2127) and appropriated domination/privilege, which “results from the mastery and ownership of cultural tools that transmit dominating/privileging ideologies, messages, and scripts” (p. 2127). These “cultural tools” – languages, ways of interpreting behavior, etc. are mastered through learning which takes place on the sociocultural, interpersonal and personal planes through cultural participation, guided participation and participatory appropriation (defined above). The advantage of thinking of oppression and domination as
appropriated is that it becomes easier to look at the micro-workings of how they are learned or resisted, and thus intervene in those processes.

The contradictory nature of these seemingly oppositional concepts is shown in the example of mestizo/a identity. As mestizaje supposes a mixture of racial/ethnic background, people can at once suffer discrimination for having darker skin like oppressed groups at the same time their mestiza public identity puts them in the position of the dominant ethnic group. They seem to appropriate tools of both oppression and domination. This is complicated further in contexts such as Cotacachi, where some indigenous people have gained political and financial power over the past twenty years, giving certain families and individuals more power in those terms than many mestizos and mestizas. In Chapter Seven I observe how the mestizas who don’t like their “indigenous side,” having appropriated oppression, have also appropriated domination.

**Appropriating liberation**

By extension, we can also look at how liberation is appropriated, which Tappan (2006) suggests is connected to the fomentation of critical consciousness. He says that oppression “can be changed through the same process that gives rise to mediated action in the first place” (p. 2134) and prescribes the following process for doing so:

Freire (1970) and others (see Roberts, 1983, p. 25) suggested… [as] necessary for attaining freedom/ liberation: (1) unveiling the world of oppression; (2) expelling the myths and images created and promulgated by the old order, and rejecting the oppressive images of one’s own culture (i.e., rejecting oppressive cultural tools and resources, voices, and ideologies); and (3) replacing old myths and images with new images, stories, and ideologies that are more liberating (i.e., appropriating liberating cultural tools and resources, voices, and ideologies) (Tappan, 2006, p. 2134).
These themes will reappear in subsequent chapters as I examine how consciousness is taught, learned and relearned.

**Agency and resistance**

Along with the concept of appropriated liberation, the ideas of agency and resistance are important for understanding how people and collectives defy what hegemonic forces teach. Foucault theorizes “where there is power there is resistance” (M. Foucault, 1988, 1978), and Seymour defines resistance as “intentional, and hence conscious, acts of defiance or opposition by a subordinate individual or group of individuals against a superior individual or set of individuals… [i]n a context of differential power relationships” (Seymour, 2006). Agency is defined as “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (Charrad, 2010, p. 518 citing Mahmood), or as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112).

As theoretical concepts, agency and resistance are important counterbalances to hegemonic forces. They remind us that people are not just pawns to be manipulated by larger structural and institutional forces, but that they also always have some level of personal power and choice. It is important to focus on those moments in social interactions where *choice* is possible because they reveal openings or opportunities for change. Agency and resistance both describe these dynamics, as do the concepts of appropriated oppression, privilege and liberation, which emphasize the learned (and therefore changeable) nature of social relations.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at how self-knowledge, political knowledge and consciousness are theorized and understood in academic and non-academic spaces, emphasizing the constructed, collective, situated, and contradictory nature of consciousness and of learning. I developed definitions of self-aware and critical political consciousness, the central terms of analysis in this dissertation, based on a review of common sense and academic literature on consciousness combined with knowledge gleaned from my own research, explaining how they are interconnected. The assumptions undergirding my understanding of consciousness emphasize its contradictory nature based on the presence of hegemony and agency in shaping people and the relationship between the individual and communities of practice. I have discussed how epistemological ignorance, appropriated privilege and oppression emerge from the varying ways in which people are socialized based on their intersectional embodied identities. I have also emphasized the importance of empathy and solidarity.

I presented two models of the subject of consciousness, defined public versus subjective identities, and emphasized that while society assigns us certain aspects of identity, we also have a choice in defining who we are. I defined intersectionality, agency and resistance, all important ideas for my work. Throughout the dissertation I will try to evaluate how social dynamics impact different parts of the self, which I understand as having intellectual, emotional, corporeal and spiritual components. I have presented several theoretical tools for examining how different consciousnesses are learned and relearned, tools that I will use to examine learning identity and consciousness in the subsequent chapters. I also offered some preliminary ideas for thinking about the importance of listening, empathy and
consciousness for building relationships of solidarity. These theoretical understandings will run through the following chapters.
Photo 3: Chuchuka - corn, a sacred grain, is hung from the rafters to dry in Cotacachi. It can then be consumed throughout the year.
**viaje andino**

desde las islas galápagos
te mando un beso

soplo

y se va

rozando el agua como los pajaritos
   buscando desayuno
siguiendo el corriente azul, profundo
del mar
volando en las espaldas de las olas
   hasta llegar a
arena
   suave, quemando, sede en fuego
   color de ascuas

se tira en la boca del volcán, antiguo, ardiente
sigue el río, la energía
de
platos tectónicos
   movimientos prehistóricos, eternos,
cambiando siempre el mundo
   sigue, sigue
   platos viento
cambia y constancia simultánea

llega a los andes
   con sus antiguos ritmos

y se va

enroscándose la caña del choclo
   con la rama del frejol

subiendo
   al ritmo de la siku, del tambor

subiendo
   los taitas

vistiéndose en blancura de nevada
   en verde del mundo abajo,
   falda amplia brotando,
   viviente.

el beso
se va
   con el soplo
para que cuando te llegue
    cuando acaricia tus labios
como brisa sobre mar

el beso
    sabe del viaje

de sal
    de dulce
    de baile
    de vuelo

de vida.
Chapter Three: My Body, My Voice: Speaking, Silence, and Solidarity Conducting Activist Feminist Research in the Andes

Introduction

In this chapter I tell stories about the year I spent conducting my dissertation research on consciousness of members of the Ecuadorian women’s movement. I tell these stories in an attempt to join a conversation and share ideas about how people from one place who have chosen to work in solidarity with people in another place through academic/activist research might navigate some of the risks and tensions we encounter along the way. First I describe the research methods I used for my dissertation research and discuss what I understand activist feminist research to be. Then I write about three methodological points I found compelling while conducting my research. They are: (1) ethics and method, (2) whose knowledge counts, and (3) the politics of listening, silence and speaking.

Ethics, Method, and Community: Awareness of My Intersectional Embodied Identity

My first women’s studies class was Chandra Mohanty’s Postcolonial Feminisms, and it turned my world upside down. Not only did it teach me a new way of seeing, offering a powerful lens for analysis and a language to express things I’d wanted to say but didn’t know how, but it gave me the perspective that my work is part of a larger project. It introduced me to a community of scholars, activists and scholar-activists that I am becoming part of as a feminist and activist with a women-of-color feminist project. This community’s values, ethics and commitments resonate deeply with my own. Looking at the experience through this dissertation’s theoretical framework I see that my sumak kawsay wisdom synced with the codes and language in this particular transnational feminist
community of practice. Its tools have sharpened my analytical ability, reframing how I understand my own past and present experiences and the social dynamics I observe and seek to change. The women who comprise this community in the United States, some of whom I know in person, others through their writing, have become, alongside the Latin American activists I know, maestras, teachers, mentors, amigas, friends, offering their insight, commitment, encouragement, critique and friendship. I envision a tejido, bien largo\textsuperscript{44} with all the work already invested, which keeps growing as we weave it though our common work, \textit{la lucha}.\textsuperscript{45} I pull it around me as I weave my own threads, words, ideas; it warms and inspires me as I work, when I sit down to write, when I stand to speak, when I am still to listen.

The injustices in this world haunt, hurt, they inform my work. The knowledge that I’ve never been the target of racist or homophobic hatred heavy in the pit of my stomach listening to others’ experiences, the assumption of shared perspective when a stranger from my southern hometown makes a racist comment and looks at me smiling, the “they” other foreigners use when they talk to me about Ecuadorians, the seeing straight through stories of “not finishing school” to their structural foundations, the wise words of Gayatri Spivak whom I heard say to me through my postcolonial feminist book, “white girl stay home.” Clearly this is all experienced from a place of privilege, it has a different weight than the destructive messages sent daily to people of color around the world, but these and so many more moments of separation illustrate the painful schisms in the world and the birthplace of the risks and tensions inherent in my work.

\textsuperscript{44} Weaving, good and long
\textsuperscript{45} Lucha literally translates as “fight” or “struggle” but is commonly used in Ecuador to refer to the fight or struggle for social justice.
These risks are inherent in my lucha, because I want to use research, with its colonial and exploitative history, as a tool for social justice. This is especially challenging as I have the skin color, sexual orientation of The Oppressor, as I come from the Global North, the Empire, from privilege. I work in the Global South, with women of indigenous and African descent, from popular classes. I claim a woman of color feminist project as a white woman, a Latin American project as a North American. How dare I? But how dare I not? These are the problems I want to address and they are urgent. The history of how research and the academy grew up intertwined with the Western imperial and colonial project has been well-documented and thoughtfully discussed both inside and outside the academy.\(^{46}\)

A review of this literature is outside the scope of this chapter; but my knowledge of it and its terrible ramifications has made me suspicious of research itself, leading me to question its norms and procedures in thought and action, and it has heightened my awareness of the risks of someone from my social location wanting to do research in the Third World.\(^{47}\)

Before leaving for Ecuador, I gathered advice from the community of mujeres sabias. The discussions by US women of color feminists about how to collaborate across lines of difference, their accounts of experiences and subsequent analysis of life and structural inequality and their insight on research methodologies have been particularly important. From the collection of texts and conversations produced by US women of color feminists, listening became a common point of advice. Jacqui Alexander writes “To become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each other’s histories” (Alexander, 2002, p. 91). María Lugones writes, “We cannot talk to you in our language because you do not

\(^{46}\) For one excellent discussion of this, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies.

\(^{47}\) I use this term drawing on Chandra Mohanty’s definition of it in her 1991 book Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. She defines it as “Third world is defined through geographical location as well as particular sociohistorical conjunctures. It thus incorporates so-called minority peoples or people of color in the U.S.A..” (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991, p. 2).
The power of white Anglo women vis-á-vis Hispanics and Black women is in inverse proportion to their working knowledge of each other” (Jaggar, 1983, citing Lugones 1983). Alison Jaggar expands on this idea, talking about, talking to, white women. “Before they can contribute to collective dialogue, they need to ‘know the text,’ to have become familiar with an alternative way of viewing the world” (Jaggar, 1983, p. 386). She quotes Lugones again:

You need to learn to become unintrusive, unimportant, patient to the point of tears, while at the same time open to learning any possible lessons. You will have to come to terms with the sense of alienation, of not belonging, of having your world thoroughly disrupted, having it criticized and scrutinized from the point of view of those who have been harmed by it, having important concepts central to it dismissed, being viewed with mistrust (Lugones in Jaggar 386-387).

Gloria Anzaldúa gives another reason for collaborating across difference. “I think we need to allow whites to be our allies…we must share our history with them so…they will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead” (Anzaldua, 1987a, p. 107). She emphasizes the importance of women of color’s agency and leadership being manifest to white women, who often, she alludes to, approach common work with a patriarchal desire to “save” or “help” women of color.

The idea of following the lead of those outside your community in a research context appears in Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s wonderful book Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. She discusses “culturally sensitive approaches to research” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 176) or “culturally appropriate research” (p. 177) and offers several models by which non-indigenous researchers can conduct such research with indigenous peoples. In the journal that accompanied me to Ecuador are jotted Tuhiwai Smith’s (2005) review of Graham Smith’s research models (#1-4) plus #5 which she added.
She writes that these ways of doing research go beyond being only culturally sensitive to address issues that actually matter to Maori people. I think her ideas could be extended to other communities, and have tried to take her advice while in Ecuador. The models she offers are:

1. “the *tiaki* or mentoring model in which authoritative Maori people guide and sponsor the research” (p. 177).
2. “the *whangai* or adoption model… [in which] *whangai* researchers are incorporated into the daily life of Maori people, and sustain a life-long relationship which extends far beyond the realms of research” (p. 177).
3. the “power sharing model’ where researchers ‘seek the assistance of the community to meaningfully support the development of a research enterprise’” (p. 177).
4. “the ‘empowering outcomes model’, which address the sorts of questions Maori people want to know and which has beneficial outcomes” (p. 177).
5. the “‘bicultural’ or partnership research” model “involves both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers working on a research project and shaping that project together” (p. 178).

I have thought often of the “‘imagined community’ of Third World oppositional struggles” Chandra Mohanty writes about, which she envisions as “women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systematic” (C. Mohanty, 2003, p. 46-47). To her description of the political nature of these imagined communities she adds, “Clearly our relation to and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different, often conflictual, locations and histories” (C. Mohanty, 2003, p. 46). This vision of community is based on solidarity – it does not exclude anyone based on social location, but maintains an awareness of the ever-present structural forces, something I try to practice.

If changing/subverting the existing power structures is necessary for achieving social justice in the world, then these women’s words are crucial. If we are going to work together for social justice we must reveal and refuse to replicate existing forms of
domination and power relations, whether in activist circles, universities, or while conducting research. To do this, we must always be aware of our social location and its potential impacts, question research norms and procedures, and constantly examine the political and ethical implications of our choices.

**Critical Political Consciousness in Action: Activist Feminist Research**

This awareness and the questioning that accompanies it is part of conducting activist feminist research and a result of researchers’ critical political consciousness. Both feminist and activist/action research are based on an awareness of hegemonic social structures and their impact on academic research, accompanied by a commitment to challenge these structural factors and work for justice in the world. The different emphases of these two methodological families are interesting as examples of how general critical political consciousness and a critical feminist consciousness manifest in a concrete epistemological project. In this section I discuss the valuing “other” knowledges, the political commitments of researchers, and the methodological innovations that set apart activist and feminist research. Finally I will explain how my commitment to “activist feminist research” shaped my dissertation research in Ecuador.

In talking about “activist feminist research” I am bringing together literature on “feminist research” or “feminist methodologies;” the Anglophone family of methodologies including participatory action research (PAR), action research, activist research, community-based research and collaborative research; and a similar family situated in Latin America: investigación-acción participativa (IAP), metodologías comunitarias participativas, and
investigación militante. Literature on IAP, feminist and activist research agrees that there is not a single definition, method or technique that makes this research activist or feminist. Instead, it is set apart from traditional research by the epistemological and methodological assumptions and the political commitments of researchers. This is explained clearly in Sandra Harding’s (1987) piece “Is There a Feminist Method?” where she makes a distinction between methods, which she defines as “techniques for gathering evidence,” methodology, “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed,” and epistemology, or how knowledge itself is theorized. She argues that it is in the epistemological and methodological choices that “feminist” research is found (Harding, 1987, p. 2).

Epistemological decisions: Valuing Other knowledges and seeing power

The majority of literature on activist and feminist research frames it in relationship to Harding’s point about epistemology, as different than mainstream, especially positivist research and thought. Researchers reject that objective, neutral, “value-free” research exist and recognize that “the apparatus of knowledge production” (DeVault, 1999, p. 30) has been one of many structural forces which have colluded to oppress and colonize vulnerable groups (DeVault, 1999; Hale, 2006b; Speed, 2006), paying close attention to both ethics and power dynamics in research (Briscoe, Keller, McClain, Best, & Mazza, 2009; Castleden, Garvin, & First Nation, 2008; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Greenwood & Levin,

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48 I consider participatory action research (PAR) and investigación-acción participativa (IAP), which is its literal translation, distinct categories because of their very different histories and applications, although they emerged simultaneously in the 1970s and were inspired by some of the same scholarship, including Paulo Freire and Kurt Lewin (Castleden, Garvin, & First Nation, 2008; Fals Borda, 1999). IAP has a rich history in Latin America, where it has often been linked to socialist, Marxist and leftist movements and is often quite radical in its execution. What I have understood of this type of research United States is that it has typically been engaged in by academics bound by institutions such as universities and funding agencies which leave little room for radical action, although the projects are often innovative and do challenge traditional research paradigms.
In opposition to the structurally-influenced unequal power dynamics, activist and feminist researchers try to do two things.

First, they put “issues of agency, representation and power” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1667) at the core of their research critique and they attempt to challenge “hierarchical modes of creating and distributing knowledge” (S. J. Hesse Biber, Hesse Biber, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 3) in their institutions and in their relationships with “research participants.” Even just the acknowledgement of power differences between people involved in a research project makes activist, and I would add feminist, stand out from mainstream research (Stoecker, 2008, p. 51). Second, feminist and activist researchers attempt to value different kinds of knowledges and integrate them into how and what they research and write about.

Action/activist and feminist research is grounded on the assumption that valid knowledge comes from many different sources (Small & Uttal, 2005, p. 938) and that there are many ways of knowing (Fals Borda, 1999; Kovach, 2009; Lugones, 2008a; Lugones, 2011; Smith & Kauanui, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). It aims to “incorporate the great diversity of knowledge and experience of all society's members in the solution of collective problems,” attempting, through this, to “disrupt existing power relationships” (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 88). A wonderful example is given above with Tuhiwai Smith’s recommendations for how people who are not from a certain community can ethically do research in it.

Feminist research specifically points to experience, particularly that of individuals and groups not part of privileged communities, as a type of knowledge that has been dismissed and invisibilized by Western androcentric research paradigms. It seeks to center the
experiences of these peoples and groups (S. J. Hesse Biber et al., 2004). This is done by making visible and valuing the researcher’s own experiences, subjectivities and positionality (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Nagar & Geiger, 2007; Weiler, 1988) as well as the locations, perspectives, experiences, issues, concerns, everyday happenings, experiential knowledge and practices of women or others about whom the research is conducted (DeVault, 1999; S. J. Hesse Biber et al., 2004; Weiler, 1988).

If we zoom out to look at research itself as one method of knowledge-creation, we are reminded that it is situated in the historical moment and context in which it is being conducted. Just as knowledge, learning and consciousness (Chapter Two) are all situated, so is the research produced about them and the researcher who produces it (Field, 2008, p. 41-42). Part of the context which frames this research is the hierarchical social structure in which we all live, which makes it often difficult to escape from power-laden relationships, no matter how great the intent. For this reason I write that researchers “try,” “attempt” and “aim” to be aware of and to shift power relations. Their efforts are met with varying amounts of success; the literature is full of personal reflections on successes, failures, conflict and power-struggles as researchers’ critical (good sense) and noncritical (common sense) consciousnesses coexist. Consciousness is contradictory, and it creates contradictory behavior.

While these authors talk specifically about “women’s experience,” I expand the definition to include “members of communities who are not part of privileged or dominant groups” in order to include people with the incredible diversity of identities who are discriminated against by the patriarchal capitalist hegemonic norm, which includes people who are not middle-upper class white male, “first world,” heterosexual, etc. While it is obviously very important to center women’s issues, I think that feminist theory requires that we expand definitions to be more inclusive of the other people who also suffer from patriarchy and sexism.
Political commitments and their influence on the goals of feminist and activist research

Complimenting the epistemological position that recognizes that the devaluing, destroying, excluding and invisibilizing certain knowledges is part of the hegemonic system’s bid to maintain power is another aspect of political critical consciousness: a commitment to social change by activist and feminist researchers. Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian sociologist and probably the most well-known practitioner of IAP in Latin America writes that “the main criteria of research should be obtaining knowledge useful to supporting just causes” (Fals Borda, 1999). This commitment to change is constantly verbalized in literature on these types of research.

Weiler writes that since they have understood that there is no value-free research, feminist researchers are free to express their commitment to do research “of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women,” ultimately hoping to change society through changing women’s situation (Weiler, 1988, p. 59) and, I would add, the situation of other oppressed peoples. Some examples of how this change is imagined include: “changing theory or bringing new topics into the discipline… consciousness raising or decolonization (for the researcher, the reader, or participants in the research)… producing data that will stimulate or support political action or policy decisions” with a focus on gender dynamics and women (DeVault, 1999, p. 31), and empowering women and oppressed groups (S. J. Hesse Biber et al., 2004). One specific theoretical goal which may also serve to raise consciousness is to make visible the concrete effects of structural oppression (Weiler, 1988, p. 59).

The goals of activist research frequently named in the literature include having a positive impact through the research project, its results, or both on the community, neighborhood,
community organization, public policy or social problems, while also creating knowledge. Some of the most frequently stated goals are creating social change (Briscoe et al., 2009; Field, 2008; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Hale, 2006a; McIntyre, 2008; Nyden, 1997; Riger, 1999; Speed, 2006; Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue, 2003), empowering people (Campbell, Copeland, & Tate, 1998; Field, 2008; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Mosher, 2009; Small & Uttal, 2005; Strand et al., 2003), influencing policy makers (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Strand et al., 2003; C. C. Wang, 1999; C. C. Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001), and creating better research, which is defined as more relevant, useful, reliable, valid, accurate, and more complete because of its incorporation of multiple perspectives (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), among other descriptions. It has also been suggested that a more complete and applicable type of knowledge can be gained by combining academic and popular thought (Fals Borda, 1999).

DeVault summarizes much of this when she writes that feminist methodology must “have an open and ‘provisional’ character… [I]t is…a ‘strikingly cumulative’ discourse, held together by core commitments to addressing particular problems” in social research and “a common history of learning through activism” (DeVault, 1999, p. 32). This description’s emphasis on the open, cumulative nature of this research, researchers’ political commitments and the relationship between activism and knowledge also coincide with some of the elements necessary for building relationships based on solidarity. It seems clear, then, that solidarity is a helpful goal not just for activists who do not engage in research, but also for activist researchers as it gives concrete ideas on how to direct our thoughts and actions as we try to make our contradictory consciousnesses more critical.
Looking for Other ways to research: successes and failures

Literature on activist, IAP, PAR and feminist research understands (1) researchers’ consciousness and (2) research techniques as two important places for responding to critical critiques of traditional research. “We argue that the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualized and conducted” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1667, emphasis mine). I understand these attitudes as stemming from epistemologies which value different types of knowing (hopefully with intersectional awareness) and political commitments to work for social change, both of which are typically related to understanding hegemonic structures (i.e. critical political consciousness). This critical consciousness leads feminist and activist researchers to be open to other ways of thinking, and creative in how they do research as they seek to accomplish both of these goals.

Fals Borda describes his community’s thinking about how not to reproduce subject-object relationships between “researchers” and “the researched” led them to the desire

   to see both as “feeling-thinkers,”50 whose diverse points of view about common life should be considered together. To resolve this tension we adopted… “symmetric reciprocity,” which includes mutual respect and appreciation between the participants and also between humans and nature, in order to arrive at a horizontal relationship between subject and subject (Fals Borda, 1999, p. 7).

The epistemological convictions and political commitments of those who engage in intersectional feminist research leads researchers to question the paradigms underlying standard research techniques and look for ways of researching and writing that are congruent with or emerge from the culture of those with whom they are working. This

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50 “Sentipensantes” is the word Fals Borda uses, which is an invented word, a combination of the words “sentir” which means “to feel” and “pensante,” which means “thinker” and comes from the verb “pensar” or “to think.”
looks different from the perspective of researchers with more or less privileged intersectional embodied identities.

Action researchers with more privileged identities hope to enter into relationships of solidarity with the communities with whom they carry out their research. They often attempt to address the challenge to value nonacademic knowledges by including who would normally be called “research participants” in collaborative or participatory ways in the research process. What is understood as “collaborative” and “participatory” varies widely, and in action/activist research includes participants: collaborating in identification of a research question (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 96; Strand et al., 2003), participating in the research design process (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 56; Stoecker, 2008; Strand et al., 2003), conceptualizing and creating research instruments (Fals Borda, 1999), collecting data alongside university researchers (Small & Uttal, 2005, p. 104; Stoecker, 2008, p. 56-57; Strand et al., 2003, p. 944), collaboratively analyzing data (L. Dodson & Schmalzbauer, 2005; L. Dodson, Piatelli, & Schmalzbauer, 2007), and/or participating in a collaborative writing process (Field, 2008).

Research conducted by people whose intersectional public identity is not as privileged often looks different in its execution and presentation. Recognizing that “from a Nehiýaw point of view… knowledge and story are inseparable and that interpretive knowing is highly valued, that story is purposeful,” Margaret Kovach and other Indigenous researchers employing “indigenous methodologies” attempt to “provide openings for narrative… such as conversations, interviews, and research/sharing circles… to give space for story” (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). In a different approach, the book Playing with Fire is collectively written “using a blended ‘we’” (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006, p. xii) as a conscious
strategy “to highlight our analysis of specific moments” rather than focusing on individual stories, and “to interrupt the popular practices…in which the writing voice of the one analyzing… as the ‘expert’ is separated from the voice of the persons who are recounting their lives or opinions” (p. xii). Using this strategy, the nine women participants “collectively and reflexively examine the different meanings of ‘poverty, hunger, privilege, and oppression’ and the politics of ‘casteism, communalism, and elitism’ in their own lives” (p. xi), using their own experiences and carefully thought-out writing strategy to upset traditional research paradigms.

In their emphasis on the importance of experience, including the experience of the researcher, many women and others with non-privileged public identity characteristics write for similar reasons to Gloria Anzaldúa who addresses other women of color writers here:

> I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit (Anzaldúa, 1981, 1983, p. 169).

One of the ways that people with self-aware consciousness, and often with non-privileged public identities, challenge the paradigms surrounding research and writing is to oppose the tendency to value solely intellectually-produced knowledges. “We write – think and feel – (with) our entire bodies rather than only (with) our minds or hearts” Minh-ha writes (1989, p. 36), then continues. “‘Your body must be heard,’ … Touch me and let me touch you, for the private is political” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 37). The private is political. We are feeling-thinkers (Fals Borda, 1999; Restrepo Botero, Velasco Alvarez, & Preciado Buitrago, 1999),
comprised of four bodies, part of the Pacha Mama (L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2010b), who often encounter the lines dividing inner from outer, us from them, vague and porous (Orr, 2004). Awareness of these interconnections and multiplicities is part of having self-aware consciousness, a useful tool for innovative and creative research.

*Failures of “activist” research*

While I have primarily focused on successful examples of feminist and activist research here, the failures are also instructive. Awareness of them is important in order to avoid harm. Some researchers reinforce the status quo, claiming to have done “participatory research” when they were never open to the knowledge of others, when they did nothing to share power or address power dynamics, making it impossible for people to collaborate (Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Other researchers set up “collaborative research projects” without a real understanding of the interests or concerns of the community, resulting in a lack of buy-in and participation from the “collaborators” (Cornwall, 1995, p. 1673) and a replication of existing power relations. There is a tendency to dichotomize or simplify social situations. Researchers may paint “academics” as the knowledge-holders and “the community” as in need of salvation, or they might idealize and stereotype non-academic experiences, knowledges and communities and not express their ideas and knowledge (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

In many cases “community participants” are expected to volunteer their time or organization’s staff put in time to do research on top of their already-busy schedules (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1107; Riger, 1999, p. 1673). Third World peoples, especially women, are often relied upon for community development and research projects in ways which have continued patterns of exploitation, “contributed to the cultural
deprivation of the poor, and... contributed to political violence... and the destruction of grassroots organization” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1673). Sharing information on survival strategies with outsiders can be seen as betrayal by members of a community (L. Dodson et al., 2007). Marginalized people often guard their knowledge for a reason, and there are ethical questions about outsiders accessing that knowledge and making it public, as it can be used to harm people or organizations (L. Dodson et al., 2007; Riger, 1999; Small & Uttal, 2005).

Activist feminist research and my project

Designing my study I was very conscious of the failures as well as the successes of activist and feminist research. While I did four collaborative research and writing projects during the time I was conducting my dissertation research (Fueres Flores & Hill, 2012; Fueres Flores, Morán Salazar, & Hill, 2013; Hill et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2012), my dissertation research itself was primarily not participatory. Rather it was done with activist intentions, feminist consciousness, and collaborative elements. For example, I chose my research topic based on conversations with leaders of Ecuadorian women’s organizations, attempting to find a subject that was of interest to them, to me, and that I thought would contribute to academic-activist conversations. Following our collaboration on other research projects, I paid Magdalena to do interviews for me in Kichwa and her son to translate the interviews into Spanish for me. In addition to conducting interviews, Magdalena and I together reviewed the interview questions I had drafted before either of us began interviewing and adjusted them based on her suggestions. I used photovoice as a collaborative methodology. In February 2014 I presented the main ideas that emerged from my dissertation research in a public forum at Flacso University in Quito, to which I invited
the organizations with which I collaborated, university academics, and the general public. I have attempted to incorporate the suggestions and perspectives I received there into this document.

Other plans to use this research in collaborative ways remain in the future: in the coming months I plan to translate into Spanish my primary recommendations for the organizations with whom I conducted research and present them with those ideas. If the leaders agree I would love to do workshops with the members of the organizations, based on what I learned about each organization as a community of practice. I also intend to publish the dissertation in Spanish in Ecuador. Finally, since I continue to live in Ecuador, the knowledge I have gained from this research will be part of the academic, activist and other work I do, and I am continuing to enroll in educational processes which further increase my understanding of consciousness and my toolkit for addressing the urgent issues women face. Given my positionality in the context in which I live, I see solidarity as one of the most important principles that orients my actions as I strive to work with my friends and compañeras for justice.

**Methods Used for Dissertation Research**

I used a combination of participant observation, interview, focus group, survey, and photovoice methods during my time in Ecuador. From when I arrived to do my research in Ecuador in May 2010, through May 2011, I kept detailed fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) of my daily observations collaborating with the AMPDE and local organizations in Cotacachi, where I attended meetings, workshops, assemblies, and leadership schools. In the fall of 2011 the women from the Casa Feminista invited me to
join the organization and following its dissolution many of us stayed together, forming a
group to continue producing the group’s feminist magazine *Flor del Guanto*.

My participant observation took yet another turn in 2012 when I was hired to coordinate a
project on “formation processes” at the Institute for Ecuadorian Studies where Nancy and
Judith worked. There, my paid work merged with dissertation research as I formed part of
a team with several feminist friends from Quito to research the educational activities
women’s organizations provide to their members and propose a national-level leadership
school (to be discussed in detail in Chapter Four). So while my participant observation has
been continuous since 2010, my position within the organizations and the frequency of
which I could attend events has changed considerably. How much I participated versus
observed has also been varied in different settings over time.

Between February and May of 2011 I conducted a total of 80 interviews with members of
women’s organizations in Ecuador. I interviewed both leaders and members of the three
local organizations who play the most active role in the Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y
Diversas (AMPDE): women from the Casa Feminista (CF) in Quito, the Movimiento de
Mujeres del Oro (MMO) in the coastal city of Machala, and the local organizations which
comprise the Coordinadora Cantonal de Mujeres de Cotacachi (CCMC) which is part of the
larger Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi (AUCC). The majority of my
interviews were with these women, who form part of the Comité Central de Mujeres
UNORCAC (CCMU), the Coordinadora de Mujeres de Intag (MI) and the Coordinadora de
Mujeres Urbanas de Cotacachi (MUC). I hired Magdalena Fueres to conduct interviews in
Kichwa in order to include Kichwa-speakers in my interview sample.
I interviewed several key leaders of other women’s organizations that are not as involved as the three organizations mentioned above, but still form an important part of the AMPDE. Additionally, because the major Afro-Ecuadorian women´s organizations did not participate with the AMPDE during the time period I was involved, I also interviewed leaders of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras (CONAMUNE), a national organization whose regional chapters have participated intermittently with the AMPDE. As part of the project on formation processes at the Institute of Ecuadorean Studies (IEE) we also did a limited number of interviews with women leaders, some of which I have included here. While many of the women interviewed are not directly quoted in my dissertation, what they shared with me in the interviews informed my perspective and understandings of consciousness.

My decision to wait nine months to interview people after beginning participant observation was based on a desire to have established trust and in many cases, friendships with the women interviewed. The interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and four hours, were semi-structured (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002) oriented toward life histories (Behar, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and roughly guided by an interview schedule. How much the women talked, how much time they had for the interview, and what information they gave in response to the questions determined the number of questions asked. Based on the context, I gave the women interviewed printed photographs I had taken of them and/or their families at organizational events, fruit or bread (a customary gift to give people in Cotacachi when interviewing them), or took them to lunch. My interview questions moved chronologically through their lives focusing on learning identities, organizational involvement, and attempting to pinpoint moments of personal transformation. While
several of my interview requests were refused by women who did not have time or did not want to be interviewed, the majority of the women accepted my invitation and several thanked me very sincerely for listening to them, saying that they didn’t talk to anyone about what they had shared with me and that it was a relief to talk about their experiences.

While using a couple informal focus group sessions with women in Cotacachi in 2011, the majority of the focus groups (L. Dodson & Schmalzbauer, 2005; L. Dodson et al., 2007; S. N. Hesse Biber & Leavy, 2007; Short, 2006) were conducted as part of the IEE research project in 2012. As part of that project we held eleven forums in different parts of the country which were attended by leaders from women’s organizations. In these collective spaces women shared ideas and experiences, compared, contrasted and evaluated their organizations’ procesos de formación.51

They were complimented by surveys (S. N. Hesse Biber & Leavy, 2007; S. J. Taylor 1949 & Bogdan, 1998) conducted with all the women who participated. In the surveys we gathered information on organizations’ goals and the needs of their members and asked participants to self-evaluate the topics and methodologies their organizations used in processes of formación. The knowledge gained in these collective spaces will be shared in Chapter Four.

The last method I used for my research in Ecuador was photovoice, a participatory methodology designed to offer women the opportunity to represent their experiences and observations visually and creatively. Researchers having used this method have observed that it has succeeded in involving less verbally-oriented participants and offered new

51 Literally translates as “formation processes” and includes all types of educational processes within organizations.
insight to the problem (McIntyre, 2008). Participants from a First Nation in Canada responded positively to the method, saying it built trust and balanced power between participants and academics (Castleden et al., 2008). I found both of these observations to hold true with the young women with whom I did the project, which I describe later in this chapter.

Challenging Whose Knowledge Counts: Collaborative Research and Methodological Experiments

Collaborative research in Cotacachi

At some point in the afternoon I spent with Judith and Nancy in 2009 discussing my potential collaboration with the AMPDE, we talked about our ideas on and philosophies about research. They said that research should a) recognize that women are subjects and are capable of generating their own processes of reflection to understand our own realities, and b) produce tangible proposals that improve the lives of women at a national and/or local level. I agreed with them, shared my training and thoughts on this, and we agreed that it seemed like a good fit for me to collaborate with the AMPDE.

A month after moving to Cotacachi, Judith told me that the AMPDE had received a grant to do a study on food sovereignty and women, and asked if I would be part of Cotacachi’s research team, along with Carmelina Morán and Magdalena Fueres, both indigenous women leaders from Cotacachi who were already becoming close friends. I readily agreed, excited to contribute something tangible to the AMPDE, and to be part of my first collaborative research team.
Judith explained that the AMPDE had decided to form three research teams made of women from three constituent organizations in Ecuador; each group would write about a topic around which they had a history of organizing. This decision was a political one stemming from the commitments we had discussed the year before; rather than hiring a consultant the AMPDE wanted to value the knowledge of organized women in Ecuador and provide them space to publish their knowledge. At our second meeting, the grant funds for the project were divided among the researchers by weighing their access to paid work; a small but political act of redistribution and solidarity.\(^5\) Aside from sharing political commitments and goals and friendship, Carmelina, Magdalena and I have complimentary skill sets. Over the eleven months we worked on the study, we communicated easily and enjoyed working together. We collaboratively wrote the interview questions, all conducted

\(^{52}\) My transportation to group meetings was the only financial remuneration I received; I did not want to be paid nor was I eligible as a foreigner under the grant’s stipulations. I was the only foreigner on the research team.
some interviews although Magdalena did the majority of those conducted in Kichwa, and
Carmelina did the majority of the transcription. Carmelina asked me to explain methods
for qualitative data analysis, which I did, and we divided that work, later writing the
majority of the document collaboratively at Magdalena’s kitchen table (Fueres Flores et al.,
2013). In this and a second research project we conducted as a team (Hill et al., 2012), we
strategically used their insider status and bilingualism (Kichwa-Spanish), my outsider status
and higher education degrees to navigate local politics and access certain people to
interview.

One day when I arrived at Magdalena’s house to work, she brought out a book (printed in
English) that a foreign friend had just given her so I could see if anything in it was relevant
to our work. I opened it, noticed it was the woman’s published dissertation, and that
Magdalena was thanked on the acknowledgements page. Many times since moving to
Ecuador I have picked up books set in Cotacachi and found her quoted or her name on the
acknowledgements page. It has always made me reflect somewhat indignantly about how
knowledge is circulated and valued, but this particular day it annoyed me more than usual.
“Magui, I’m really tired of seeing your name on the acknowledgements page. I want you to
publish. I want your name to be on the cover.” Then I doubted myself, wondering she
would want to write to publish. I took a breath. “Would you be interested in publishing
something?” She said she would, that she had lots of ideas she’d like me to help her
organize.

Aside from the two consultancy research projects completed, we have collaboratively
written one article for a US academic journal together. Magdalena expressed her hope for
that article, “I want to share our way of life in the indigenous world with others to raise
awareness among people who aren’t part of this world” (Fueres Flores & Hill, 2012). She wants to conscientizar, and she has much to teach. Magdalena and I have other organizational and writing projects in the works, but with time I have learned that writing isn’t her top priority – she doesn’t see it as the most effective way to achieve the change she desires. While I still think it necessary to question how knowledge is valued and who has access to things like publications, understanding Magdalena’s priorities has made me rethink how different ways of presenting information serve different purposes and different groups of people.

The colonial specter and the camera

For many years I have taken photographs at friends’ weddings, and in January 2011 my friend Miriam asked me a couple days before her brother’s traditional indigenous wedding if I would be the photographer. I hurriedly bought a fancy dress and heels, charged my camera batteries and cleaned off my memory cards. First was the ceremony in the Catholic Church. Fifteen minutes after it began I watched, horrified, from my perch near the altar as two white foreign tourists wandered in to the church wearing jeans, t-shirts, and hats sold at the local market. They walked up the other side of the church from where I was, right up to the altar; all the while talking to one another, pointing at people, laughing, and taking pictures.

Looking at the wedding guests seated in the orderly rows to which the pews confined them, I imagined how many times they have been objectified by the western gaze and then had that objectification frozen in time by a camera’s mechanical click. A heavy sadness settled over me, followed by a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realized that few of the guests actually knew me, that they might think I was capturing their images with my
camera with that same objectifying gaze. This insight was confirmed as over the two days of traditional indigenous wedding events people asked me not to publish pictures of them; told me the pictures would make un buen recuerdo, a nice memory for me of an indigenous wedding; and several elderly women hid their faces when I turned to photograph them. I tried to explain that the pictures were for the bride and groom, but the colonial specter loomed large and weighed heavy. I’m not sure they believed me, and why should they?

_Reversing the lens_

I moved to Cotacachi in June 2010, just as a leadership school for indigenous women, run by one of the organizations with which I was affiliated, was beginning. Through my presence at the weekly workshops I learned about Cotacachi and the political situation in Ecuador and I got to know the women and learn about their lives. In October I announced to the group that I was forming a photography group as part of my research project, explaining that members of the group would receive a digital camera on loan and that we would meet regularly to look at their pictures and analyze society through them. The sign-up sheet soon filled and I was surprised to discover that only one of the women who signed up was over 23 years of age (most of the women attending the school were older). From October 2010 through April 2012 a group of young people ranging in age from 12 to 23 met biweekly to take and share pictures and see their friends.

I headed into the first meeting armed with a box full of donated cameras, uncertain expectations, and ideas from reading articles about Photovoice (Alice, 2003; Castleden et al., 2008; McIntyre, 2008; C. C. Wang, 1999; C. C. Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; C. Wang & Burris, 1997; Willson, Green, & Haworth-Brockman, 2006). In my notebook were some notes from one of Carol Wang’s articles on the topic:
Photovoice methods:

1. Target audience: policymakers or community leaders
2. Recruit Photovoice participants.
3. Introduce Photovoice methodology. Have group discussion about cameras, ethics, power, risks to participants, minimizing risks, giving photographs back to subjects.
4. Informed consent.
5. Brainstorm initial theme for photos.
6. Distribute cameras; explain how to use them.
7. Set the next meeting time.
8. Discuss photographs:
   - Have each participant select and talk about 1 or 2 pictures,
   - Tell stories & be critical about their pics. Suggested questions (SHOWeD):
     - “What do you See here?”
     - What is really Happening here?
     - How does this relate to Our lives?
     - Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?
     - What can we Do about it?”
   - Participants codify: issues, themes, theories from their photos
9. With participants, plan how to share the photographs with policy makers and leaders.


After an icebreaker, an explanation of myself and my research, I moved on to numbers 3 to 5 on my list. The young women really “got” the ethical issue of photography. One gave an example of how a woman in her community was photographed by someone from a government ministry when she was working in the campo at home. One day she went to the ministry office and encountered this picture she didn’t know existed of her in her work clothes hanging there. She was furious, recounted the woman telling the story. Her example served to launch a conversation to establish group ethical norms.

My recording from our first meeting begins at number five on Wang’s list; we were brainstorming topics. Alexandra’s voice plays back to me first, ¿Por qué primero no ponemos a investigar lo que tenemos nosotros mismos en nuestra comunidad? Why don’t we first set out to research what we have in our own community? Other voices chime in,
and a more detailed list emerges. They wanted to document: environmental issues; elderly people and traditional ways of life; indigenous traditions; handcrafts; local gang problems; changes in Inti Raymi (the most important indigenous celebration of the year for Ecuador’s Kichwa peoples); nature’s beauty; differences between life in the city and in the rural indigenous communities. In addition to the categories they selected, I asked them to take pictures illustrating “who you are” and facilitated conversation based on their photographs about identity. In our meetings I gave brief writing assignments to provoke reflection about their childhoods and families. Our discussions informed the subsequent chapters of the dissertation and offered the perspective of a new generation.

As time went on, I no longer referred to my notes but let the group evolved in response to emerging ideas and requests. I trace some of those changes here, as most of the literature on photovoice makes it appear to simply follow a prescribed path. I think that it can be most useful and enjoyable when it responds to the context in which it is being implemented. In my group one shift came because the young women kept asking if I was going to teach them how to take pictures. At first I told them that the point wasn’t so much to “take good pictures,” but to capture images of things they wanted to photograph and then to share pictures with one another. After listening to them talk about why they attended what they generally call the “photography course,” however, I realized they wanted to learn a new skill. As all the group members live in communities outside the city of Cotacachi and some travel as far as an hour and a half to participate, I felt the least I could do was respond to their request, which in the end I think positively added to their experience of the group.
Following a conversation in December with some of the indigenous women leaders in Cotacachi in which they identified the need for leadership training for young indigenous women, I integrated such topics into our meetings. In April some of the young women asked if their male friends could join; the group discussed the idea and quickly decided they didn’t want to exclude anyone, so there are now three young indigenous men participating. One of the biggest moments of transition came when we put on a photography exposition in Cotacachi in March 2011. They decided to name the group Mushuk Shuyukuna, which means “new images” in Kichwa. Following the discussion where they chose this name and what the group actually was, Gladys, one of the group members, wrote the following description of Mushuk Shuyukuna about the purpose of the group:

The objective of the members of Mushuk Shuyukuna is to capture images that capture our culture and identity, our communities and to discover their significance. Taking pictures of the themes we are attracted to, we record these images and realities in a way that can’t be easily erased. Through this, we try to discover and document the traditions and customs of our grandparents so they are not lost. Taking pictures gives us a sense of freedom to capture the images that we want to capture, and through them, we are able to show something that others are unable to perceive, in this way we share what we see and feel with others.

Another shift came when I left town for three months and Magdalena took responsibility for the group. Recognizing their desire to learn more about indigenous culture and traditions, she took them to visit sacred sites in various communities in Cotacachi. Because of how the photovoice group evolved and the topics discussed, I did not include the information from it in my dissertation; I will write about the experience separately.

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53 Images from the exposition and the descriptions given them by the young women can be seen here: http://mushukshuyukuna.blogspot.com/2011/09/exposicion-de-fotografia-marzo-2011.html
Blurring Boundaries and Questioning Method: Conversation as Interview?

I had just gotten to Lucy’s apartment to interview her. We chatted about graduate school while she fixed us tea. The conversation moved to topics related to my interview questions and I asked, “Do you mind if I start recording our conversation now?” She did not, so I followed her around her apartment with my recorder while we talked, until we were sitting on the living room floor, cups of tea in hand, and I asked if we should move to the interview questions. I supposed that would shift the dynamic from conversation to interview, but it didn’t work that way.

About one-third of the way through my questions, I asked what was the first time she realized she was mestiza, and that that was different than being, say, indigenous or Afro-descendent. Her answer resonated so much with my own experiences of coming to consciousness about being white that I responded, “Ah, the hard thing about interviewing for me is that I always want to share things about myself and my life with the person I’m interviewing… I’ll tell you afterwards.” She said, “Afterwards is fine, but you can tell me now if you want.”54 I thought, Why not? Why does an interview have to be so one-sided? I did share my thoughts. For the rest of the interview I adopted a more conversational style; often my reflection back to her led her to speak more in depth about her original comment.

After leaving Lucy’s home I reflected on this variation on interviewing. Why is an interview primarily a one-way information exchange? Because the person in the “interviewer” role wants to know something and so asks the person in the “interviewee” role. But if the response provokes a more conversational response from the interviewer, why not share it if there is time? Because we don’t want to influence the interviewee to tell

54 My translations, from the interview transcript.
us what they think we want to hear, right? We know the interviewer is not an objective presence, however. As Marj DeVault says, “conversation is always located;” and “speakers in any oppressed or marginalized cultural group learn distinctive skills that ‘tailor’ speech for different cultural contexts” (DeVault, 1999, p. 100). This reflection made me want to consider the interview from a different perspective; in terms of vulnerability.

It seems to me that in a traditional interview, it is vulnerability that is not in balance. One person speaks, confesses (M. Foucault, 1988, 1978), making her more vulnerable. The other person listens. Listening is also a very important skill, but is a less vulnerable position. Because we do not typically respond to the interviewee, express agreement or disagreement, they have no idea what we think of what they have said, how we are judging or admiring them. Asking about experiences of girlhood, class, racial and ethnic dynamics, about their organizational involvement, and about moments or events that changed their lives in some way often led to women telling me stories bien guardados (well hidden away), led to tears. I used active listening techniques (Active listening. 2008; Glenn Whitman, 2006; Silvia Cristina Bettez, 2011), attentive to verbal and nonverbal language. I listened with my heart, listened empathetically, and ended interview days exhausted, but convinced at the importance of women’s organizations’ work and finding ways to both structurally and individually do something to address the multiple types of violence that affect women in their intersectional identities. I also questioned the relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

After my interview with Lucy I decided to keep blurring the boundary between the quotidian information-gathering technique of conversing with interview techniques I learned in the academy. The level of blurring differed, depending on how much time the
person I was interviewing had available and how much of what they said inspired a
response from me. I began the practice of, at the end of the interview, asking the person if
they wanted to ask me any of the questions I’d asked them, or anything else about me.
Almost everyone asked me one or more questions, or said they would like to get coffee at a
later date to keep talking. As I have remained in Ecuador, many of the conversations begun
in interviews have continued.

In my interviews I often felt the cariño, the warmth that is created when women sit down
to talk, to exchange information and create relationships. It happens at slumber parties,
lunch tables, coffee shops, locker rooms, tiendas, while desgranando choclo or knitting,
braiding another’s hair, riding busses to work, anywhere women gather. This warmth is
related to Marj DeVault’s idea of “women talk,” that women share enough of a common
framework that they are better able to listen to and understand one another (DeVault, 1999,
p. 62). In the year I spent “doing research” I have tried to cultivate this type of relationship
with the women I’ve worked with, hoping to build friendships with many of them, an
attitude which has certainly influenced my work. These experiences of sharing and trust
are ones which cannot be discounted nor forgotten, and make me loathe to talk about “my
interviewees” or “research participants.” Each person has a name and a story and has dared
to let me in, to the extent she let me in, sharing with me her experiences, wisdom, analysis,
and life. Through the analysis and writing of my dissertation, I have thought of the gifts
these women have entrusted to me.

Although I had originally thought I would include stories of my own shifting consciousness
in this dissertation, and one of the interviews Magdalena conducted was with me as

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55 Cariño is one of many words for “love” in Spanish. It is a fondness, a warmth, a friendly type of love.
The interviewee, once I began writing I realized that my stories don’t fit with the stories of the women I am telling here. I wanted to focus on the lives of activist women living in the Ecuadorian context so that I could look at changes in consciousness against the relief of the sociocultural and historic context of Ecuador. While I have lived in Ecuador for five years, my answers to my interview questions tell stories of experiences in at least six different countries where I have lived, spent time, or have roots. My experiences of consciousness-creation have not been primarily in organizational spaces, but a varied mixture of organizational, religious/spiritual, familial, formal and informal educational spaces.

Looking at the big picture of all the tales collected in my research, I thought my stories were set in such a different context and so marked by my privilege as a US citizen that they might distract or detract from the other women’s stories. I have attempted to make myself visible in the dissertation, and in this chapter I share some about how my consciousness has shifted around research methodologies, but aside from that do not include my experiences of learning consciousness.

The Politics of Listening, Silence and Speaking

My silence

In my interview with Irene, one of the members of the Coordinadora de Mujeres Urbanas (CMU) in Cotacachi, she said, “Indigenous women… we’ve seen at meetings that they just talk in Kichwa, I don’t know what they’re saying…we’re all talking in Spanish…” She made disapproving noises and facial expressions. When I asked her why she thought they were speaking Kichwa, she said “they don’t pay attention to what we’re talking about; they’re not interested.” Her words echoed comments I heard during the CMU meetings I

56 Invented name.
regularly attended over the course of a year. There, members complained that indigenous women brought their children with them, spoke to one another in Kichwa, and knitted during meetings. During the interview, I did not respond to this comment, making yet another mental note about the problematic attitude of the mestiza women in the CMU towards indigenous peoples in Cotacachi.

The day after this interview I ran into Irene on the street with two other CMU members. In the course of our conversation she said to me, “It’s like what you were saying yesterday, Dana, those indigenous women just don’t pay attention to anything at meetings.” My surprised response was to say, “You understand how it is to be too busy. Sometimes you really don’t have time to go to a meeting but you figure out how to go anyway. And you can knit and listen at the same time.” She said, “Yeah, I guess you’re right.” But I walked away from the conversation feeling that one of life’s truths had been verbalized: silence means assent, consent. If you are silent you are complicit. The fact that I had not said anything in response to the discriminatory comments I heard while attending their meetings, I can assume, gave the women present the impression that I was in agreement with them to such an extent that the woman who made the comment attributed it to me.

Upon reflection I realize that my positionality and my desire to observe and better understand racism led me to act very differently in different women’s organizations. When with indigenous, Afro-descendent and mestiza women with critical political consciousness that take into account intersectional realities (such as in the AMPDE or CONAMUNE), I was quite vocal about my beliefs, sharing my observations and analysis of racism and coloniality. I felt free to share this because I knew that in those spaces the women had similar perspectives. Synergy developed from these conversations, and I knew that
communicating my views would help overcome suspicion of how this white woman from the United States might think or who she (I) might be. As a result of this openness and our similar perspectives, I have developed friendships with many of these women.

At CMU meetings and events I have largely been silent, being more “observer” than “participant,” trying to understand their perspectives and discriminatory attitudes, and, I realized retrospectively, letting my white skin and silence give the impression that they could express these views in front of me. Without thoughtfully considering this matter until the incident just described, I had assumed the women would have stopped saying such things in front of me had I pointed out the racism in their perspectives, and I would have thus been unable to observe and thus better understand them. Just by being present it appears that I have gained the trust of many of the women in the CMU; they always welcome me warmly into their space. Retrospectively I realize I have not let them into my life the way I have other women I have met in Ecuador, and it is because I have held back what I really think from them. I feel real cariño for them, especially after the often intensely personal experience of interviewing them. The interview conversation described here has felt heavy. Did I betray my ethical commitments with my silence or was it important that I was able to observe these comments and behaviors? How do I undo this impression I have given and contribute to this community learning empathy and solidarity? How do I point out prejudicial perspectives in a way that is constructive and contributes to change? Am I imposing my outsider beliefs thinking they “should” develop more critical consciousness and solidarity? Am I betraying this woman and her compañeras when I write that the way they talk about indigenous women is problematic? How do I be gentle in light of their vulnerability and be respectful of their trust in me?
These are hard questions. I can only hope that my analysis contributes to a compassionate understanding of both appropriated oppression and privilege, and I am planning on designing a series of workshops based on what I have learned doing my dissertation research to offer to the women’s organizations who collaborated with me as a way of giving back to them, and sharing with them what I have learned. I hope to address issues such as these in the workshop setting addressing my observations of each group with that group.

*Speaking*

For much of my research year, I largely kept silent at meetings and public events, María Lugones’ words ringing in my ears, wanting to listen, to learn, to let other women speak. In May 2011, one year after beginning my fieldwork, I tagged along with Carmelina and Magdalena to a meeting at UN Women to collaboratively set priorities for the institution. There were about 20 organizational leaders present, three of whom were indigenous, one of whom was Afro-descendent, the rest mestiza, and me. When the discussion turned to domestic violence in rural areas, I thought of how in the normative Ecuadorian imagination Afro-descendent and indigenous people are seen as rural (Radcliffe, 1996; Rahier, 2003a; Rahier, 2003b), how many times I’d heard mestizos talk about how great a problem domestic violence is in indigenous communities, and of the constant stereotype of the violent black male. As usual the debate rose in my mind. Speak or be silent and listen? Then another voice from that imagined community spoke to me, it was Donna Kate Rushin’s “Bridge Poem” (C. Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981):

I’ve had enough  
I’m sick of seeing and touching  
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody

Nobody
Can talk to anybody
Without me
Right?

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends’ parents…

Then I’ve got to explain myself
To everybody

I do more translating
Than the Gawdamn U.N.

Forget it
I’m sick of it
I’m sick of filling in your gaps

Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
Sick of being the crazy one at your holiday dinners
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday Brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white people

Find another connection to the rest of the world
Find something else to make you legitimate
Find some other way to be political and hip

I said I thought that we needed to be very clear that domestic violence happens across racial
and class lines and that UN Women should be careful that domestic violence work does not
reinforce colonial stereotypes of indigenous men as wife-beaters and black men as violent.
The one Afro-Ecuadorian woman present at the meeting spoke after me, saying that she
wasn’t going to say anything about that, since she’s always the only one who talks about it,
but that what I said was true and important. She elaborated. It was a very small step but it
gave me the confidence to think that I could contribute in solidarity to the important work Ecuadorian women activists are doing.

**To Stay or To Go**

How and when to end one’s research, how to maintain relationships (or not) with the people you worked with, how to disseminate research results are all important questions for a research project and become more prominent as the project draws to a close. In 2011 as the end of my research grant approached, these questions became increasingly more important. To stay or to go? A year before I was contemplating the ethics of doing research in Ecuador, now I was contemplating the ethics (among other things) of leaving.

As the deadline approached to sign a contract to be a teaching assistant at Syracuse University, where I was completing my PhD, I listed my “unfinished business” in Ecuador. I was thinking strategically with Magdalena and Carmelina about how to strengthen indigenous women’s activist projects. Mushuk Shuyukuna had a relatively-new sense of itself as a group; not only were the young people taking beautiful pictures, but learning about their own traditions, re-connecting with their grandparents and other elders to learn more about the content of the images they capture with their cameras. I still wanted to give feedback to the Mujeres Urbanas. Finally, I felt that I had listened to and accompanied several of the women’s groups I’d worked with long enough to be able to speak in solidarity with them and contribute to conversations about the issues they face. AMPDE members had just begun asking me to attend events to represent the group, which would reduce their work load. I began to be invited to speak in academic settings which I was able to turn into co-speaking engagements, including women who have less access to those
spaces. I was just at the point of grasping something, and felt that if I left I would just take it all with me and be absorbed into the all-consuming life of PhD student.

I decided to stay. Since making that decision I have taught classes at various local universities and done consultancy work on gender-related issues with friends and colleagues from the organizations with which I collaborated for my dissertation research. Living in Ecuador, rather than just being here for research, has allowed relationships to bloom into friendships, work partnerships, and in this context have found myself in conflictual situations with several of the women with whom I have continued working. While writing my dissertation from Ecuador it has been wonderful to borrow Nancy’s books, ask Carmelina what she thinks of my analysis, interrogate consciousness with Lucy over coffee. The women I have written about have become my community, have given me invaluable feedback on the ideas written about in this dissertation, and I look forward to continuing to be part of these feminist communities of practice and to continued collaboration.

**Putting Activist Feminist Research into Practice**

Using the tool of research, with its colonial history, to fight oppression can be challenging, and has been an experience which has contributed to my own consciousnesses. Both in my dissertation research and the other research projects with which I have been involved over the past few years in Ecuador I have attempted to put into practice feminist activist research. It has been an iterative experience as I have read, acted, reflected on my experiences alone and with others. I have made mistakes along the way, learned important
lessons, and taken seriously the responsibility that comes from this endeavor, especially
given my whiteness and North American-ness.

Over the course of my research I have tried to think strategically with my friends about how
to use our different skills and identities to meet our common goals and have realized that I
have acted “strategically” on my own in non-reflective ways as well. My teachers, both in
the classroom and in the organizations with which I’ve worked, have been many, aware of
their personal power, wise, and in many cases have been women of color, creating contexts
where public identity hierarchies have been reversed and offered me opportunities to,
structurally and intentionally, occupy the space of listener, student and collaborator. As I
continue to live in Ecuador, exploring how to apply what I have learned from this research
in practical ways, I will continue this iterative process of learning, and continue my
attempts to construct my research methods on relationships based on solidarity.
Photo 4: Photograph of the opening workshop of the IEE project on procesos de formación. Explanation of the project before breaking up into work groups. Museo Mindalae, Quito, Ecuador
Chapter Four: Procesos de Formación: How consciousness is “taught” in organizations

Gender-focused Procesos de Formación

In the summer of 2012, Judith Flores (CF) called and invited me to join a team at the Instituto de Estudios Ecuatorianos – IEE – the Institute of Ecuadorian Studies, where she worked, on a project being funded by UN Women evaluating procesos de formación – formation processes – among organized women in Ecuador. The idea was to survey and collaboratively evaluate with organizational leaders the gender-focused processes of formation being carried out in their groups. “Formación” includes all educational activities within social organizations: workshops, trainings, continuing education, adult education, leadership schools, consciousness-raising activities, etc. Based on that information, we designed a national-level formation school that the United Nations wanted to later create and fund. Intrigued by the idea, I accepted, and coordinated the three-month-long project for a team that included friends who are part of feminist organizations in Quito: Lucía Pérez, Nancy Carrión (CF) and Margarita Aguinaga (CF). Much of what is included here was analyzed with Lucía. This work allowed me to look closely at what is explicitly and implicitly taught in Ecuadorian organizations, and how conscientización is part of formación processes, which are emphasized more than the former in present-day Ecuador.

The IEE team conducted 4 national-level workshops in Quito and 6 regional workshops in different provinces from the coast and Andes, bringing together regional and local organizations as well as academics and NGO employees. We surveyed workshop participants on the needs of their organizational members and their dreams, then divided them into groups to analyze and later share in plenary sessions: why they do formación
with their members, on what topics, what methodologies they use, what works and what doesn’t. We supplemented this information with interviews of organizational leaders from the Amazon region and government employees involved in procesos de formación.  

While I primarily relied upon participant observation and interview methods for the research conducted explicitly for my dissertation, the information collected with these surveys, focus groups, and interviews, and the analysis conducted as a team enabled me to look outside the organizations which form part of the AMPDE to get a sense of what educational activities are being carried out in Ecuador on a larger scale. Participating in the project were a total of 500 women and a few men from almost 200 organizations, of which 79% were second or third “grade” organizations (those which are regional or national level organization comprised of various local organizations), meaning that a larger number of organizations were actually represented. This information is supplemented in this section by interviews and participant observation I conducted from 2010 until 2013 (concentrated in 2010-2012) with the AMPDE and in Cotacachi. My strategy in the dissertation has been to use the information generated from the IEE project’s surveys to broaden my understanding of what tends to happen in Ecuadorian women’s organizations functioning as communities of practice in terms of formación processes. This is invaluable for understanding trends and tendencies in consciousness-creation in women’s

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57 Toward the end of the project we held a national-level workshop at the end to return to the participants the information collected and our analysis of it. At that workshop, we worked on co-constructing the skeleton for a national “school” for organizational leaders to give to UN Women, who was financing the project, with the idea that the UN would later create and fund this school. Because of the financial crisis, their budget was cut and the school is on the agenda for 2014, but its future is uncertain.

58 We invited organizations affiliated with the AMPDE, and some did participate, but we also invited many organizations which don’t form part of the AMPDE, and the majority of participating organizations were not part of the AMPDE.
organizations in Ecuador and is supplemented by the in-depth stories related in the
interviews I conducted on my own.

**Pedagogy, Teaching, and Learning**

Pedagogy is “concerned with what is taught, how it is taught and how it is learned and,
more broadly, with the nature of knowledge and learning” (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.
140). Some feminist pedagogues join other educators in calling for an “understanding of
pedagogy which recognizes that knowledge is produced, negotiated, transformed, and
realized in the *interaction* between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge itself”
(Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 140, emphasis in original). This understanding of pedagogy
and its relationship to learning and knowledge goes hand in hand with the feminist ideas of
situated knowledge and the project of decolonizing knowledge. Pedagogy is directly linked
to consciousness-raising, of course, in the important work of Brazilian popular educator
Paulo Freire and his “pedagogy of the oppressed,” as well as other feminist and critical
educators who see pedagogy as having the specific goal of creating freedom through
consciousness (for the oppressed as well as the oppressor).

*The relationship between needs and education*

In their evaluation of their procesos de formación, participants in the IEE project stated
again and again that successful formaciones were those that responded to women’s needs
and daily lives. Pertinent topics result in greater attendance and participation, and open the
door to methodologies which build on prior knowledge and experience, an important
principle for learning in formal and popular education scenarios (Freire, 1970, p. 69;
Richter & Timm, 2005, p. 2). For example, women from the CCMU in Cotacachi
mentioned that formaciones around issues of food sovereignty were successful because
responded to rural women’s “need to know” about that issue. Likewise, when I asked Enith
Flores (CF) what aspect of her organizational participation had most affected her on a
personal level she replied,

The topic, well it’s not just the topic… [of] self-esteem, but also [learning to]
recognize yourself. The workshops have been built on… our concrete necessities.
For example, the last workshop that was about romantic love: these are things,
things that need to be demystified, and demystifying these constructions from the
point where you generate them, from what you believe and what you create… So
for me, it has been there that I have found [personal change].

Enith’s participation in the organization has reached her on a personal level because it has
offered procesos de formación about topics that are relevant and necessary in her life. In
formaciones she learned new ways of coding aspects of romantic love, for example, which
taught her new ways of seeing them, which “demystified” them. Her statement that this
new way of seeing affected her recognition of herself (her identity) implies that it impacted
her self-aware consciousness. She has become aware of how her beliefs are constructed
and has gained a reflexive awareness of herself, which she expresses as having “learned to
recognize” herself. Related to the relevance of topics and methods based on participants
was the estimation that the best facilitators are people knowledgeable of both the topic and
the region where the formación is taking place, as they are more able to teach in a way
which connects the topic to the specific realities and needs of participants.

What are the needs of members of organizations working for gender justice? At the
regional and national forums, we asked participants to write and orally present the greatest
needs of their organization’s members. Based on transcripts from the forums, I analyzed
the compiled results, and made the following chart, with the most frequently-listed needs first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs of communities</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Education, knowledge, information</strong></td>
<td>Women need access to formal education. They also want greater knowledge about rights, laws, and international agreements and to understand how to use this information in their activism. They emphasize the importance of valuing ancestral knowledge and wisdom and passing it on to younger generations. They state the need for greater diffusion of information about government programs and laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Political participation and public policy</strong></td>
<td>More women should participate in politics as power-holders and decision-makers, and in spaces of political intervention and participation from the outside. This is true at all levels – from the national level to community government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Organization</strong></td>
<td>Local organizations need to be strengthened, more women should be organized. Organizations need funding and they specifically need financing for workshops and longer-term “schools.” Organizational leaders need their leadership skills strengthened, and members need conflict-resolution skills. Organizations need to establish long term or permanent training programs or schools for members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Economic needs</strong></td>
<td>Women’s lack of economic independence, the feminization of poverty and migration were recognized as problems which create economic needs. Specifically named were the need for: paid work, access to and ownership of land, access to credit, markets for agricultural products, and dignified housing. Women wanted more economic projects for vulnerable groups based on the principles of community and solidarity. Certain needs named implicate the state: roads, bridges, potable water, sewage systems, transportation, social security for women who work in the home. “The global workload,” the term used to discuss how women’s unpaid labor sustains the national economy, and “the economy of care” describing the unpaid caring for others that women do, were mentioned as factors which create economic needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Health,</strong></td>
<td>The need to address the high numbers of unplanned pregnancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>specifically sexual and reproductive rights</strong></td>
<td>and the accompanying ignorance about sexuality were mentioned as well as ignorance of sexual and reproductive rights. The need for women to have free maternal health care was also named as important, as was health care for children, indigenous campesinos, elderly people and sex workers. Alcoholism and drug addiction, especially among youth, were mentioned as a problem. The health consequences of the “global workload,” are also talked about in some organizations as a health issue. Women not only prioritize their children, husbands and parents over themselves when food or money for healthcare is short, but also on average work 22 hours more a week than men (Arboleda, 2012). Rural women are especially vulnerable; they work on average 7 hours more a week than urban women (Arboleda, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Freedom from Violence</strong></td>
<td>Violence is a huge problem, according to workshop participants. Gender violence, domestic violence and trafficking were all mentioned, as was the lack of justice for women victims of violence. Many women talked about how men won’t let women leave home to participate in organizational activities. The relationship between women’s economic dependency and gender violence was named, the unfair division of labor in the home, men’s jealousy, and problems with gossip and jealousy between women. They said that men need to learn about women’s rights, and indigenous women talked about the lack of access to indigenous justice systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Self-esteem, empowerment</strong></td>
<td>These needs were frequently mentioned, in conjunction with the need for conflict resolution skills for the home and women’s fear of men. The need to educate youth in leadership skills and to keep them out of trouble was also named.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Freedom from discrimination</strong></td>
<td>The need to address discrimination in all its forms was mentioned: discrimination based on class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, employment (especially sex workers), disability, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Ancestral knowledge and values, identity</strong></td>
<td>There is a need to strengthen community life, to “rescue” indigenous languages, cultures and identities as traditional foods, agricultural practices, dress and values are perceived as being lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. Environment</strong></td>
<td>Women who live in areas with mineral deposits or petroleum are under constant threat of mining and oil drilling; participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
expressed that the fight for nature is a fight for women. Environmental concerns are also found among women for whom nature is part of their culture, spirituality, livelihood, and sustenance. From indigenous women in the Andes, to women working to protect the mangroves on the coast, to women living in cloud forests and the Amazon region, participants clearly articulated how women’s rights and needs are inextricably connected to those of the natural environment.

Lucía Pérez and I designed a survey which we revised based on input from the first national forum (see Annex 1) that we asked participants who attended the national and regional forums to complete. As part of the survey we asked participants what issues their organizations were formed to address. The surveys were compiled into a database by Gaby Gutierrez, and I made the following chart to show what responses were given with what frequency (they could list as many issues as they wanted).

What Organizations Teach: The Content of Formaciones

How do these organizations educational processes, often designed to concientizar, match communities’ needs and organizations’ goals? When we look at the topics of the procesos
de formación, we see that organizations participating in this project educate their members on the following topics with the frequencies indicated below (the bar indicates what percent of participating organizations have carried out formation processes on that topic).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of organizations doing formaciones on these topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing the percentage of organizations doing formaciones on different topics](image)

Illustration 18: Topics of formaciones offered by organizations to their members (percentage of organizations that offer each topic)

The relationship is often very clear between needs, organizational goals, and topics of formación, as exemplified by the large percentage of organizations training their members in gender rights, political participation, economics, sexual and reproductive rights, ethnic and cultural rights and environmental issues. Aspects of Ecuador’s sociopolitical reality can be understood from these topics as well. The large number of trainings given on gender rights, sexual and reproductive rights, and feminism attest to the prevalence of gender violence and discrimination all women face. Given the prevalence of violence
against women (explained in Chapter One) it makes sense that almost 70% of organizations, regardless of identity, geographic and other differences, listed gender violence as one of their reasons for existing, and more than 50% offer formaciones on this topic. Various types of violence surfaced in workshops as one of the major impediments to the success of organizations’ educational efforts. Many times women are not “allowed” to leave home to attend workshops by their husbands or their parents or were subjected to physical or emotional violence for their attendance. They many have nowhere to leave their children, or do not have enough money to pay for transportation to get to the event.

The prevalence of formaciones on food sovereignty, production, and environmental issues all point to the importance of rural women’s organizations, the material and political challenges they face as women struggle to maintain their livelihoods, culture, and support their families in the face of increasing industrialization and concentration of land (S. Latorre & Herrera, 2013). These struggles are also intimately linked to people’s holistic connection to the Earth. Food sovereignty has to do not only with the right to define one’s own “policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food, capable of guaranteeing the right to food to the whole population” (Fueres Flores et al., 2013, p. 15, citing Maluf), but also with the fact that these things must be done respecting the cultures of the people who work the land and water – farmers and fishermen and women – because their cultures, spirituality and ways of life are interwoven with food production, commercialization, preparation, consumption, and the spaces where those things happen (Fueres Flores et al., 2013).

If we return to the explanation of the four families given in Chapter Two – humans, nature, ancestors and spirits – as part of the Pacha Mama (translated as Mother Earth or Mother
Universe) we understand that destroying the earth is destroying part of ourselves. Those who comprehend the deeper meaning of sumak kawsay, not just as an alternative to “development” as it is used in the constitution (as “el buen vivir”), understand that kawsay

is a Kichwa word which recognizes that all beings and all of Nature’s processes are living things. In this way, from our point of view a mineral is a being that has a useful function within the whole of nature and its consciousness is expressed in the marvelous geometric and crystal figures. Life has other manifestations invisible to physical eyes, like the spirits of plants, animals, mountains and waterfalls that constitute the substratum of the visible (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 37).

With this sort of understanding, they have a different sort of relationship with both the earth and environmentalism.

Formaciones on leadership, political participation, and political incidence encourage women to get involved politically and reveal organizations’ recognition of the lack of decision-making power and political participation of women in Ecuador. A 2012 survey showed that only 27% of social and union leadership is female although a high percentage of these organizations’ members are women (Arboleda, 2012, p. 102). Trainings on children’s and elderly people’s rights speak to the violation of the rights of these vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, the prevalence of education about history, collective and ethnic rights, identity and culture highlight the need to confront racial and ethnic discrimination, violence, and to prevent the disappearance of non-Western knowledges, memories, and ways of life.

59 The current government makes a mockery of the idea of both sumak kawsay and the idea that Ecuador will follow an alternative economic model, as it bases its social programs on money from mining and petroleum extraction and throws leaders who oppose these policies in jail. For just one recent example, see: http://www.elcomercio.com/negocios/Intag-mineria-Ecuador-arresto-Enami-Imbabura_0_1118288367.html
I observed that most formaciones are oriented toward teaching practical skills to meet women’s material needs and cultivating critical political consciousness around these social and political topics. For example, there are workshops given on productive activities, commercializing herbal teas and the like. Formaciones also serve to organize and educate women to pool resources so they have greater access to credit. Economic solidarity and alternative economies workshops are often materialized in community savings (microcredit) groups, the organization of trueques (barter-based exchange of goods), agricultural product exchanges or urban women’s purchase of organic products from rural counterparts. These formaciones may or may not be designed to concientizar. While some link women’s economic situation to capitalism and patriarchy, or educate women on the precarious situation of rural farmers, others focus solely on teaching practical skills and organizing the women to sell what they produce in the market, pooling their money to create microcredit groups, etc.

Self-esteem and rights-based workshops, very popular among organizations, typically include elements which encourage self-aware consciousness (explored in depth in Chapter Six). In forums and interviews, leaders specifically stated that topics such as self-care, autonomy and self-esteem are important starting points for formación processes with women. Activities done to concientizar women about and influence their self-esteem are frequently mentioned in interviews as having made a lasting impact, as will be shown in subsequent chapters.

The degree of critical-political and self-aware consciousnesses that is cultivated by procesos de formación varies greatly from organization to organization. Consciousness-raising in itself is talked about less than other topics at this historic moment in Ecuador,
although it is still consciously done by some organizations. While not usually articulated in these terms, intersectional perspectives are found in organizations of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women. There, discussions include talk of the “multiple discriminations” that members face as women, indigenous or Afro-descendent, poor, and rural (etc.) people. Most organizations of mestiza women I have observed don’t have an intersectional perspective about their own or other social groups. I have also observed that many people with minority identities hold stereotypic beliefs about other minority groups. In Cotacachi for example, I overheard indigenous people express fear of Afro-descendent people, and thought it notable that some soccer teams hire Afro-Ecuadorian soccer players from the coast to join their teams for important soccer tournaments. Many people of color are homophobic, many people from the GLBTIQ community are racist, there are classist beliefs within minority communities, etc.

In sum, looking critically at the topics of organization’s formaciones we can see the following is missing in many organizational spaces:

- An intersectional perspective.
- Skills specifically useful for building coalitions and relationships based on solidarity. This includes unlearning stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs about other groups, and learning empathy, listening skills and how to build relationships of solidarity.
- Conflict resolution skills (mentioned as a need, but not included in the topics addressed).
- Skills useful for helping women access formal and higher education (also mentioned as a need but not included in formación topics).
- The inclusion of men in procesos de formación (mentioned by many women, especially women from small and/or indigenous communities).
How Organizations Teach: Methodologies for Consciousness Creation

Many women report that what Freire called the “banking method” (Freire, 1970, p. 57-74) is very common methodology used in formación spaces. Facilitators often stand in front of a group and dictate information, expecting workshop attendees to listen and learn. Although common and reflective of the pedagogical methods used in Ecuadorian schools, this method was not seen as effective by those evaluating it.

The other observable trend among organizations was to draw on the following methodologies: popular education, pedagogy for peace, investigación acción participación (IAP) and feminist pedagogy. Leaders emphasized the importance of teaching beginning from the concrete realities of participants, learning by doing, and teaching with the goal of transforming reality. It became clear that the tradition of popular education is strong in the Central and South Andean regions in Ecuador, attributed to the influence of Ecuadorian bishop Leonidas Proaño (1920-1988), whose liberation theology methods were largely based on Paulo Freire’s pedagogical model. The methodological techniques deriving from these traditions were positively evaluated by everyone with whom I spoke and who participated in the IEE project. Aside from this basic difference, there were certain points that emerged from interviews and focus group discussions as specifically useful for consciousnesses’ creation.

After the regional workshops, Lucía and I sat down with the transcripts and notes on the workshops where participants had analyzed their organizations’ procesos de formación and grouped their feedback on “what worked” into categories. Later, taking this into account alongside what I learned from the interviews and participant observation done for my
dissertation research, I organized the information in the following way to offer practical suggestions to organizations and individuals wishing to concientizar through procesos de formación: (1) pedagogical prerequisites for formaciones, (2) concientizando groups with similar identities/ experiences, (3) concientizando groups with different identities/ experiences, (4) the importance of hope and (5) visualizing alternative present and future realities.

**Pedagogical Prerequisites for Transformational Group Learning**

**Safe space and trust**

The first “must” for any sort of learning environment is that it be a safe space, where participants trust the facilitator and one another. “Concrete material situations” can be conceptualized as “geographic realit[ies] of… social relationships,” and emotions as constructed in physical contexts and spaces (López González de Orduña, Helena, 2012, p. 55). Thus it is important that the physical spaces be private, comfortable and suitable for the activities planned; have an atmosphere of emotional trust and safety, non-judgment, confidentiality, and emotional warmth; and that quality childcare be available for participants’ children. People are better able to pay attention and learn when they feel at ease. They are also more likely to share painful experiences, which can be healing for them, empathy-producing and instructive for the group, whose embodied understandings of what others share will vary depending on their intersectional embodied identities as well as lived experiences.

When people feel safe, they are more able to develop trust. As social movement theorist Tarrow points out, common interpretations and identities are also important for generating
trust among organizational members (Tarrow, 1998, p. 21). This is part of learning the language and coding system of a community of practice, to be examined below. The importance of space and trust to successful learning and group functioning highlights the importance of attending to the holistic self in organizational spaces. The content of the formación must not only be relevant and accurate, but the larger learning and organizational environment must also be learning-suitable.

An example of a space created in an AMPDE meeting in 2010 in Cayambe exemplifies what kinds of spaces may be able to facilitate learning consciousness through sharing similar experiences. Here I share an excerpt from an article I published in the feminist magazine *Flor del Guanto*:

Sitting around a room in a community center in Cayambe were indigenous and mestiza campesinas from the Andean, Amazon and coastal regions of Ecuador, along with mestiza feminists from Quito, and myself, a white urban gringa. We were discussing the Law of Equality, a law that was soon to be debated in the National Assembly. The assembled women discussed the harsh realities and inequalities of their lives, rights guaranteed them by the constitution, and made suggestions for the drafting of the law. There was a tangible sense of shared experience and understanding among the women present – despite their differences in age, geographical location, and ethnicity, they all understood what it means to be responsible for everything at home and they acknowledged the ironies and impossibilities of the differences between their rights and their realities.

We turned to the topic of the rights to retire and rest. Having clarified that everything they do in their homes *is* work, they suggested the new law mandate a retirement age of 45 for women who work at home, since they had begun working by age 5, giggling all the while at the idea that *they* would ever retire. The right to vacation was the next topic, and the apparent absurdity of that concept in their lives was summed up by an elderly indigenous woman who had been silent all morning. She had perfect comic timing – waiting for just the right pause in conversation, she said, “We get vacation when we give birth.” The room erupted into laughter. Someone else spoke up, “We may joke about these things, but they are real.” “Yes, they are real!” the room responded as if in chorus. The laughter was not negating the reality, but affirming it and was evidence for me of a profound shared understanding of the situation (Hill, 2013).
While AMPDE meeting spaces are not always so idyllic (I have also witnessed public disagreements and behind-the-scenes disillusionments), the creation of spaces where such diverse women can talk and listen and find common perspective is important. It is especially crucial for organizations such as the AMPDE whose goals include creating spaces for discussion in order to be able to systemize diverse perspectives and transfer them to spaces inhabited by law-makers.

*Listening, reflection and dialogue skills*

In situations where empathy and solidarity are goals of procesos de formación, it is important that group members have active listening, self-reflection (Schirch, 2004) and dialogue skills. This is especially important where group members come from different backgrounds and may have stereotypic impressions of one another. Love is also an important element for radical personal transformation (Freire, 1970, p. 78), but if that is not possible, it is at least important that participants have compassion and respect for themselves and one another.

*Knowledge and language*

It is important that facilitators are knowledgeable of not only the topic they are teaching, but also of the participants’ context and interests, and are able and prepared to communicate in the language most adequate for the setting. Mentioned over and over in the IEE study was how problematic and how common it is for facilitators to use unfamiliar technical or academic language or only speak Spanish when participants speak Kichwa or a different language. Workshops based on written exercises or texts for communities with an oral culture or where people don’t know how to write or read also hinder or prohibit
learning. These linguistic practices limit participation and understanding and can generate a sense of incompetence and/or frustration among participants. In other cases, a specific technical language is necessary to reach participants. For example, one of the leaders of Casa Trans-Proyecto Transgénero (Trans House - Transgender Project) explained that in the workshops given by her organization to police in an effort to diminish police violence against transgendered people, being able to speak to police officers “in their own language” was very important.

Knowledge of the local context of the formación has to do with respecting different paradigms, cosmovisions, realities and values. It is important that those facilitating formaciones are not only fluent in the language of the participants but also their culture.

For example, many rural indigenous women’s organizations have different perspectives on abortion, justice, and what to do about men’s violent behavior toward women than do urban mestiza groups.

Important to learning is the “match” that exists between a person’s embodied perspective on the world, the underlying assumptions and overt teachings of the formación, the language used, and the organizational community of practice’s culture. Many times women who do not appropriate the ways of seeing and language of an organization do not feel comfortable there and simply leave. This could be because they do not think they will be able to make changes in their lives or because the practices, including language, of that community do not make sense given their understanding of the world.
Group learning, group consciousness

While it is possible to learn a new consciousness by oneself, from activities like reading, listening to the radio or watching television, most people report shifts in consciousness happening in group settings. Collective consciousness-raising has proven to be very powerful (Freire, 1970; Hill Collins, 1991; Larry Cottin Pogrebin, 2002; C. Moraga & Castillo, 1988). This is especially the case for the situations I examine as my research is focused on women who are part of women’s organizations. This chapter highlights situations where the individual’s consciousness is connected to the group’s consciousness.

Teaching to the holistic self

Organizational leaders participating in the IEE project recognized holistic approaches as important for formaciones, highlighting spirituality’s role. Some talked about Catholic spirituality; others discussed indigenous spirituality or ancestral wisdom. The organization Jambi Kiwa’s goal is to “rescue ancestral knowledges for the production, processing and commercializing of medicinal plants with the active participation of men and women from Chimborazo.” In line with this goal, they conduct formaciones based on the experiences of their members in order to value their knowledge, wisdom and capacities. From Cuenca, Sandra Peñaherrera explained her organization GAMMA’s holistic approach:

It is necessary to work with the body and spirituality, because spirituality is one of the important parts of everything. We work with essential human needs from the systematic schools, since needs are the same for all human beings but the ways of meeting those needs are different… We also base our work in religion, in agents of socialization like religion that influence our construction. Therefore the topic of transcendence, like I mentioned, from spirituality… it’s a necessity to transcend, to know that I am something more. We work with spirituality, with transcendence, as a human and an essential need, but [we treat] spiritually as a practice… not [as] something in the air, but as practical. Part of spirituality is to care for our water, part of spirituality is to sit and contemplate the landscape.
It is interesting to see how the inclusion of the spiritual aspect of the self is recognized by organizational leaders as important to their members and to learning processes. Taking different kinds of knowledges (in the examples given above, spiritual and campesino knowledges) seriously enough to use them as the foundation for educational processes is an important political and feminist action as it resists hegemonic definitions of what counts as knowledge and who is capable of knowing, centering people and knowledges that have been devalued and invisiblized, re-coding and teaching new ways of seeing these knowledges as valuable as it does so.

Process

The frequency and continuity of procesos de formación was also evaluated by the IEE study’s participants. Organizations reported that 78% of their formacions were isolated workshops rather than ongoing formation processes, and they resoundingly said that this method does not work well to create deep and lasting learning. They noted that when they were able to plan multiple workshops at the same time, connecting the topics to be learned, they were much more successful. Instruction about particular issues needs to be situated within a larger framework and connected to organizations’ goals (Webster, 2013). This may be what planning multiple workshops at the same time lets organizational leaders do: connect all the workshops to their overall goals for participants.

One way to reinforce learning is to have participants replicate formaciones. Jambi Kiwa and the Center of Development and Social Investigation (CEDIS), both in Riobamba, reported positive experiences including as part of workshops the requirement that participants replicate in their communities what they had learned in the formación. Richter and Timm (2005) describe their “learning for understanding” framework as the opposite of
rote memorization and define it as “the ability to apply, transfer, transform (and be transformed by) knowledge” (Richter & Timm, 2005, p. 3). It makes sense, then, that replicating knowledge recently acquired would not only be helpful for spreading knowledge, but also for reinforcing learning.

**Pedagogical Tactics for Teaching Consciousness**

*Comparing common experience and denormalizing hegemonic beliefs and behaviors: Groups with similar intersectional embodied identities*

As all the research done was with women’s organizations seeking to empower women, there were not any groups who identified only with having privileged identities. Thus the analysis summarized here is for groups who are dealing with oppression in their daily lives. The tactics used to concientizar groups of people with privileged identities would obviously need to be very different. Even within groups with non-privileged identities, organizers must determine if they want participants to compare experiences to find similarities or if they want them to share experiences highlighting the differences in their lived realities and material experiences. The first technique, looking for similarities, helps makes visible structural social forces and how they shape and restrict life. It has proven its capacity to be a life-changing experience (Hester Eisenstein, 2001; Lerry Cottin Pogrebin, 2002; S. K. Sowards & Renegar, 2004). The second technique, sharing stories of difference, has shown its power to create empathetic understanding of realities different from one’s own and foster solidarity. Skilled facilitation is necessary both during the sharing and afterwards, when participants’ stories are coded.

*Highlighting common experience*
In communities of practice whose members have similar intersectional embodied identities, many groups that attempt to foment critical political consciousness attempt to create emotionally safe spaces where women can talk about their lives as women, or as indigenous women, urban women, etc. In listening to one another, they often recognize aspects of their own lives – behaviors, routines, and feelings – in one another’s stories. It becomes apparent that certain dynamics in the lives of group members are similar. The understanding that one’s experiences are similar to those of people with similar intersectional embodied identities affects different levels of the self.

First, when newcomers learn to code this commonality as the result of structural forces, they gain an intellectual understanding that the experience is shared because it emerges from hegemonic forces that intend to maintain the status quo. This is empowering as people learn to see oppression as what kept them from acting or realizing their potential rather than some personal deficit (Freire, 1970). Second, the discovery often results in the sensation, or sense of relief, that “I’m not the only one.” This realization is emotional, as often the normative codes explaining violent experiences, particularly for people with oppressed public identity characteristics, communicate that they are the victim’s fault, “to be expected,” something shameful to be hidden, that the person is crazy or the only one with that problem, or any combination of those messages. While it can be difficult to recount painful past experiences, when done in a setting and using techniques to prevent re-traumatizing the speaker (Evergreen, 2014, February 13-19), sharing can be therapeutic (Evergreen, 2014, February 13-19; Warren, 1976) for the emotional and physical, the individual and collective body. Methodological techniques which facilitate encounters
between people with similar (public) identities to share and analyze experiences were evaluated as important by the women with whom I’ve spoken.

_Denormalizing the hegemonic_

Once people have seen that their experiences are common, it has proven effective for facilitators to use the strategy of highlighting certain behaviors (Goodwin, 1994), like “hitting your wife,” that often go unnoticed with common sense vision because according to hegemonic codes those actions are “natural,” defined as commonplace and unobjectionable. They assign new codes which link what were seen as individual or interpersonal issues to hegemonic social structures, revealing that participants’ experiences were similar because they stemmed from those structural factors. This re-teaching and denormalizing how people see their experiences can facilitate critical political and self-aware consciousness.

In the spaces where this sharing and denormalizing happens, people also often learn new tools – analytical skills and languages (such as human rights language) used by the organizational community of practice. In many organizations, critical vision is part of becoming part of a critical community of practice. It involves learning the group’s shared language. This enables sharing perceptions, facilitates “insider” conversations and a sense of community (Lave, 1991). For newcomers, then, learning to see and appropriating new tools is not only part of learning critical consciousness, but is also part of joining the group.

The Combahee River Collective describes well the holistic experiences of people who gain critical political consciousness as a result of this process. “Black feminists often talk about feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics,
patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression” (The Combahee River Collective, 1983, p. 11). As is apparent in this quotation, learning new codes and language to express violence and discrimination has emotional as well as intellectual repercussions. With critical perspectives women stop “feeling crazy” and understand that they are not aware of the commonness of their oppression because of their standpoint in society. “An oppressed group’s… lack of control over the ideological apparatuses of society makes expressing a self-defined standpoint more difficult… groups unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others” (Hill Collins, 1991). Normative codes which seek to maintain power relations are typically taught to people when they are still children, as we will see in Chapter Five, so unlearning them often brings a huge sense of relief.

Denormalizing hegemonic beliefs and behaviors is a strategy related to acquiring critical political consciousness. In my interview with Enith (CF) we discussed how many members of the AMPDE had changed their ways of thinking based on their organizational participation. When I asked Enith why she thought that occurred, she talked about people realizing that things that are very natural to them are not “normal.” She uses normal here to mean acceptable, right, correct, which is obviously a different meaning than circumstances where normal conveys commonplace and unobjectionable. She said (emphasis mine):

It’s being aware of your reality. So it’s realizing that you live in an oppressive reality, and that in this oppressive reality are options for change; that it’s not normal. So it’s not normal that a woman is killing herself working while the husband strictly, the only thing he does is come home with the money and that’s it. So it’s not normal that as women we take on all the responsibilities in the home, it’s not normal that they exploit you at work with the pretext that since you’re a woman… You, you start to see that these things aren’t normal. And this… can generate, I’ve
seen two cases, that it can generate you hiding yourself, withdrawing, conforming
yourself to that life because there’s no way it will change, you can’t do anything.
The other… possibility is to change. That totally depends on the individual and
their conditions, what one is able to do…

The terms “being aware” and “realizing” signal that Enith learned new codes and thus a
new way of seeing (similarly to when people say “the blindfold was removed”). In the
situation Enith describes, the community of practice re-coded as hegemonic and patriarchal
what had previously been understood as “normal” behavior enabling people to see
oppressive social structures and the inequality, injustice and violence that result from them.
These codes, ways of seeing, analytical skills, and language are important aspects of
learning critical political consciousness as is becoming part of the community of practice of
organizations which teach them. Learning these tools creates the possibility for change –
both because assumptions and beliefs are revealed as constructed, and because the thoughts
and behaviors built on inequality, injustice and violence are coded as such and more likely
to be rejected.

*Listening with openness to experiences different than yours: Unlearning epistemological ignorance*

When groups with different identities and experiences are formed, there are more
opportunities for participants to interact based on epistemological ignorance, appropriated
privilege and oppression. There is also the opportunity, however, to create empathy and
solidarity. In such groups facilitators should be very conscious of creating a culture of trust
and respect, and be prepared to deal with situations where hegemonic power relations play
out between participants. Here I will focus on situations I witnessed or heard about where
people have unlearned privilege and developed empathy. I attempt to analyze what can be
learned from them.
Enith (CF) told me that she learned to “recognize herself” in that she was able to understand her parents as campesinos through her participation in the AMPDE. She recounted as important “a tour we did when we went to Intag… where we went to see the alternative agricultural production projects… It reminded me of the place where my parents are from.” She recalls that event as enabling her to value her campesino heritage rather than being ashamed of it as she previously had been. Her self-aware consciousness was impacted at the same time as her critical political consciousness on the Intag tour, as she learned a new way of seeing and valuing both rural life and her identity.

It is clear by now that coalitions and relationships of solidarity have to be constructed based on differences rather than ignoring differences, a strategy that has been attempted and that has failed every time. It is also clear that the only way that this type of solidarity creation can happen is if those involved, especially those with privileged identities, listen to and respect others’ perspectives, experiences and wisdom. It is challenging to create a safe space and trust in a group where there has been animosity between members, but if conscientizando is going to happen in that space, surmounting this obstacle is necessary.

On an individual level, openness to listening to rather than judging new perspectives is an essential prerequisite. People with more self-aware consciousness are more likely to have this openness as they have more perspective on and ability to observe and not completely identify with the thoughts, emotions, physical reactions that surface with exposure to new and potentially unsettling things. In the following excerpt from an interview, I give an example of how Rosa Ana (MUC)’s stereotypes began to break down and how she has begun to develop deeper consciousness of gender discrimination and violence and develop empathy for trans women, who she sees as very different from her.
Rosa Ana: As you know, in the AMPDE there is a bit of everything, everyone, even in terms of gender, there’s everything, uh huh. It made me very very sad that they killed Evelyn. She shared a lot with me in a workshop where we could share about our personal lives. They organized a workshop about sharing and it really hurt that they killed Evelyn, I don’t accept that, I don’t see why. I also have shared a lot with Shirley, who deep down is a very good woman, and I don’t like to make differences. But my way of thinking has changed more after being in the women’s organization, because… in the Andean region, black women, I haven’t had problems with race; I even liked dark guys and it seemed like my mom had a bit of a problem with that – how could you with a dark guy, no! – but I, I always have had… but before it wasn’t accepted. But I did have a little resistance to gay people, yes. Joining the organization I have accepted them one hundred percent, I don’t have a problem with sharing with them, with walking around with them, no problem.

Dana: And what changed your way of thinking?

Rosa Ana: It was sharing with them, living with them, because you go to an assembly and you live with them, sometimes you even share a room so you see practically normal people; well they are normal, the fact that they changed gender doesn’t mean that they stop being people, human. So it was when I was in a national workshop about citizenship, they took us to see different experiences and there… they let us choose, and they said we could visit a group of gays in Guayaquil and I said no, it’s better that I go here to Las Cometas where they work with kids, with women… it would be better there. But when I joined the Assembly [AMPDE] it was different, there, yes, it changed my way of thinking because you sit with her to talk and you’re talking to a person…

Because she was open and able to listen to Evelyn and Shirley and because they were willing to share their perspectives, Rosa Ana has learned a new way of seeing what it means to be a woman. The AMPDE provided her a space where she could share with transgender women; in that space she was able to learn new codes for “normal” and “woman” and therefore a new way of seeing. Her critical political consciousness was transformed through listening and sharing as she learned to become part of the community of practice of the AMPDE which accepted trans women as normal members of the organization.

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60 Evelyn was a transgender activist who was killed in a hate crime in 2010. See [http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ec/noticias/2224-las-trans-piden-tolerancia-.html](http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ec/noticias/2224-las-trans-piden-tolerancia-.html).
In this example the weight of conscientizando people with more normalized identities and epistemic ignorance falls on the more oppressed person, a problematic dynamic which adds weight to the already heavy burden of having a discriminated-against identity (E. Ellsworth, 1989; C. Moraga & Anzalúa, 1981). It is still a hopeful example of people finding a space to speak, listen and to share with one another and to be transformed by the experience. It seems to be in such spaces where people can listen and learn to see the world through one another’s eyes that consciousness can be transformed and solidarity can be built.

A second example of transformation through listening comes from Isabela (MI) who explained that she used to be wary about working with indigenous people. When I asked her how she overcame that reticence that she answered:

I think that wariness passed 12 years ago, since when Auki Tituña [the past mayor of Cotacachi] united people through the citizen participation [process]. So I think that it was there that we got to know each other more, we lost the hesitation, the fear… We sat down at a table to write down ideas. We sat a table to eat and to debate. Not just to eat but also to discuss the problems that had happened in the past. I think that this has been an accomplishment and there I believe that Cotacachi was the protagonist at a national level and for the world, having these encounters with [people of different] ethnicities.

Isabela was also open to listening to others’ experiences and perspectives. She attributes having the opportunity to sit with, eat with and talk to people she saw as different from her as what helped her overcome her hesitation to work with people of diverse ethnic identities. Opportunities for meaningful contact, openness and the ability to listen are all important factors in allowing other people’s stories transform one’s consciousness.

Reading can be another way of accessing the stories and perspectives of those with different identities and experiences than your own in ways that conscientizar. In the space of the Casa Feminista, where members are popular and middle class urban mestizas,
reading and reflecting on written material was mentioned as transformative and has helped the women develop solidarity with groups with quite different identities. Many of the members of this organization talked about the importance of reading and discussing texts as a group, a practice of the groups they originally joined in the 80s and 90s. In leftist organizations they read Marxist literature, in Christian base communities the Bible, in feminist spaces they read especially Latin American feminist and US women of color feminist literature. Reading, collectively discussing, and publishing their own writing in the various magazines they have produced over the years, such as La Flor del Guanto, La Pepa, and Los Cuadernos Feministas have been central to shifting and shaping consciousness in the spaces where critical political and self-aware consciousness meet.

As part of their organizational lives, women in the Casa Feminista have engaged in analyses of intersectional identities and the implications for their lives and work. In interviews, some associated those reflections more with discovering their own oppression, others with recognizing their own privilege, and with both perspectives. Nancy (CF) gives a wonderful description of how her own privilege was made obvious to her through texts.

Audre Lorde – when I read her I was like aaaaah – [she led me to] to discover, to construct another vision of the world… it was a painful process too… painful in various ways – first to see the blindness with which you grow up – that impedes you from seeing the specificity of your existence, of your own life, of your own experience and the experiences of others that are always silenced, always – and to suddenly discover in the words of other women these sensitive things… that are in your life. It was wonderful… and painful because it meant taking a position about life that also implied ruptures and ruptures with friends, compañeros… It created a distancing with my own dad… and it was also painful because in the middle of this we [in the Casa Feminista] always put ourselves in question, from our own class

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61 Of course identity and positionality change as one moves from one space to another. This is an important point that deserves further comment Maria Isabel has spent time in Europe, where she was on the receiving end of xenophobic attitudes in a way that she obviously is not in Ecuador.
privilege, and that is hard, to be able to look at power, to become aware of power, and to try to transform things from there.

Lucy (CF) describes some of the questioning Nancy describes. She talked a lot about mestizaje in her interview, explaining why she chose to write her doctoral dissertation on the historical construction of “mestiza consciousness” in Ecuador.

In the doctorate [program] and also as part of the reflections in the Casa Feminista appeared… a strong questioning of your place. This doctorate is in cultural studies and they are very critical about power’s place and knowledge construction. Adding to this what we have been working on with the compañeras in the Casa Feminista – these relationships between unequal women – it became a really powerful thing, I just couldn’t brush it to the side and continue the easy road…”

Although she had enough information compiled to write a dissertation on Afro-Ecuadorian communities where she had been working for years, she re-did her dissertation proposal and started over in order to look at mestizaje, specifically at mestiza consciousness. Both of these women describe how written texts in combination with the critical analysis at both a personal and societal level led to changes in their lives. Their critical political consciousness and awareness of their privilege were especially impacted as they came to understand the intersectional nature of hegemonic social structures and their place in those structures based on their public identity characteristics. They allowed these shifts in consciousness to affect, in Nancy’s case, her relationships with others and in Lucy’s case, her academic and career path. These women were obviously open to “listening” as they read, letting the written word and the group consciousness of their feminist collective transform them.

*Explaining the ramifications of violence and injustice on the self*

While not as common as conducting a political analysis of women’s experiences, procesos de formación that explain the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual impact of structural
violence or hegemonic power relationships are teaching aspects of self-aware consciousness. When I asked Irene (MUC) what she liked about participating in the AMPDE, she said she liked that:

One gets filled up with knowledges, from the beginning you hear stories… about one another. You hear, you learn and you see that I am not the only one who has been affected since I was a little girl with things that won’t leave one… There have been the same, similar cases, in people from other [organizational] processes. They are lived experiences – I am not the only this happened to; there are even more painful, more difficult cases. So one listens. This is beautiful because we are able to let go, and speak, and remove a weight that holds us back. This is what I have liked about those spaces; that there have been a lot of participatory workshops.

As Irene says, listening to others in participatory spaces gives one perspective on one’s own painful experiences. She likens speaking about her reality to removing a weight, testifying to the emotional benefits of the formación and their effects on her body. She also talks about the knowledge gained from the experience.

Although the therapeutic is typically divorced from political organizational spaces and the aspect of these encounters that is emotionally healing is not often evaluated by organizations or researchers, I argue that organizations should consider providing women and others access to spaces of healing. As I have suggested, this would support a holistic understanding of how the violence that results from hegemony affects individuals and groups. It would also increase the possibility of creating relationships based on empathy and solidarity.

The importance of hope

When Enith (CF) talked about people’s different reactions to the denormalization of inequality in their lives, she said, “I’ve seen two cases, that it can generate you hiding yourself, withdrawing, conforming yourself to that life because there’s no way it will
change, you can’t do anything. The other… possibility is to change.” She identifies whether or not people think they can change their circumstances as the factor that determines whether or not they accept or reject the new codes, tools, and ways of seeing that reveal hegemonic social structures in their lives. The withdrawing she mentioned is reflected in Freire’s observations.

Hope is rooted in men’s incompletion, from which they move out in consistent search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with other men. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it (Freire, 1970, p. 80).

If women have hope that change is possible, they will be more likely to adopt new ways of seeing and speaking and try to make changes in their lives or in the world. It might be too painful for people who perceive no possibility for positive change to live with the knowledge that things don’t have to be as they are. They seem more likely to reject new skills, codes, communities of practice, and decide to continue relying on the ones they have always known. One woman said to me in an interview that she thought it was worse to be conscious if there were no possibility for economic change. It would be worse to know how badly you have it than to think así es – that’s just how it is.

Making changes in one’s life based on new ways of seeing often involves some risk as it inevitably upsets the status quo with those who have not learned new codes, language and a new way of seeing. Jenny (MMO) told me how, upon leaving the first self-esteem workshop she attended as a new member in the Movimiento de Mujeres del Oro, she walked right by the father of her children with another woman.

In that moment I saw it like that and when I got home… I said, “Do you know what, we’re going this far [and no farther]”… According to him, since he gave me food I had to wash his clothes. I grabbed [his clothes] at that moment and I threw them in the street. He said, “You’re crazy,” and I said, “Yes I’d be crazy to let you set foot
in this house again.” It was my parents’ house. I said, “Do you know what, I prefer to work or to beg in the street, but to wash your clothes, no. I saw you in the Center [of town] with so-and-so and so don’t you come say to me…” …Ever since that moment I began to have the strength of character to say, “No – I made it to this point [but no further].”

For many women the fear of losing a stable income is something that keeps them from separating from violent partners; it is a major risk that accompanies leaving partners after gaining consciousness about violence. Throughout the IEE project, many women, particularly indigenous women, argued for the importance of including men in projects dealing with gender violence. Many other women, particularly urban mestiza women, argue that resources for women’s projects are scarce and don’t want to spend the precious little women have on men.

An interesting possible explanation of these differences comes from Julieta Paredes, a Bolivian indigenous feminist intellectual activist who is at the forefront of developing “community feminism” as an alternative to Western feminism in Latin America. She writes,

> We begin from the community with the inclusive principle of taking care of life (que cuida la vida). To construct community feminism it is necessary to demystify the man-woman (chachi-warmi) that impedes our analysis of the life realities of women in our country. In the West feminism has meant that women position themselves as individuals in front of men… We don’t want to think of ourselves compared to men, but rather think of ourselves women and men in relationship to the community (Paredes, 2010, p. 27-28, emphasis in original).

Perhaps it is the experience of living in community that gives women hope that men can also change and that indigenous women can create the type of feminism necessary for their communal intersectional embodied identities. As Freire (1970) writes, it is not limiting factors that create hopelessness, “but rather how they are perceived by man [sic] at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers” (p. 89).
One factor that influences how obstacles are seen is “critical perception” which he asserts “is embodied in action” and leads to the development of “a climate of hope and confidence… which leads men to attempt to overcome the limit-situations” (Freire, 1970, p. 89).

While she doesn’t use the word hope, the conclusion to Paredes’ book is hopeful, as she and her community imagine the feminism they desire and work to make it a reality.

This is another stage of life, another moment of our personal histories and another moment of our collective history, we are mature, with strong wings and plentiful energies. We have on our backs the coherence of our luchas and the promise that while sometimes there are weariness bewilderment and vexations, we will keep building utopias. This work opens the way for many more, we are beginning to specify the feminism that we want to construct and that excites us, it is thrilling to make concrete the ideas that are dancing around out there (Paredes, 2010, p. 49).

It is important for organizations to think about how to create the conditions and support systems in which people dare to hope and where they can trust the other members of their community of practice, understanding that hope is an important component for members of a community of practice to feel empowered to demand changes based on the new vision of the world taught by that same community. Organizations should be aware that it is possible to provoke feelings of hopelessness by teaching new codes and ways of seeing that create awareness of injustice and power differentials. As Paredes clearly states, the role of the group and the community in critical movements such as feminism is crucial. Individuals always function as part of a group, of a community of practice. Knowing this we must pay close attention to those dynamics, leveraging them to foment consciousness and hope.
**Imagining different realities**

Another important strategy which teaches critical political consciousness and simultaneously inspires hope is access to lived or imagined alternatives to current realities. Concrete ideas as well as visual images of alternatives teach by literally allowing one to “see” a way of life not previously considered. Both in the workshops and interviews the act of leaving one’s space and seeing another reality was frequently cited as transformative.

Many women talked about the importance of exchanges with other organizations or groups. Others said just getting out of their homes or communities to attend meetings and workshops as part of communities of practice offered different ways of seeing and understanding society. In those spaces they were often exposed to new ideas and ways of living that resonated with their sumak kawsay wisdom. These ideas about how to live became tools for change. As Clara (CCMU) said:

> I would say that when one leaves to receive trainings, it’s like one is liberated and begins to think about things differently. Because when one is used to being in the house, immersed only in the home, the housework, one feels timid… but if one goes and gets trained, one hears so many things it’s like one starts liberating oneself a little bit, and goes choosing different actions with oneself. Or maybe, it’s that one’s self-esteem gets put at another [level]… it’s raised.

Here, Clara, as a rural woman who works in the home, links freedom with self-esteem with getting out of the house and listening to new ways of thinking about life. It is not so much the topic of the trainings that she remembers or recounts as important, but the act of going and being in those spaces, of hearing new things, that enables her to “liberate herself.” Learning human rights language is also powerful in this way as it gives those who learn it an image of how the world should be. When Cecilia says, “I have the right to education” she is able to imagine herself in school.
Sometimes groups organize visits to other regions and communities to observe other organizations’ projects when they are planning to begin a similar venture (such as a microcredit or agricultural production project). Exchanging facts and actually seeing the project function provide invaluable information for newcomers.

A recommendation for organizations is that they facilitate situations where people can visualize or otherwise experience desired changes at individual, communal, or societal levels. This is important given the knowledge that embodied experience gives the intersectional embodied self important information for making change a reality.

**Hidden Curriculum**

The idea of the hidden curriculum is important to any analysis of teaching practices. Typically used to analyze dynamics in schools, it is defined as:

The unofficial rules, routines, and structures of schools through which students learn behaviors, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Elements of the hidden curriculum do not appear in schools’ written goals, formal lesson plans, or learning objectives although they may reflect culturally dominant social values and ideas about what schools should teach (Hamilton & Powell, 2007).

Knowing that social organizations are educational spaces, we can see that it is not just the formal procesos de formación that are educational, but also organizations’ “unofficial rules, routines, and structures,” discourses and attitudes that are an accepted part of their culture.

To illustrate how the hidden curriculum works in organizational spaces and how it shapes members’ consciousness, I will quote at length from one of the MUC weekly meetings, meetings I attended over the course of a year. I consider this piece fairly typical of this group’s discourse in ways I will explain below. One day in late November 2010, seven members of the organization and I were assembled one Tuesday evening, as usual, for the
meeting. The women were preparing for their annual “16 days of activism” for the international day against violence against women (November 25), and the current president of the group was explaining to the other women at the meeting the fight she had with the man at the municipal government with whom she was working to print shirts and magnets promoting the event.

President: I went and explained [to Pamela, an allied city council member] that I had been talking to the women from the AMPDE and that they gave me a different phrase [to use on promotional materials for the event], explaining that “peace and tenderness” made us smaller, made us fragile, weak, and we are not that; we are strong! And [municipal government employee] came, we showed it to him, and he said no. Then he [told me]… that our logo has to be on the same level as all the other women’s organizations. For me, this was a huge blow; and I insulted [him]. I thought Dr. Pamela was going to support me, but she didn’t support me. I said, if there is one person who is here, it is me, and I represent the Urban Women… This is a very ugly thing. First [municipal government employee] says it is fine, then he says it is not. A bad word escaped my lips; I almost threw the computer!

Member 1: Well done! I approve of that.

President: It’s because they have the money, so they have the power.

Ex-president: That is violence. It’s the day against violence against women and they treat us with violence.

President: I’m not trying to belittle the other women [from the other women’s organizations in Cotacachi], but we had a meeting with the municipal government, and they didn’t show up. Margarita [indigenous woman, president of the CCMC] was the only one at the meeting and she didn’t have anything planned, no one from Intag came, they just sent their logo, and Manduracos only sent their logo.

Member 1: We should have privilege.

President: We always do everything alone.

Member 3: The Andean [indigenous] women are always there talking among themselves in Kichwa.

Member 4: …And embroidering

Member 5: They don’t ever help with anything… We, the Urbanas, are ones who have done everything.

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62 Invented name.
63 Invented name
Member 1: …And they always bring their kids with them.

[...]

Ex-president: This is a very grave situation… all that is happening with us is terrible, first with the Center [for women victims of violence] and now this. The 16 days of activism came from us. I want to propose something to you all, to do a big event celebrating our 10th anniversary. We will do an event with an international artist or something, and we will publish our budget, the history of our organization, everything we have done, and … we will recognize… Dr. Marianita [from the urban zone], Magdalena from the Andean [indigenous] zone, and Irma64 in Intag. She’s a strong/tough black (es una negra bien parada).

I include this extensive quotation from one of their meetings to illustrate several things about the organizational culture and the hidden curriculum that exists in the Urban Women’s organization in Cotacachi, and how it affects their consciousness as a group and as individuals. First, I want to call attention to their analysis of gender and power. The president conducts an analysis of symbolic violence, learned in collaboration with other women’s groups (the president mentioned this analysis being done with leaders of the AMPDE in her individual interview with me) when she explains how language is used to make women small. The group also conducts an analysis of power relations between groups, noting that the municipal government in this situation has the money and power to decide and approve what happens. The ex-president categorizes this as violence. The current president of the Urbanas clearly resists the municipal government’s attempts to dominate the decision-making in her discourse and actions as she recounts them, and expresses anger with the municipal employee embodying the government’s power. From this excerpt of conversation we can see that as a group, the Urbanas exhibit and encourage critical gender consciousness. They are able to see through the lens of power relations to analyze and talk about the violence and injustice they face as women and as a small organization dependent on external funds.

64 Invented name
Second, I want to call attention to the lack of consciousness of the intersectional nature of identities at the level of the individual and group. The way that these members of the MUC criticize indigenous women, women from the rural zone of Intag, and the harsh way they attempt to express admiration for a rural Afro-Ecuadorian woman reinforces the colonial order of public identities, thus perpetuating violence. Rather than understanding, or attempting to understand, why indigenous women speak to one another in Kichwa, embroider, and bring their children with them to meetings, they judge them for these things. My attention was drawn to how many women, who had previously just been listening, chimed in to complain about indigenous women’s behavior when it was first mentioned. It shows how much this perspective is part of the group culture. The Urbanas are obviously “blind” to this, however. Whatever the reasons, they have not developed an empathetic or intersectional “way of seeing.”

Third, this non-empathetic way of seeing “others” seems to go hand in hand with a sense of their group as victim. As a collective, they talk about themselves in ways that reinforce the stereotype of the suffering woman, the victim, who does all of the work and gets none of the credit. While it is true in Ecuadorian society that on average women work more and receive less recognition (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas y Censos, 2012b), in this case the women are comparing their organization to other women’s organizations. From spending time with this group over the course of a year, I know that they also often complain that the Andinas and women from Intag “get all the funding.” The sense of competition between their group and other groups is a constant, accompanying the victim discourse. This topic will be addressed further in Chapter Seven, which contemplates conflict and solidarity among the various organizations with which I collaborated.
The hidden curriculum in the MUC includes teaching ways of coding that enable seeing and language that enables articulating relations of power around gender issues. It teaches codes which obscure the intersectional nature of gender and facilitate judging rather than seeking to understand other groups of women. It teaches codes which reinforce a vision of themselves and their organization as receiving unfair treatment in relationship to funding and recognition for projects addressing women’s issues in Cotacachi.

Conclusion: Teaching Consciousness

Organizations, and the procesos de formación they offer their members, respond to women’s needs given the sociopolitical realities of the Ecuadorian context. These trainings cover a range of topics, some offering practical skills to address women’s economic and political needs, others fomenting critical political and self-aware consciousness. The methodologies which were evaluated by organizational leaders as effective are Freirian, participatory methodologies, as opposed to the common but unpopular banking methods (Freire, 1970). Emphasizing what works, in the rest of the chapter I focus on strategies for teaching consciousness.

In reviewing self-evaluations of participants in the IEE project about what worked in terms of teaching and carrying out successful procesos de formación with their members, this list of five factors emerged: (1) The place where the workshop is being held should be a safe space. This enables people to feel comfortable, to be attentive, to learn, and to share. A trusting relationship between group members is part of creating this safe space. (2) Ideally, participants should have listening, reflection and dialogue skills. This is especially important for groups where people come from very different backgrounds, have different
identities, where trust is not yet established, and/or where conflictual topics are to be discussed. (3) It is important that the workshop facilitator knows the context where she is teaching and can speak the language appropriate for that community. (4) Pedagogical techniques should take advantage of the fact that learning happens collectively and that group consciousness is powerful and related to individual consciousness. (5) Teaching methods should aim to teach the holistic person. Pedagogical techniques that access the mind, emotions, body and spirit should ideally be used.

Looking specifically at consciousness-raising techniques, I observed the functionality of slightly different strategies given different goals for the process. In situations where members of the assembled group have similar public identity characteristics, the “consciousness-raising” formula popular in feminist organizations in the 1970s proved to have retained its effectiveness for the appropriation of liberation or the creation of critical political consciousness (Tappan, 2006). First, stories are compared and the facilitator leads a discussion which makes apparent that the person telling about her life is “not the only one” to have experienced violence or discrimination. The realization that one is not alone is an emotional relief (Hill Collins, 1991; Lerry Cottin Pogrebin, 2002; The Combahee River Collective, 1983; Warren, 1976). Second, group leaders teach ways of coding life experiences that denormalize women’s experiences and assign hegemonic forces responsibility for inequality and injustice. Third, participants are taught new linguistic (human rights language, for example), critical thinking and analytic tools which facilitate their ability to analyze and express their new critical perspective. Fourth, they are offered alternative ways of living which enable them to imagine a different reality and take steps to attain it.
Where groups have significantly different intersectional embodied identities, or where the goal is to center difference as important and create empathy, rather than looking for similarities in stories, group members recount stories of life experiences that are very different than those of other participants. Those who are listening should focus on listening empathetically. They should cultivate openness to changing how they see and understand the world. Steps two, three and four are the same in this process, only that those explaining how hegemonic forces structure embodied experiences cannot assume that those experiences are shared. What can be assumed to be shared are the underlying values and hierarchies structuring society. In such situations there is the opportunity to talk about privilege and epistemological ignorance to the people present with more privileged identity characteristics.

Other factors that came up in my analysis as important for procesos de formación are developing long term educational processes comprised of sessions that build each other as opposed to isolated workshops, and having students replicate sessions to re-teach what was learned. It is also important to pay attention to the hidden curriculum in any teaching space in order to be aware of what is being taught through unofficial guidelines, behaviors, and assumptions (Hamilton & Powell, 2007). Lastly, the presence of hope is necessary for any process of change; without it, people often do not try to change themselves or society, but rather withdraw from the world (Freire, 1970).
Photo 5: Mishary Flores Fueres, the daughter of Magdalena Fueres Flores, has accompanied her mother to meetings her whole life. She is already following in her mother’s footsteps, organizing the children in her community to participate in community events and celebrations. I think this picture captures her capacity for concentration and her luminescence. She herself reminds me of all that we learn as children. Whether it is reminding me how important childhood is, teaching me how to put on an anako or how to count to ten in Kichwa, Mishary is one of my teachers.
Dedos de karishina

What could be less lady-like than climbing a tree? It is a feat that would prove impossible in typical feminine attire, an act where it is impossible to keep your legs together or look dignified. Climbing takes coordination, muscle and fearlessness. Few adults would venture up the tree behind a child, and so the act gives freedom. From up high, the expanse of your vision widens. The cares of earth below – parents, chores, siblings, sadness and fears are temporarily left behind.

Tree-climbing was a trope among the women I interviewed when they spoke of childhood, and it is an appealing and powerful metaphor: one of growth, freedom, and resistance I attempt to capture in this poem.65

descalza66
toes free on my
feet bare
resting in the crux
of your
gentle strength

arms stretch upward
reaching reaching for Taita Inti67
below his golden rays your rough skin

there!
dedos68 circle around
feel my strength
sure-footed
karishina

abrazandote69
we play
my limbs
crossing, holding, reaching, swinging under
and around

your limbs

catch
cover
rough brownness
cloaking me from below
which has become so pequeño70

quiet

finds me

65 This idea of using tree-climbing as a metaphor was Anya Stanger’s, and this initial paragraph was co-written with her. My deepest gratitude to Anya for her support and insight and for reading all my drafts!

66 “Barefoot” in Spanish

67 “Father sun” in Kichwa.

68 In Spanish, dedos means both “fingers” and “toes.”

69 Spanish for “hugging you”

70 “Small”
reaching upward
Taita Inti
    kissing my forehead

closer to the clouds
wrapped in the wind
wedged between your branches

solitude
silence
    freedom
Identity: Where Self-aware and Critical Political Consciousness Overlap

Identity is a borderland where self-aware and critical political consciousnesses overlap. One aspect of *self-aware consciousness* is awareness of public identities (woman, indigenous, upper class, lesbian, etc.) and subjective identities (who I understand myself to be). When I asked Carmelina (CCMU) how she would describe herself to someone she just met, she said:

> I am an indigenous woman, Kichwa, from a community, although now I live… [on the outskirts of a town]… I really identify with the countryside… with my family too, or my genealogical roots… I am a woman who has two children – a daughter and a son, and I try to do my best to educate them.

Her public and subjective identities overlap as she claims them, identifies with being a woman, as Kichwa, as being from a rural indigenous community.

Central to *critical political consciousness* is awareness of the meanings of public identities’ sociocultural locations (where one stands on the power ladder). Carmelina talked about this in another moment of the interview:

> I have also reflected on all of these things we have lived, in other words, all this injustice levied against women compared to men in the countryside; against indigenous people too, who have also been discriminated against, who have also suffered. But [indigenous] women have been doubly discriminated against, violated.

It is in this intersectional embodied identity – in the bodies of rural indigenous women, for example – where the abstract sociopolitical structures of the world become materialized and personalized for each of us as individuals. Public identities can be understood as the embodiment of social structure, in infinite variety, and herein lies their power for critical consciousness creation. Through accessing lived, embodied experiences based on public identities, people have access to firsthand knowledge about how hegemonic social structures
function both at a political (critical political consciousness) and personal (self-aware consciousness) level. These two types of consciousness are connected through this embodiment of social structure and observations of how that affects the mind, emotion, body and spirit.

Learning identity: Disciplining and agential forces

Public identities are learned. Feminist theory has revealed gender as “a product of social doings” (West & Don H. Zimmerman, 1987), “a stylized repetition of acts” produced “through the stylization of the body” (Butler, 1990). Critical race and postcolonial theory have explained the many ways that race and ethnicity are constructed categories (Du Bois, 1994, 1903, for example; Omi & Winant, 1994), and it has been made explicit as well how identities are learned in relationship to others. This is discussed in terms of how (public) identities are framed in terms of similarities and differences to others (Hernández Basante, 2005, p. 47) and it is related to how individuals conceptualize themselves and the world based on their community’s vision of those things. The individual self is immersed in a perspective, or “group meanings and practices” which “precedes the individual and makes possible self-consciousness or self knowledge” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 117). In effect, “The social precepts which first arise are those of other selves” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 117, citing Mead).

If identities are learned, then what or who teaches them? Who are these “other selves?” Sociocultural theory suggests they are communities of practice. How and where are identities learned? People accept and resist the tools, codes and ways of seeing they are taught as they appropriate intersectional embodied identities and membership in communities of practice (community of urban mestiza girls, rural indigenous girls, etc.). Teaching and learning happens on three levels:
1. The social, cultural, institutional plane,
2. the interpersonal plane, and
3. the personal plane, where tools are appropriated as one’s own (Tappan, 2006).

In other words, one is taught how to be “who one is.” One is taught the linguistic and behavioral tools necessary to see, think, speak, move, feel and act as a member of a particular community of practice “should.” That same community teaches newcomers those tools.

On the institutional plane, this teaching happens in the form of spoken and unspoken rules, punishments, and examples set by others in schools, hospitals, workplaces, and other group spaces. Where communities teach hegemonic norms and behaviors, their teaching is a form of disciplining, of making “docile bodies” easily manipulable by society’s dominant forces (M. Foucault, 1977). Zooming in to observe the quotidian and embodied actions that teach, we see that they are interpersonal: a conversation, a name-calling, a gift given. The people around us communicate to us who we should be, or, more importantly, who we are. Finally, on the personal plane, each individual appropriates tools as part of her identity-based community of practice, making them her own and claiming full membership in that community. “I am an indigenous girl.” “I am an ugly dark-skinned mestiza.” Which norms are taught to an individual depend on her sociocultural location, intersectional embodied identity, and whether her context is more hegemonic or critical in nature.

Individuals do not usually universally accept or resist hegemonic knowledge. Rather they learn and internalize some hegemonic norms which they reproduce with their bodies and actions while simultaneously resisting and contradicting others. Both people with and without critical consciousness exercise agency; for this reason all aspects of identity, even public identity, are not dictated by structure. Like Carmelina, some people claim the public identities assigned by their sociohistorical location, as their own. Others attempt to influence how they are perceived,
usually by changing physical characteristics such as hair, clothing and skin that serve as identity markers.\(^71\)

It is also important to realize that agency is not solely an individual force; it is always also connected to the agency of one’s community of practice.

The individual has agency, but its agency operates from the beginning in a collective context. “The child fashions his own self on the model of other selves. This is not an attitude of imitation, but the self that appears in consciousness must function in conjunction with other selves” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 117, quoting Mead).

While individual agency always functions in relationship to collective agency, it has different manifestations. Sometimes individuals exercise agency in concordance with their community of practice, resisting alongside their feminist mothers, grandmothers and aunts hegemonic teachings of what it means to be a girl. Other times, based on their own experiences and ways of thinking, people develop perspectives, behaviors, and languages contrary to those of their communities.

What is learned and what is resisted about identity depend on these agential choices as well as one’s location, and affect the self (body, thoughts, emotions, and spirit) in different ways. It is the docile learning of “common sense” dictums simultaneously with “good sense” resulting from agency, sumak kawsay wisdom and embodied experiences that result in contradictory consciousness (Sturm, 2002).

Because identities are so central to understanding both types of consciousness, I will examine what is taught about them and how public identities are unevenly learned as women accept and resist hegemonic teachings. I will specifically discuss how little girls are taught to see through learning to code “what is for girls” and what is not, how they are taught “girls’ tools” including

\(^71\) There are countless books and articles written about afrodescendent people’s hair, and in countries like Ecuador where the difference between being indigenous and mestizo is often judged by outward appearance and language, dress and hair style can be changed to claim different identities, a phenomenon also well-documented in the literature.
language, and how they appropriate and resist their communities of practice’s teachings as they become part of those groups over time. If learning is becoming part of a community of practice, and identities are learned, then examining becoming a girl or woman with a particular social location can reveal how hegemonic notions of intersectional identities are taught, appropriated and resisted on a micro level by individual members of that community.

To try to understand how identity is learned in interviews I asked, “When was the first time you realized you were a girl and not a boy, and what that meant?” I asked the same question about racial/ethnic identity and about interviewees’ families’ economic situation. As I didn’t interview anyone openly not heterosexual or from other minority communities, these three questions were most relevant to public identities. I also asked people if they had noticed differences between people of different genders and ethnic/racial backgrounds, and if so, how they explained those differences. In this chapter I analyze their answers complimented by information obtained from participant observation to look at how the women I interviewed appropriated and rejected hegemonic teachings growing up in the process of learning their intersectional embodied identities. This term, as I explained in Chapter One, I use to emphasize the embodiedness and the material and subjective experiences of the self that accompany having a particular intersectional identity, or interwoven combination of public and subjective identity characteristics. As products of opposing forces of structure and agency, both identities and consciousnesses are uneven, multiple and contradictory. It is this contradictory consciousness and its manifestation in women’s intersectional embodied identities that are central to this chapter. While each woman interviewed has an intersectional identity, I address identity axes one at a time.
Different communities of practice, different stories

I investigated women’s memories of becoming girls through the interviews I conducted with members of women’s organizations. While all the groups are or have been affiliated with the Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y Diversas del Ecuador (AMPDE) at some point, they are local groups. As such, many participants grew up in similar sociocultural contexts and share identity characteristics with compañeras from their local organizations. I will name each group here and give a brief synopsis of the basic demographic information of its members.

Starting in Cotacachi, the Comité Central de Mujeres de UNORCAC (CCMU) is the women’s branch of UNORCAC, the indigenous and campesina organization that unites 45 rural, primarily indigenous communities in the canton Cotacachi. The women who comprise the CCMU are mostly indigenous with a few mestiza women, the majority from rural areas. While most active members are over 40 years old, there is a sizeable participation by younger women. Most of the women live on small parcels of land owned by their families and most come from families that did not (many still do not) have access to much cash. There is also a middle class, and wealthy and politically powerful families in the communities. Many of the younger women and those from wealthy families have university degrees while many of the older generations did not complete primary school and many are much more comfortable speaking Kichwa than Spanish.

The Coordinadora de Mujeres Urbanas de Cotacachi (MUC) is made up of mestiza women who live in the urban part of Cotacachi. Most of them came from lower class families, although a fraction from middle or upper class families, and many of them, regardless of class background, now own houses and cars and could be considered middle class. Most completed either primary or secondary school and are artisans, seamstresses, domestic workers, or own small businesses,
while those from wealthier families and those with university degrees work for the state, NGOs, hold public office and/or are medical professionals.

The Coordinadora de Mujeres de Intag (MI) is comprised of mestiza and Afro-Ecuadorian women from the Intag cloud forest, a rural region marked by its physical beauty, biodiversity and remoteness. There is no cell phone service, no high school, busses run once or twice a day and in rainy season are constantly stopped because of landslides, and until recently there were no paved roads. Intag is marked by its inhabitants’ 20-year-long fight to keep mining out of the region. Its economy has traditionally been based on agriculture and livestock but, as part of the anti-mining struggle, has developed eco-tourism, organic coffee, and other “green” industries.

The Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi (AUCC) is the organization I described in the first chapter as founded by Cotacachi’s first indigenous mayor to promote citizen participation in governance of the canton. The women I interviewed who are part of the AUCC are mestiza and indigenous women from Cotacachi, from lower and middle class families, with university degrees and a strong connection and commitment to local governance. They work with and coordinate activities between the CCMU, MUC and MI.

Most of the women who were members of the Casa Feminista de Rosa (CF) are from Quito, others moved to the city when they were children. Most began the university after graduating high school but not graduate until recently. Some have earned or are in the process of obtaining master’s or doctorate degrees. They are mestiza women in their late 20s, 30s and 40s, some from popular and others from middle class families of origin who would now be considered middle class. They all do intellectual work for NGOs, universities, and many are nationally well-known.

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72 It is the one organization about which I write that no longer exists. Its members are affiliated with and running other feminist collectives and groups in Quito, and several are directing their time and energy to the AMPDE.
for their work as part of the women’s movement. The *Movimiento de Mujeres del Oro (MMO)* is an organization based in the coastal city of Machala, which brings together local women’s organizations but also has its own members. The women who comprise the MMO are from quite poor and very wealthy backgrounds, and everything in-between. They are mestiza, Montubia and Afro-descendent. Some women have higher education; others finished primary or secondary school. Women affiliated with the MMO are fishers, farmers, sex workers, teachers, accountants, lawyers, NGO employees and/or political representatives. The women I interviewed live in the city of Machala, although some of the local organizations affiliated with the organization are rural. The *Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras (CONAMUNE)* is the national-level Afro-Ecuadorian women’s organization that groups together the regional-level organizations. While the women who comprise CONAMUNE are from very diverse class, regional, and educational backgrounds, most of the women I interviewed have a university education and work for NGOs, local organizations, or the state.

The *AMPDE* is comprised of these organizations and many more. In terms of internal diversity, it includes campesina and urban women’s groups primarily from coastal and Andean, with some participation from Amazonian regions. Women from the popular and middle classes form part of the AMPDE, as do women from university student and elderly women’s groups. Mestiza and indigenous women are always present, and at certain points, women from Afro-Ecuadorian’s women’s groups participate. At certain moments trans women’s and sex workers’ organizations were also involved, although not currently. There is little other sexual diversity in groups that form the AMPDE. Soon after it formed, there were groups from 17 provinces who participated in the AMPDE; I have not seen an updated roster of organizations since 2010.
Girlness: Becoming Part of a Community of Practice

Wearing heels and cooking: Learning skills to be a girl

In interviews, women talked about the rules given for their behavior as girls when they were young and the language that was used to explain those rules. These rules and language can be thought of as skills necessary for entering in the community of practice of girls. Some of what was taught, for example that women are emotional, dress a certain way, and should participate in domestic labor, was fairly consistent regardless of other public identity characteristics, while other teachings varied based on class, ethnicity, etc. Rosa Ana (MUC) told me:

Our parents have always driven home that the little girl is delicate, the little boy is macho, strong; the little girl cries, the little boy isn’t supposed to cry… “You’re the little boy, you’re macho, you have to, you can.” [To] the little girl – “No my daughter, you can’t. Be careful; you’re a delicate little girl… If your classmate tries to hit you, move out of the way because you’re delicate.” To the little boy – “If your classmate hits you, hit him harder because you’re a man…” It’s the small things… that happen every day.

Some women recount accepting certain norms without a problem. Mariana (MUC) said that she and her brother wore orthopedic shoes as young children, but when she went to school and saw that the other girls wore shoes with little heels, she understood that those are the shoes girls wear and wanted some for herself. As part of their girlness, these women learned the rules of the community. They were guided by adults and their peers to understand that they “were” a certain way (delicate), that they wore certain things (heels) and thus they learned to see that “girls” are different than “boys.” Learning to be a girl does not only include learning certain behaviors or what one is capable of. It is also about learning what a girl is meant to look and act like. This learning shapes both public and subjective identities as well as daily practices that become habitual and normal. As Foucault says, “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes,
homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*” (M. Foucault, 1977, p. 183). Women learned to differentiate and to be differentiated, to be homogenized into the category “girls” who are understood as simply being a certain way. This normalization is part of the disciplinary process that shapes people into docile members of the hegemonic social structure.

Participation in girlness is not always explained with words; it is also guided by modeling behaviors and rewarding those who do what they “should.” María Isabel (CF), the youngest of nine children, remembers helping her mom with housework without being asked and putting up with the violence and sexism of her older brother. She recounts doing this because she saw how hard it was for her mother to keep up with everything and because she wanted her mom’s attention and affection. Part of learning to be a (good) girl in this case involved learning to wash, clean, cook. It is common that domestic work skills are import for learning to be girls and women. In many homes, some of the “small things” mentioned by Rosa Ana included parents’ rules that boys and men did not or “were not allowed to” wash or cook. That was women’s and girl’s work. In other cases boys were also taught to housework, but for different reasons. Carmelina (CCMU) articulates well how gender was taught in her family:

At home I remember clearly how my mom would say, “Serve...
your brother his food,” while he could have gotten it himself, “because you are a
woman.” For example, “you have to learn so that when you get married” bla bla bla. Or,  
“You have to learn to cook because later when you get married what’s going to happen if
you don’t know how to cook?” Things like that; that was the discourse my mom used
with me, but not with my brother… because my brother also cooked… [and] washed, but
she didn’t say to him that when he got married he would need that. She was preparing
him for life, but for me, she was preparing me because I have to be a woman, wife, to
serve my husband… That is the difference.

That is the difference in teaching identity. Carmelina’s experience shows how the practical tools
we learn are given different meanings based on what we are taught about them and how those
messages are often based on our identities and the functional purpose attached to them. These
are the underlying messages about what we do and who we are that we either appropriate, refuse
to learn, or partially appropriate while also resisting. While in Carmelina’s home it was the
rationale for learning to cook that was different, in María (CCMU)’s house the work was actually
divided differently, a division that generated resistance.

At one point my mom… tried to say that the women [in our house] had to wash the men’s
clothes… Yes I rebelled, my whole life. Because of that my mom called me karishina
and I don’t know what else… When it was our turn to wash all the clothes that were
there… [my brothers] were like “here, ñaña (sister), here are my clothes” but no, I did not
wash their clothes.

In the places children inhabit there are many rules,
both spoken and implied, which guide participation in
the community of one’s public identity. There are also
punishments for breaking them. María’s mother called
her “karishina,” a Kichwa word which means
“tomboy” with a negative connotation. Women who
dare to break gender rules often remember being called
karishinas or “machonas,” the Spanish word with the
same insulting meaning. Thus we see that direct parental instruction, modeling behavior, and punishment for disobeying gender norms are all ways of teaching newcomers how to be part of a community of practice. They are social doings and performances, acts that are copied and repeated until they are internalized or ultimately resisted and one’s own version of girlness, as part of one’s community of practice of girls, is learned.

*Machonas and karishinas: Language, codes, and freedom*

In stories about learning identities, there is a clear relationship between hegemonic teachings about girlness and limitations placed on bodies, freedoms and pleasures. How the “teaching” happened, the context in which it happened, the person’s intersectional embodied identity, and how much hegemonic teachings were accepted or resisted determined how much freedom that girl had. Rebellious women who had more freedom and could break the rules often did. Teresa (MMO) captured well the relationship between freedom and the body when she said,

> They told us, gave us these roles… little girls have to play cooking, and the boys have to go kick the ball. If you [as a girl] climbed a tree, you were a machona… because only men can be throwing their legs around and climbing. So I said “Well if this is being a machona, then I like to be a machona.”

Carmelina (CCMU) also said when she climbed the avocado trees with her brothers her parents called her a karishina. Discourse, or language, is one strategy of punishment, which is a tool used by the powerful to shape behavior, and in effect, to teach. Through language people and behaviors are differentiated, ranked, and assigned different values. This creates hierarchies of what is good, bad, beautiful, ugly, etc., by defining what is “normal” and what is “abnormal,” and through this process often encouraging conformity (M. Foucault, 1977, p. 182-183). Disciplining language is yet another tool learned by girls as they become part of their community. That it is learned does not necessarily mean it is appropriated. In this example
Teresa identifies with the term intended to discipline her and halt her tree-climbing, in a small way turning disciplining language on its head.

It is the lack of freedom specifically denied them as they learned to be girls that women often lamented. Lucy (CF) said,

I really remember my brother’s games, that they were games that weren’t mine – no one ever told me that they weren’t for me, but I saw him as very different, and I loved the adventure games I saw him play…He always went out on his bike and had a lot of friends… From the time I was small I thought that life was easier for men.

This vision of her brother as different illustrates how Lucy successfully “learned to see” from a girl’s perspective. No one had to tell her that “boy’s games” were not for her because she had already mastered and appropriated the teachings of her community and could code those games as “for boys.” Learning to see from the perspective of a particular community comes about in part by learning such codes. For children, many of the codes have to do with classifying where different bodies can be and what different bodies can do, different types of play, and ultimately with different levels of freedom. The women I interviewed said that as little girls they wanted to ride bicycles, climb trees, play ball in the street like their brothers. These statements reveal how they coded these activities as “boy’s.” Many hated being confined to their houses and not being allowed to play with boy children. When they were adolescents, they disliked not being allowed to go to dances or parties or even to the library, while their brothers had those freedoms. Learning codes for “boy’s” and “girl’s” activities and thus embodying certain behaviors, bodily movements,
desires, emotions created reactions on all levels of the girl’s selves. Remembering and understanding these embodied reactions and their presence in the self is an important part of learning critical self-aware consciousness.

*Contradictory learnings, fuzzy gender identity lines*

While in most cases normative identity behaviors and roles were taught in their homes, and some girls just broke the rules, in other cases women attributed their resistance to and diversion from gender norms to their families. In some people’s homes, gender was not as cut-and-dry as in others. When asked when they noticed they were girls and what difference that made, two of my interviewees talked about how in retrospect, they think that they were “raised as boys” because their fathers had wanted them to be boys. In Irma’s family (AUCC), she and her two sisters were raised “always with sports clothes and pants, not typical girly colors like pink but other colors.” They learned to change light bulbs, tires, and to work alongside their parents making leather goods. Enith Flores (CF) said she realized later in life that as the youngest of her family and the result of an unplanned pregnancy, her parents had hoped she was a boy. They always cut her hair short (her two older sisters always had long hair) and relied on her to be the strong one in the family. She was the one to help her father do manual labor around the house, while her “beautiful” and “sickly intellectual” sisters fulfilled other roles.
In these descriptions of what it meant to have been raised as a boy, we see notions of masculinity and femininity made obvious by how entire families ignored normalized notions of gender in the guidance they gave their daughters to become girls. By saying that they were “raised as boys” these women show that they successfully learned the hegemonic codes which classify certain clothes, colors, work, and bodily actions as male and others as female. Comparing those to what they were taught in their families, they observe that they were taught to be a different sort of girl.

Aside from being “raised as boys” like Irma and Enith, women also expressed identification with maleness if they had certain athletic skills or work habits. After explaining that if a boy hit her, she hit him harder, if he played soccer, she played twice as hard, Aida 73 (CCMU) said, “I wondered if I was supposed to be born a man and not a woman. And my schoolmates said, you’re too strong, you’re worse than a man.” When Irene (MUC) talked about how back-breaking hard she worked from the time she was a child, she said with indignation, frustration, and tears, that she “worked like a man.” As a girl and woman she did not like having had to “work like a man” although she also expressed satisfaction at having her own money and, as a mother, being able to buy her children what they needed if her husband could not. These women learned the codes which enabled them to see how “men” versus “women” move, act, and work. Although intellectually they seemed to accept these classifications as true, Aida’s personality and Irene’s economic situation led them to behavioral nonconformity. While on some level they appeared satisfied with the strength and independence their “male” behavior afforded them, the combination of acceptance and resistance also seemed to provoke discomfort (wondering if I was supposed to have been born a boy, frustration at having worked like a man) and sadness.

73 Invented name.
In other cases, women attributed their nonconformance to having rebellious women as role models who guided them to disobey gender stereotypes, especially mothers who resisted the submissive, obedient and married woman norm. Lisset (CF) said that feminism was very transformative for her. I asked where she encountered feminism. She talked about her mother, who, while she would not identify as a feminist, decided to leave Lisset’s father and raise her daughter alone on her small teacher’s salary. Lisset sees her mom as a very independent woman “who has her rebellions,” and cites her own upbringing as laying fertile ground for the feminist literature she encountered in college. Nancy (CF) also talked about the importance of the women in her family to her feminist identity. She explained that her mom is a feminist who divorced her father after being married a short time. Her grandmother was a single mother, and so she grew up surrounded by autonomous independent women who taught her feminist values. Working with women’s and feminist organizations, she has followed the footsteps of her mother. In these stories, single motherhood is a common theme. The decision to separate from male partners is something these daughters see as marking their mothers as rebellious and independent. These “different” mothers then created a home environment where their daughters were taught, in contrast to what the hegemonic norms taught them by society not to appropriate gender oppression.

On the social and non-familial interpersonal planes, Lisset and Nancy learned the codes which enabled seeing normative gender stereotypes but in the interpersonal spaces of their families they were guided by their mothers to resist those stereotypes. There they were taught a different set of codes which enabled a feminist way of seeing. This way of seeing offered them entrée into an alternative community of women, where tools of critical thinking, independent behavior, and feminist language were the tools to be mastered and appropriated.
Almost everyone I interviewed displayed a mixture of “appropriating” and “resisting” the rules and codes they were taught as they learned to see public identities and their meanings and become girls, revealing the multiple nature of their consciousness. Just as tools such as how to perform domestic labor were learned as girls appropriated hegemonic norms about girlness, other tools were learned which allowed them to resist those norms. One powerful tool which became apparent in the stories I heard is a kind of sumak kawsay wisdom. This first became apparent in the stories of women who rejected from a young age the prejudice and oppression they encountered both in their childhood homes and society because they did not agree with it.

When I asked Isabela (MI) if she remembered a moment in her childhood where she realized she was an Afro-descendant girl, her immediate response was:

I always said, “Why do we have to be humiliated?” I always argued with my parents, because when they told me I had to call the mestizo “niño” or “niña” I felt offended because I thought maybe because of my parents’ poverty, because they don’t have land, or because we’re poor… But why, but why do we have to say niño if it’s obvious that they’re equal to us. It was the same at school – they were in school and we were with them in school, but the people of color were “the blacks,” “the blacks,” and always separated, discriminated against. But even then, I have never liked being humiliated… I told them what I thought, I told them off, because I said why do they have to humiliate people because they don’t have money or because they don’t have the same color [skin] that they have?

Niño literally means “boy” and niña “girl” but as Isabela explained, addressing mestizo children in this way was a sign of respect and deference, something that Afro-descendants, even adults, were socially pressured to call mestizo children. There were similar titles for adults, marking
racial and economic social hierarchies. While Isabela had clearly learned the coding system which classified people with certain skin tones as better than people with other skin tones, she blatantly rejected it and the way of seeing the world it attempted to teach, with it rejecting the language that normalized this hierarchy. On a personal level Isabela resisted what she was being taught on both interpersonal and societal levels, provoking arguments with authority figures in her home and children in her school.

Ofelia (MA) told me how she played house as a child with her friends growing up in the Chota Valley: the little girls would “stay home” and cook and clean while their play husbands “went to work” the fields. While the other girls scurried to have everything ready for when their “husbands got home,” when he arrived Ofelia would ask her “husband” help with the housework. “Ever since I was little I have been very revolutionary,” she told me. When I asked her if her dad helped in the house when she was little, and that was how she learned to think that way, she said laughing,

Oh no, I was revolutionary even with my dad. He was soooo sexist, as they say, he was sick with sexism, he was sexism in person. We would always argue, and they would say what a brat, they said it was bratty to argue with your dad, to make him see…. No, I was always very liberated; my dad said I was very rebellious.

In these stories there is a noticeable absence of instruction from parents or other authority figures which would encourage Isabela or Ofelia’s resistance to sexist and racist ways of seeing and acting in the world. Their refusal to appropriate tools of oppression, developing instead on their own accord tools of resistance, reveals their defiance of normative interpersonal and societal teachings. They say they have always been this way. In searching for how to explain this I developed the idea of “sumak kawsay wisdom” as an already-present knowledge that all people have the same worth and value and should be treated with justice, respect, and dignity. I think
that all people have this knowledge, although it is more accessible for some than for others, for whom it has been drowned out by hegemonic teachings about inequality, appropriated oppression and privilege.

**Coding and thus learning to see ethnicity and race in Ecuador: Clarity and confusion**

Ecuadorians, like others around the world, are taught to code for ethnic and racial categories based on skin tone, hair type and style, clothing, language, last name, geography and customs (Burdick, 2002; Caldwell, 2007; de la Cadena, 1995). These codes are learned alongside codes for gender and all other public identity categories. In combination, they teach intersectional public identity. When I asked the women I interviewed how they learned their ethnic or racial identity, the majority, regardless of their ethnicity, referred to clothes, which also served as an important marker for gender. Mestiza, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio girls said they were dressed in skirts or dresses, indigenous girls talked about their anakus (skirts), wallkas (necklaces), manillas (bracelets), and alpargates (shoes) as markers of their indigenous identities. They referenced whether their families spoke Spanish and/or Kichwa. Cultural differences were also mentioned, one woman giving the example that eating with one’s hands was only customary in indigenous communities in contrast to other ethnic groups in Ecuador. These things are not only codes, which enable identification of who is indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, Montubia or mestiza; they are also learned behaviors that make one part of a particular (in this case, ethnic) community. Other codes which are not behaviors include: whether or not they live or grew up in an indigenous or Afro-descendent community; the color of their skin and the straightness or curliness of their hair. The women also mentioned what their families “are” in terms of ethnicity/race. Learning these codes were part of learning to see racial and ethnic differences.
For some people there was no confusion, all the codes pointed to the same ethnic or racial identity. When asked how she knew she was mestiza Clara (CCMU), who has always lived in a primarily indigenous rural community, said “Because of the clothes and language…. Because I was raised this way, my parents are mestizos.” María Isabel (CF) knew because her mestizaje contrasted clearly with the indigeneity of the many indigenous people who inhabited the Amazon region where she was raised. Lucy (CF) saw her mestizaje in contrast with the indigenous peoples with whom her mother worked. Doris (CCMU) said she knew she was indigenous because “my grandmother told me we are indigenous and I dressed in anakus.”

Other women’s stories reveal the fuzzy line between indigenous and mestizo/a identities; these women expressed discomfort or confusion when the codes indicated contradictory ethnic identities. For example, when I asked Irma (AUCC) about her ethnic identity she told me that she’s confused about it. She was always raised as mestiza, her parents identify as mestizos, but her grandparents, who live in a rural part of Ambato, speak Kichwa and she is not sure how they identify ethnically. Between living there and in Cotacachi (with its 40% indigenous population), she said she has always felt more comfortable with indigenous people than mestizos, and that sometimes she used to wear indigenous traje, but felt conflicted about it.

Two indigenous women from Cotacachi talked about how white they are and how that provoked
commentary from others about their ethnic belonging. As María (CCMU) said, when she moved from Quito to Imantag, an indigenous community, the other students at her high school “didn’t accept me, they always pushed me off to the side because…I appeared mestiza…and they always gave me nicknames – I was the gringa, like that. And so I dyed my hair,” she laughed; then continued, “But I didn’t like it… I asked myself, why was I born like this? – white – I don’t like to be white.” Another indigenous woman, Aida (CCMU), also talked about her whiteness in her interview.

I was always aware that I was indigenous, but I said, I’m not of the indigenous race… To this day people who know me tell me that I’m not of the indigenous race, I have white people’s race, and I tell them, but I’m indigenous, and they say “but you don’t look indigenous.” “But I am indigenous, my parents are indigenous, my brothers are indigenous, my sisters are indigenous, they wear anakus.”…My mom is pure indigenous because she’s trigueña (wheat-colored). She’s different from my father… “You look like a gringo” I tell my dad.

These women’s experiences illustrate the complexity surrounding mestizaje in Ecuador, and how most people react when the codes they have been taught to use to classify people in terms of their ethnic identity suggest contradictory public identities. Isabela (MI), who has been treated according to stereotypes about “black women” her whole life, highlights the arbitrariness of public ethnic and racial identities, pointing out that there are Colombian, Ecuadorian, mestizo, mulato, black, and indigenous people in her family, and that “we come from this mix.”

The coding system which teaches people to see in a certain way and thus participate in society as a particular kind of subject serves precisely to create order and structure where there are messy mixtures. With its colonial origins, it does this by teaching that there is a natural power hierarchy among people whose identities encompass different races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, sexual orientations (etc.). These identity characteristics are conceptualized as stable observable facts. Despite the contradictions and ironies of these codes, they are what
Ecuadorians are taught that enable them to learn the different identities of those around them. As I have mentioned, as these codes are learned, ways of resisting them are also devised. Sonia (CONAMUNE) talked about how indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians share many of the same problems such as poverty and racial discrimination. However, she noted that, because of their skin tone, Afro-descendants can’t eliminate some discrimination as indigenous people can by putting on different clothes and taking out their braid. For those who have the option, changing physical appearance to pass as someone with the dominant public identity is one way to use knowledge of codes to resist the prejudices built into the hegemonic identity system. Refusing to change one’s appearance and rejecting the values assigned to different identities is another form of resistance.

*Discriminatory practices and language as a tool guiding participation in a racist society*

Another way people recounted learning their public identities was by noticing how other people treated them. Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubia women all mentioned being treated as different and in discriminatory ways as part of how they learned their ethnic identities. Sonia (CONAMUNE) said that she knew she was Afro-Ecuadorian ever since I was very little… Living here in a city as discriminatory as is Quito, when we were little, from the time we were small, we already were aware that there was a difference – maybe we didn’t understand what exactly it was…

Pilar (AMPDE) said that when she was growing up being Montubia was synonymous with being “last,” at the bottom.

As evident in Isabela’s refusal to say “niño” or “niña” and thus show deference to mestizo children, language is an important tool for learning public identities and becoming part of communities of practice embedded in social hierarchies. Noticing how other people talked about you and to you, what others said about your racial or ethnic identity was one way of learning
how one’s own community is devalued. For example, Lucía (CCMU) said she realized she was indigenous

when I was in Quito [to work]… I went when I was still a little girl, when I was 15 years old, and there one is all alone, and as indigenous they always see you as a thing (cualquier cosa), they even treat you different in what they call you.

Luz María (CCMU) said she was aware of being indigenous ever since I was a little girl. For example the abuse… my grandmother always spoke Kichwa; we would go to the store, we would go to Cotacachi and the women insulted her and all that… I would get upset even when I was little, I was a fighter (pelearinga) and I would argue with those women who mistreated my grandma.

Indigenous women remember being called indias or longas and Afro-descendent women “black” in derogatory ways. As indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian, these women noticed how language was used to degrade and discriminate against them. The white-mestiza family of Irene, a mestiza woman, whose story will be told in Chapter Seven, insulted her with racial slurs and mistreated her because of the relative darkness of her skin. As research has pointed out, in the Andes, including Ecuador, race is “experienced as alterable, through changes in body and comportment… [rather than] genetically determined” (Casanova, 2013, p. 568, quoting Roberts), and “nonwhite appearance and darker skin are generally associated with low class status” (Casanova, 2013, p. 567), which was likely part of the reason this family took such offense to Irene’s appearance. While there are many shades of “mestiza” in Ecuador, and according to the hegemonic order of things lighter skin is better, “mestizo” remains the dominant ethno-racial identity in Ecuador. As such, many of the women I interviewed talked about becoming conscious of their mestiza identities later in life and in organizational spaces; these cases will be discussed in the following chapter.

74 Indio / india (Indian) is a derogatory way to refer to an indigenous person. So is longa/ longo, and is even more insulting.
While mestiza identity and consciousness is contradictory in Ecuador, learning derogatory language about indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubian people and ignoring their social realities is part of the process of learning mestizo-white identity, acquiring epistemological ignorance (Frye, 2007) and appropriating privilege (Tappan, 2006) for mestiza, white-mestiza and white people. To offer an example, I once attended a meeting where only mestiza women were present. One of the women recounted a domestic violence incident she had witnessed between an indigenous couple. Upon hearing the story, another woman’s response was “the dirty Indian!” No one flinched at that statement or pointed out the racism inherent in it. On the contrary, it seemed to be accepted as an appropriate indignant response.

When members of oppressed groups learn demeaning language about themselves and other oppressed groups, they illustrate the contradictory hegemonic learning processes of appropriating oppression and privilege. One of the indigenous women interviewed recounted that she responded to the offensive words of “a black man” by telling him, “At least learn to respect that there is a woman here; learn to respect and learn to talk; all you of the black race are oafs.” While said in anger, the use of this language by both of these women reveals how deeply racist stereotypes have been learned. This language is a tool that not only shapes how they perceive their situation, but when said out loud can also serve to “teach” the other about his or her own public identity, community, and position in society. As people learn to appropriate privilege, they tend to repeat what they have heard about Others, reinforcing stereotypes both for themselves and those Others.
“Positive” codes teaching difference

Sonia (MA) observed that learning she was “different” – that she did not have a normative mestizo public identity – was not always a negative experience.

These differences are marked in a way that is sometimes positive and sometimes negative. I think that these differences marked me in a positive way because it turned out that I was the pretty little girl in the elementary school… and in high school I always had good grades and I was always… the little black doll in my grade; so they didn’t treat me like the ugly doll, as bad, as negative, but as the little chocolate doll – marking the difference but sweetly.

Carmelina (CCMU) made a similar observation,

Mestizo people, they called us Indians, longas, which was very discriminatory. But there was also a moment where you are also flattered, when they’d say “how pretty your shirt, how pretty your clothes…” I remember when I recently started high school they would say to me that I had come wearing my Sunday clothes, that they are very pretty.

The codes of skin color and clothes were employed in these examples to point out different identity communities, but instead of being used as insults they were used to compliment at the same time they marked the women as different.

How girlness is learned from different class locations: Domestic workers and those who hire them

Class membership emerged as central to how intersectional identities are learned in childhood.

Families’ economic resources, which are often (but not always) related to ethnicity or race, shaped the rules of girlness in profound ways. Certain codes overlap as people learn to see different classes, ethnicities and genders. Clothing is used to code for gender and ethnicity. It also marks class. Carmelina (CCMU) mentioned that an upper class indigenous girl in her class in elementary school poked fun at her because she only had one anaku to wear to school every day, while that child wore different camisas (shirts) and anakus every day.
The stories I heard about girlness, particularly around domestic work, were drastically different based on class background, revealing the intersectional nature of communities of girls. Loly (MMO) told me,

In questions of chores... we were lazy, the last kids, because my mom took charge of it all, later my [much older] sisters worked... and then they looked for someone to help my mom, so we didn’t learn to make food or anything. When... they’d say, “Do you know how to cook?” and these things, like they ask you to see if you’re ready to get married... I’d say, “I don’t...” and there you are [when you get married], looking for a cook.

Loly still assumed that women should do domestic work (as opposed to men), but whether the individual interviewed cooked and cleaned or hired someone else to do so was different in the stories of women with different intersectional embodied identities. While Loly didn’t explicitly express how her economic position was different than that of the women she hired, Alejandra (CF)’s childhood discovery of social divisions included an awareness of her privileged place in them. Her story highlights the painfulness of separation from a privileged person’s perspective, and cognizance of the contradiction and wrongness implicit in such divisions.

It is so tenaz\textsuperscript{75} when you discover the world – it can generate so much pain, so much pain. It happened to me when I was a little girl, because in my neighborhood, which was a middle class neighborhood, but in the 80s in Lima there were still a couple neighborhoods where [people of different classes] lived. We almost never went out because my parents were never home and... the situation in Lima was very difficult and no one went out. One summer we played carnival...\textsuperscript{76} I was really really timid as a child but I managed to make friends with some girls, a lot of girls, there were little girls everywhere, all around, and all of us were playing, until all of a sudden I had my dad in the doorway waving at me to go.

And I go, I’m super happy, I’ve been playing carnival all afternoon and I was completely drenched. And it turns out that in my encounter with my father he makes me feel the structure, power and all of that. First he yelled at me, second he said “Why are you playing with those girls? Those girls are not like you!” And I was like, “but they live in

\textsuperscript{75} Tenaz is a common expression that is difficult to translate. It literally means “tenacious” or “stubborn;” in this context it means impactful, difficult, painful.

\textsuperscript{76} “Jugar carnival” is what happens right before lent begins (Marti Gras), and in Ecuador and apparently in Lima too, especially children, but also adults, chase each other around and throw water, dirt, eggs and paint on one another. That is called “jugando carnival” – playing carnival.
the same neighborhood, they are wet like me, what’s the difference between them and me?” And of course my father told me in a second. I was 8 years old, 7 years old, I don’t know – he was like they could be the daughters of domestic workers. It was terrible, I felt… I cried and cried and cried.

As Loly and Alejandra grew up, their families taught them at an interpersonal level what it meant to be a middle/upper class girl. They were taught the tools (hire a cook, make friends from your family’s social class), and codes (domestic workers versus middle class people) necessary for membership as women in that particular (middle class mestiza) community.

These experiences contrast with the stories of the women I interviewed who, at a young age, had been live-in domestic workers for wealthy families. As children they had in common that they were poor, rural, and/or parentless. Luz María (CCMU) said that her parents constantly moved from forest to forest collecting wood to sell and couldn’t manage their money because of their alcoholism. Because of this, when she was a small child, they sent her to live with family in Quito where she worked all day and went to elementary school at night. Aida (CCMU) decided on her own accord to leave home to go work for her teacher when she finished elementary school, knowing that her parents would not send her to high school and seeing the change as a way to escape her mother’s violent behavior.

Their intersectional public identities meant that these girls grew up in a community where girls worked. Girls working for wealthier families, often without pay was, at least as recently as 30 years ago, a practice of poor communities and part of their culture of girlness. For Aida, the decision to work was hers. While working is not an ideal situation for a child, her decision to remove herself from her violent family environment and work for a family she liked shows agency and ingenuity.
Resistance to the humiliation and violence endured as domestic workers are manifested in different ways. Isabela (MI) and Sonia (MI) were sent, not on their own accord, from their homes in Intag to cities to do domestic work when they were 8 and 10 years old respectively. Isabela worked for the same family her mother worked for after her mother was orphaned as a child. For three years Isabela lived with the family and worked for them. During that time she was never sent to school, hit, insulted, bathed with cold water at four in the morning and beaten with stinging nettle for wetting her bed. She said that when she was eleven years old she “had matured a little more since my childhood and I said to myself, this is not okay. And I picked up and I came back here to my land, I picked up and I came back here to my land.” Sonia, who was paid, said she was proud of helping to support her family and said, “When my sisters and I left to work in houses we learned, yes it was very hard, but we learned to defend ourselves, we learned to see life with more strength and we learned that one has to work.” Resisting hegemonic perspectives which see domestic work as having little or no value, Sonia’s decision to value the experience and how it shaped her is a form of resistance, as is, more obviously, Isabela’s decision to leave the domestic work and go home.

Carmelina (CCMU) told me a story about the domestic work she did which illustrates how what is taught on societal and interpersonal planes can be simultaneously appropriated and rejected at a personal level.

I remember that I went during two [school] holidays… and I worked…and there I witnessed discrimination! For example you couldn’t eat from the same plates that the employers ate from, you had to eat apart, as if a doctor said “you have hepatitis and you have to use your own dishes just for you.” I remember that with a friend we went to Quito to work and… plop, we sat on the bed, and “Get up! Why would you sit there? Sit here.” – On the floor, on the ground… But we didn’t take it [poorly]… we didn’t understand, I don’t think… that was how it was, so…
This quotation shows how as an adolescent Carmelina learned to see the world from the perspective of the community of practice of indigenous domestic workers. She appropriated hegemonic oppression in the space of domestic work while also resisting it. At the time she understood that because of how she was coded and classified based on her ethnic, classed, gendered and work identity she had to sit on the floor and eat off different plates, and that’s just the way it was. Indeed that’s the way it is for many domestic workers in Ecuador. Her experience is not uncommon (Casanova, 2013, p. 564-565).

“Así es la vida” – a common expression in Ecuador – “that’s how life is,” captures the passive aspect of appropriated oppression. At the same time she had appropriated oppression, another part of Carmelina, the part which just sat on the bed – plop – either resisted or forgot about, but certainly hadn’t internalized that oppression. While she had not yet developed the critical political consciousness she has as an adult, her self-aware consciousness was contradictory as she partially accepted and partially resisted hegemonic norms about her intersectional public identities.

The physical and technical skills needed to do domestic work – to cook, clean, work the land, etc. – were tools that were learned. Being deferent and accepting orders were some of the psychological and linguistic tools taught these girls. The verbal and material codes assigned them versus their employers (domestic workers in Ecuador typically wear uniforms, eat from different plates, eat different food (Casanova, 2013)) were used to teach Luz María, Aida, Isabel, Sonia, Carmelina and other women who do domestic work similar a certain way of seeing the world and its colonial hierarchies. The stories shared here reveal that women both appropriate and resist these teachings and learnings.
Adolescent Knowing: Bodies, Sexuality, and Repression

At a certain moment, the community to which they were learning to belong shifted. As girls’ bodies changed and they became perceived as sexual beings, they discovered that some rules changed and that the authority figures in their lives acted in ways that can be understood as protective, restrictive and at times, violent. Despite having been “raised as boys,” once they became teenagers Irma (AUCC) said that she and her sisters began to be treated as daughters. They were not allowed to go out at night or to go to parties, like she said teenage boys typically are. Nancy (CF), whose independent feminist mother raised her and her sister to be part of a different sort of community, teaching them feminist coding schemes and ways of seeing, told me a story of a conflict with her mother around her sexuality as an adolescent. She offers an astute analysis of the encounter.

One of the things that generated a lot of tension in the life of mother-daughter was my sexuality… My mom was a feminist woman, outwardly super liberal. But at the hour that she had to accept that I had grown she almost died… The two of us had a confrontation based on her own discourse that she had raised us with – about freedom and autonomy… One time I said, “Mother, do you know a gynecologist?” “I don’t know why you’re asking me that.” I said, “Because I don’t want to get pregnant.” She turned pale white and there was silence. And me: “Mom, do you know a gynecologist? If not, what about your friends? I need a gynecologist,” and I kept talking, and - “No. I don’t want to talk about this topic.” And that’s how it was – she had very literal reactions… because she wasn’t able to see [my sister and I] as sexual objects. I see this as a difference also between the feminism of my mother’s generation and ours: the way of understanding sexuality.

Mother always said to us “be independent, be autonomous… don’t let men become a weight on you… the only thing men want are women as sexual trophies.” It’s always the perspective of sexuality as a subject-object relation where our place is as the object. Which is also perverse because it affects the construction of yourself as the subject of your own sexuality and your knowing of your own capacity for pleasure, your erotic capacity and your affirmation based on that.

Ironically, while parents attempted to have greater control of their daughter’s lives as they entered adolescence, many of the tools the young women needed to manage their sexuality and
avoid undesired pregnancies (the great fear of many parents) were not taught. While they vary based on the culture of one’s intersectional identity community and the individuals involved, the codes generally taught adolescent girls in Ecuador so they learn to see young women according to hegemonic norms are that “good” women are not sexually active. Being good means being in your house rather than in the street or at parties. “Bad” women are sexually active and sex, like periods, is dirty. The language which mediates sexuality is often silence, or some type of communication, as in the case of Nancy’s mother, that sex is not to be talked about (Jerves et al., 2014). While some women, like Nancy, resist the idea that sex is bad and develop their own ideas about sexuality, others learn the codes, the interpersonal and psychological tools and appropriate this vision of good and bad women. Many women appropriated some ideas and resisted others as they found their way through adolescence into adulthood.

Some women I interviewed recounted a complete lack of knowledge about their own bodies. María Isabel (CF) said “when my sisters bought their sanitary pads I asked them, ‘Hey, what do you have?’ and they said ‘cookies’ or ‘tones para los preguntones’ (tones for question-askers).” She laughed, “They never told me what they were when I was a girl… In my house the topic of sexuality was very repressed.” Ofelia (CONAMUNE) recounted,

Our mothers didn’t prepare us that this was going to happen – it was scary… since I was always jumping around, playing, we were always climbing trees, doing things… I thought I had hurt myself – what happened?! I was too rough, too crazy, too much swinging, too many trees. And I suffered! I got a fever, I felt depressed, I was scared, and then my mom [explained].

Other women recounted that the family members with whom they lived did warn them that “blood would come down” and that would mean they were señoritas, young women.

Menstruation was a clear code for “woman” as opposed to “girl.”
Almost all the women who talked about menstruation associated it with exiting girlhood and entering the domain of womanhood. After Ofelia’s mom explained what had happened to her, she said, “I was like ooooh, I’m now a señorita… a woman, but a señorita.” This rite of passage – becoming a woman, but newly a woman (señorita) – was something recognized as important although not often talked about. The skills and language necessary to manage both menstruation and womanhood are part of the toolkit learned as girls transitioned to becoming part of the community of practice of women with its reproductive capacity. The tools taught were more or less useful depending on the particular community to which an adolescent belonged.

One woman (CCMU) who grew up in the house of her aunts having learned that touching other people, even hugging them, was sinful, recounted that she had no idea one could get pregnant having had sex only once. She was raped by her aunt’s son-in-law as a teenager, only realizing she was pregnant three and a half months later when she got sick and went to the hospital. Her aunts, who had always taught her that abortion was a horrible sin, told her that if she wanted to keep living there she had to have an (illegal) abortion. They kicked her out of the house when she refused.

The sanctions for girls and women who disobey sexual norms are often harsh. The violence this young woman experienced at the hands of her aunts and the aunt’s son-in-law is not unusual. Women who become pregnant when they are not married are often subject to violence by their families as well as the fathers of their children. Mercedes (ex-MUC) told me that when she got pregnant at age 19 with her first son,

My dad kicked me out of the house, he said that I was a piece of garbage that didn’t deserve to be the daughter of this [family]. My mom would leave me a bowl of food under the trash heap that I would sneak, like a thief, to get. I would get the bowl of my food and I’d eat it, hidden from my dad… I just ate once a day because I told my mom
otherwise my dad would notice…  Two days after I gave birth, my dad hit my mom… for bringing me back [to the house].  My dad grabbed my arm and got me out of bed and told me to go give my son to his father.  From here to Urcuqui at that time was three or four hours by bus…

When she arrived at the house, the young man who had been her boyfriend for five years saw her and hid, and his mother came out with a stick and tried to hit Mercedes, chasing her to the bus stop with the stick and throwing rocks at her.  Her ex-boyfriend never contributed to her son’s upbringing, and refused to recognize the child and give him his last name.  His and his mother’s reactions exemplify the common assumption that women are solely responsible for preventing pregnancy and raising children.  They reveal the violent actions that can result from deeply appropriated ways of seeing unmarried mothers as bad, dirty women.

The covert strategies developed by Mercedes and her mother to ensure that Mercedes ate and had a place to stay after giving birth are examples of these women’s resistance to and simultaneous acceptance of the authoritarian dictums of her father and how he had learned to see.  It was not their identity as women that determined their resistance, however, as demonstrated by the behavior of Mercedes’ ex-boyfriend’s mother.  Resistance is a more complex decision.

María Isabel (CF) observes the emotional consequences of this violence on women.

Working with topics of violence opens up such heavy topics… it makes you say que bestia how do women keep living… really in many cases they are survivors of a super violent world – there are cases of incest, sexual violence from the time they are children, or rape as adults that are later silenced for years and are never worked on, but just stored there… as though you’ve built a wall and you can’t see, you can’t turn around to see, but they are experiences that never disappear, although you ignore them.

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77 In Ecuador, people have two last names: first the (first) last name of their father, and then the (first) last name of their mother.  When men refuse to acknowledge their children, the child only has the last name of their mother, something that is commonly accompanied by a sense of shame for the mother and child.

78 “Que bestia” is a common expression in Ecuador.  It literally means “what a beast” but its meaning would best be translated in this particular context like “good god” or some other expression expressing disbelief at how bad the situation is.
Learning to see and learning language to become part of the community of girls happens from different perspectives, depending on the embodied intersectional identity of the particular girl. This remains true when girls become adolescents and are perceived as sexual beings. They then become vulnerable to new types of violence: both from those who want sexual contact regardless of the young women’s desires and from authority figures who attempt to control their sexual decisions and punish transgressed norms and rules. Violent punishment is normalized and legitimized.

The disciplining discourses used to try to shape women’s behavior often make use of shame and guilt, communicating that the woman is at fault. These come into conflict with adolescents’ agency as they struggle to understand their changing sexuality and integrate it into their subjective identity. The lack of good information on sexuality, combined with the conflicting emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations make this aspect of life susceptible to contradictory self-aware consciousness.

*Agency and constructing subjective identities despite hegemonic teachings*

If public identities are those assigned to us, subjective identities are where we get to make our own decisions based on who we understand ourselves to be. The answers I received to the question, “If you had just met someone and they asked you to describe who you are, what would you say?” are a cacophony of perspectives, of descriptions, attesting to the diversity of people and the multitude of ways in which we experience ourselves. They reveal appropriation and resistance of hegemonic dictates about identity.

Descriptions of self varied widely, but the most common identifying description was as a woman, showing how many women identified with their community of practice of women.
Some people described their intersectional womanness: I am a Kichwa indigenous woman, a young woman, a triumphing woman, a mother of the family, a married woman, and Lucy specified that if she were introducing herself in her PhD program, she would do so as a middle-class mestiza woman. Several people said their names. Here we see how public identity characteristics are also claimed as part of subjective identities, affirming membership in intersectional identity communities of practice.

Many women also located themselves as part of geosocial communities. The family was an important reference, many women saying, I am part of my family, I am a daughter, a lover. Interestingly more people said “I have children” than “I am a mother” (although both replies were given), and no one said “I am a wife,” although some said “I have a husband.” People from rural or indigenous communities frequently identified as being part of their community. Many people also mentioned where they were born and/or where they live now.

Other women identified with organizational communities of practice. They identified as activists, as participating or luchando in organizations, working for women’s rights, helping others or their community. A few described themselves as feminists. Others mentioned their professions, or what they study. These women’s identities as part of activist communities of practice define in part how they see and understand themselves.

Others described their personality characteristics and how they perceive themselves in the world, including emotional aspects of their selves. Mercedes (ex MUC) described herself as “very sensitive, very charismatic; I like to be very friendly with everyone – very sociable.” María (CCMU) said, “I am a young woman who is studying… with a strong personality, who sometimes gets excited about things and just as quickly disillusioned. Sometimes I think it’s
better to … live in a fantasy than in the real world… I am a woman who wants, who cries, who gets happy too.”

In answering the question, many people affirmed their humanity in what I interpret as an act of resistance to the dehumanization they confront in the neocolonial context of Ecuador. “I am a person,” “I am a human being.” Sonia (MI) emphasized her process of becoming. “I am [like other] human beings who, as the years pass, evolve depending on how they live, according to their own experiences.” In her description of herself, Aida (CCMU) affirmed her resistance to imposed identities, emphasizing her will and her ability to be herself. “I am who I am, I myself create who I am, and although they tell me ‘You have no value, you are this way, you are that way’… I have always shown who I am.”

Enith (CF)’s answer reveals her awareness of the constructed nature of identity, of womanhood. Her power and agency to decide who she is and how she will live is evident in her words:

I am constructing myself from a feminist, from an alternative proposal, where you can see in how I am a woman, a daughter, a student, a lover a different way of living that is not based in oppression, but on the possibility to really realize myself. I still don’t understand very well what it means to be a woman, [but I see] the possibility to build myself in freedom, in an alternative way, with decision-making power.

She is in process, and she sees herself as directing the process of her own development. Several people named their desires and dreams as part of their self-descriptions: I want to move forward, I want to travel, I want my degree. Hope and a sense of personal transformation for the future are part of people’s identities.

In response to my question about how who they are, women explained how they code themselves, indicating how others should classify them, learn to see them. They confirmed what sociocultural learning theory argues, “Participation offers a two-way bridge between the
development of knowledgeable skill and identity – the production of persons – and the production and reproduction of communities of practice” (Lave, 1991, p. 68). In this dissertation I define communities of practice as communities of women, mothers and/or activists possessing particular intersectional identities, and as organizations located in specific places. The stories recounted earlier in this chapter combined with the descriptions of subjective identities related in this section reveal how changes in subjective identities are connected to changes in the reproduction of communities of practice.

Conclusion: Learning Identity as Part of Political Consciousness and Self-Aware Consciousness

This chapter contributes to the body of literature on the constructed nature of gender (Butler, 1990; Hernández Basante, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994; West & Don H. Zimmerman, 1987) and feminist standpoint theory’s insights that where you stand determines what you see and that all vision is partial (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993). It does this by analyzing stories of how children learn to be girls from the position assigned by their particular intersectional embodied identity. To do this I draw from sociocultural learning theory to examine how girls are taught to see life in gendered terms by coding (Goodwin, 1994). They learn to code certain articles of clothing – skirts, heels, anakus, walkas – as girl’s or women’s clothes, they learn to code activities such as climbing trees, riding bikes, playing in the street as boy’s play; they learn to code blue for boys and pink for girls; they learn that girls cry but boys don’t.

They also learn the language used by their community of practice and practical tools they will need to play their part (Wertsch, 1991). They learn that girls who act like boys are “machonas” or “karishinas,” that girls are “delicate” and boys are “rough,” that girls speak softly and don’t talk back to their fathers. In most cases they learn to do domestic work knowing they need those
skills to run a household when they get married or because they already work in other people’s homes. Once girls have mastered and internalized this gendered ordering of the world, learning to see as girls, learning codes, language, and practical tools, they have become part of the community of practice of girls (Lave, 1991; Webster, 2013). They can identify when there are outliers – when girls are raised as boys, when girls work like men, when girls are not regular girls but machonas or karishinas, when boys cry or wear pink. They identify as girls and they know they will one day be women.

While many things taught girls about how to be girls are similar across identity differences, there are also important differences. In this chapter I have tried to center how learning gender is different according to each person’s intersectional embodied identity, and how a society’s norms remain rooted in its colonial past, keeping my work in line with transnational and feminist scholarship. I explain how as children girls are taught how to code for and therefore see ethnic, racial, and class differences. They learn to code for class based on how many clothes, toys, land people have, at what age they begin working. Clothing – anakus, alpargates, walkas, skirts, heels – is also used to code for ethnicity and gender. They learn to code for ethnicity and race based on skin color, hair color, hair texture as well as language and geographic location. Children are taught Kichwa or not, based on their parents’ attitudes toward the language and how much they suffered as children for not speaking Spanish, and different codes are assigned based on whether or not it is spoken.

Many times the women in my study learned, not because it is taught them, but because they are not sure where they fit in the social categories they have learned, that ethnic or racial belonging
is not straightforward. They are indigenous but have white skin. They are mestiza but have family members who appear to be indigenous. In addition to their own learning to see and identify what goes where in the social ordering of things, other people always point out if they vary from the norm. Sometimes this differentiation comes through insults, other times through compliments. Berating an indigenous woman for not speaking Spanish or telling a girl she’s a beautiful black doll are both ways of pointing out differences. If one has fully claimed one’s intersectional identity community of practice with pride, the compliment highlighting difference may well be appreciated.

Identity, critical political and self-aware consciousness

Part of critical political consciousness is awareness of public identities’ sociocultural locations and the meanings of those locations. Thus the relationship between one’s own intersectional identity and the world’s power structure is key to developing this type of consciousness. An analysis of how mestizo women versus indigenous or Afro-Ecuadorian women understand the meaning attached to the codes and language that teach members of Ecuadorian society to see different racial and ethnic groups reveals that their different perspectives and experiences offer different ways of seeing.

Many people learn hegemonic norms about identities, appropriating privilege and/or oppression as they do. My analysis has shown that women with “oppressed” public identities rarely fully appropriate oppression. Accepting you are less solely because of public identity characteristics seems logically more difficult than accepting you are better and appropriating privilege. Resistance, agency, and critical political consciousness develop and are expressed differently under different circumstances. Some women, like Nancy and Lisset, develop critical political awareness.

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This can obviously be true about gender, class, etc. In my research it was most clear around ethnicity.
consciousness about gender as children because of their families’ guidance in becoming part of alternative (feminist) communities of women. Other women, like Isabela and Ofelia, develop alternative perspectives about their intersectional embodied identities based on internal, rather than external guidance. Their sumak kawsay wisdom conflicts with hegemonic teachings so strongly that in the absence of others’ guidance, group agency or resistance, they reject hegemonic norms and do what they know to be right.

Developing self-aware consciousness and learning to observe oneself can alter one’s vision of subjective identity. It can also offer insights about the emotional and other impacts of learning public identities. This chapter has shown how this learning process can involve profound experiences framed not as “teaching public identities” but as “who you are” and often accompanied by violent disciplining. As awareness of different aspects of the self is heightened and one learns to observe emotions, thoughts, spiritual and bodily experiences rather than simply identifying with them, one’s subjective identity, or concept of “who I am,” changes. For example, rather than thinking “I am short-tempered” one might think “I am hurt by the violence I have experienced,” or “I am a strong woman who protects herself and others.” Understanding the discrepancies between what one is taught about public identities and who one experiences oneself and others to be is also central to self-aware consciousness as well as for dealing with conflicting and contradictory thoughts and feelings about oneself. This will be further explored in Chapter Six.
Photo 6: This sign hangs in the main square in Junín, a small town in the Intag cloud forest region of Cotacachi. It reads, “Welcome to the Community Junín. Number of inhabitants 260 Agriculture Livestock Tourism We do not permit mining here.” In April 2014 the president of Junín was detained by the Ecuadorian government under charges of “terrorism” for opposing mining in Junín.
inside out

as i listen
    your words run
through my head
dragging their paintbrushes
    along
    my walls
colors
layering mixing blending
anger
    hope
    love
    painting
    me
inside out
drawing new doors and windows
    there
when night comes
    i'll open them
step into
moonlight colored
    world
opening my eyes
    from
    the inside
outside
of
    this painting
breathing color
making it mine
Chapter Six: It Opened My Eyes: (Re)learning Identities and Consciousness in Organizational Spaces

In Chapter Four I looked at the topics and methodologies being used in formaciones in Ecuadorian women’s organizations. In Chapter Five I examined the micro-workings of how identities are learned among the women I interviewed. In this chapter, I will bring insights from those two chapters together to:

1. Examine how relearning identities in organizational spaces is part of learning critical political and self-aware consciousness.
2. Look at how critical political consciousness (awareness of hegemonic social structures and their relationship to public identities, awareness of the intersectional nature of these, and belief that the inequality caused by these structural factors should be replaced by equality and justice) is learned.
3. Analyze how self-aware consciousness (reflexive awareness of one’s public and subjective identities; awareness of the relationship between experience and the parts of the self to which these are connected: emotions, thoughts, the body, and the spiritual; awareness of the relationship between the individual, communal and Pacha Mama; and knowledge that one is an actor in the world) is learned.

I use the framework outlined in Chapter Two which discusses learning as (1) becoming part of a community of practice, (2) learning to see, and (3) appropriating tools (learning to use them and then owning them), all of which are only possible when there is (4) openness to learning, and (5) awareness that learning involves the whole body.

Most of the women I interviewed related that their critical consciousness emerged in their organizations, which they entered with the contradictory consciousness that comes from growing up simultaneously accepting and rejecting hegemonic teachings about themselves, others, and society. They all joined those organizations with different tools and ways of seeing. Women like Nancy and Lisset, who grew up with feminist mothers, already possessed critical analysis and language skills, while Enith and Irma had a certain experiential knowledge from “being raised as boys.” As the women I interviewed moved from peripheral to central members of their
organizational communities they were guided to learn new codes which offered them new ways of seeing and they appropriated new tools – analytic skills and activist language. Most of them relearned at least some aspect of their identity in their organizations and acquired some characteristics of critical political and self-aware consciousness.

Relearning Identities from Within Organizations That Are Critical Communities of Practice

Learning new ways of seeing old patterns

Tanya (CF) explains well what it means to learn to see how you were taught to be part of a hegemonic community of practice of girls and women, and to relearn from within a leftist feminist community of practice what it means to be a woman.

You see that you have been educated in a certain way – and from this you also try to break the things that you inherited from your family, because it’s from there… That’s where you were constructed from, as a woman – [where you learned] what it means to be a woman. Feminism has for me been about being able to understand, to be able to position myself here in this world as a woman, to be able to understand my sex and understand my body, and to understand myself with other women, because in general what one does is live how men want women to live… and not what one wants from oneself.

Here Tanya follows the steps for appropriating liberation as outlined in Chapter Two. She talks about how the world of oppression was unveiled to her, she rejected what she understood as its myths, and in their place she learned new liberatory cultural tools and ideologies. Tanya identifies feminism as the tool which enabled her to see what was “inherited” from her family, which she identifies as the place where she learned to be (was “constructed” as) a woman.

In becoming part of a feminist community she learned analytic tools and language to code for and therefore see the existence of hegemonic structures which create inequality. In essence she
learned a new way of seeing and thus interpreting her own and others’ personal histories. As she understands it now, in her family she was taught to be a woman in a world imagined by and revolving around men. In her new feminist community, she is learning “to understand” herself, her body and her sexuality in new ways, from a feminist perspective, and as part of a community of feminist practice, rather than as part of a community of women who live the way men want them to live.

Part of the power of the dominant hegemonic system comes from its ability to naturalize certain behaviors, beliefs and stereotypes. Understanding them as constructed is empowering because it means they can be deconstructed then reconstructed to learn a new and critical vision of the world. The denormalization that happened when Tanya learned to code her gendered identity as constructed and her family’s teachings as hegemonic allowed her to relearn what it means to be a woman in line with her feminist community. What she relearned included aspects of critical political consciousness: awareness of social structures and their implications for identities.

Beatriz (MUC) explains her process of learning and relearning her role as a woman, and how the Mujeres Urbanas de Cotacachi gave her a space to re-think and relearn how to be a woman:

Ever since I got married, I always had to say to my husband, “send me to this place,” or he had to give me permission, and he didn’t like to, he didn’t give me permission and so I stayed in the house and cried… Later when I began to get out… I myself realized that we shouldn’t ask permission, but just give them the information that we are going out – but I was very afraid, because my husband has always had a strong character. He was the one who told me to go to the meeting [of the Mujeres Urbanas], but I liked it so much, then he couldn’t tell me not to go. But it was there that many women we realized that just because he is the husband doesn’t mean we have to ask for permission. The husbands, you know, they don’t ask permission from the women, from their wives – so in this situation we have valued ourselves more as women.

When I asked specifically which organizational spaces made her realize she shouldn’t ask her husband’s permission to leave the house, she said it was in workshops because they “advance
your self-esteem… the self-esteem workshops are the ones I love, it makes me very happy to be there… although then we go back to the same routine in the home, but these [self-esteem workshops] encourage you.” It is interesting that for Beatriz, it was not learning to see patriarchy or power relations that facilitated her relearning of what it means to be a woman, but rather learning tools to raise her self-esteem in the context of her organizational community of practice, which is the Coordinadora de Mujeres Urbanas de Cotacachi. Beatriz told me there is a group of them who always get together to celebrate one another’s birthdays, and that they are very close friends. This sub-group is comprised of women of roughly the same age and class background who have come to trust one another. The camaraderie and trust between these women creates a space where Beatriz feels comfortable sharing her personal experiences, listening to the others, seeing their common problems, letting go of her old way of seeing how a wife should behave and adopting new behaviors.

From other interviews and participant observation I am familiar with the self-esteem workshops in Ecuador like the ones she attended. They often teach the language of women’s rights and equality, specific techniques (skills) to connect with one’s body (massages, meditations, interactive activities). Facilitators lead activities asking women to vocalize their desires and dreams, re-code the “role” of the woman, code as “unjust” the normative idea that women are supposed to serve others and take orders from men. They recode loving and doing things for themselves as positive activities for women. They teach a language of self-love and equality, many times without analyzing the larger social structures which create and perpetuate inequality. According to the information analyzed in Chapter Four, roughly 37% of organizations include self-esteem workshops in their procesos de formación, where it is often included as a starting point for training as the first in a series of workshops or multi-phased educational programs.
Education on gender rights, which in Beatriz’s case was part of self-esteem workshops, is even more common in Ecuador, with 54% of organizations including it in their procesos de formación.

Beatriz illustrates her new understanding of equality when she says that her husband doesn’t ask her permission to leave the house, so why should she ask his? She has learned tools to overcome her fear and change her behavior with her husband. She also emphasizes the emotional aspect of learning in self-esteem workshops, saying they have made her feel happy and encouraged.

Beatriz relearning her identity as the result of a new awareness of how she interacted with her husband reveals how the MUC facilitated an awareness of experiences’ relationship to self, an aspect of self-aware consciousness. This is often connected to critical political consciousness especially in settings where women with similar identities share experiences and are thus able to see their structural component. It appears in this example that Beatriz’s individual critical political consciousness shifted along with that of her group.

Here I return to stories told by Carmelina (CCMU) and Alejandra (CF) in the last chapter about moments they remember as central to learning the social locations of their identities. After recounting the events, they reflected on them in ways which reveal how their consciousnesses have shifted over time. Talking about when she was told to sit on the floor and not on the bed while doing domestic work as an adolescent, Carmelina said it was through participating in organizations’ procesos de formación that she learned to see and interpret what had happened differently than she had understood it at the time. It is no longer “just the way it is.”

Reflecting, looking back on all of those things – it was all discrimination. So with all of this, when you finally begin to reflect in [the spaces of] all of these procesos de formación… This is where I have been reflecting on all these things that we have lived… all this injustice towards women compared to men in rural areas, towards indigenous people who have also been discriminated against, who have suffered from it… [and how
indigenous] women have been doubly discriminated against, violated. So from there, this reflection and my positioning of myself has been born.

Carmelina learned the language of discrimination and injustice, rights’ violation, and has re-coded eating from different plates and being told to sit on the floor as discriminatory behaviors, rather than where domestic employees sit and eat. This re-coding has offered a different way of seeing or perceiving events. Her analysis demonstrates awareness of hegemonic social structures, their relationship to identities, and the intersectional nature of discrimination, revealing that Carmelina has gained critical political consciousness in organizational communities.

Discussing the childhood lesson that she was “better than” and couldn’t play with her neighborhood friends, Alejandra said:

In life, well with time you start to understand, that in a racist country like Peru, racist, racist, anything that is from the Sierra, indigenous, is seen with maximum contempt. There it is incredibly racist where everything is based on a pigment-ocracia, on the color of your skin. The whiter is always [better]. It’s such a racist country.

That was one of those moments… that was everything, right? It was the authority of the father, the man’s voice, the voice obliging a certain order… the private space and this is the street… To be a domestic employee is society’s last escape, obviously because they come from the countryside and they have – aah – they must have had the same color skin, but it didn’t matter. This was the position of the middle class… My grandparents are campesinos; the only white people in my family are my mom [’s family] from Quito… But my father has campesino roots, he’s a quichua-speaker. I have a grandmother who’s a quichua-speaker. He later explains, “But it’s not the same.” These ways of relating to the world are so cruel, it’s super perverse. It’s so painful. And of course to later feel like it burned your body – I don’t want this for my life. I didn’t manage to say that because I was eight years old, but later with time I understood.

The codes she learned in the Marxist, indigenous and feminist organizations to which she has belonged between the time of the event and the interview gave Alejandra a different way of seeing and interpreting what happened. The language she learned in those spaces is a tool used to analyze power dynamics and their embodiment in public identities that influenced what
happened with her father that day: racism, male authority, and the position of the Peruvian middle class. She also sees and names inconsistencies and contradictions in the logic and codes her father tried to teach her, codes such as skin color, indigeneity and rurality. Alejandra’s account also reveals how life and learning are experienced with the whole self. She emphasizes the emotional aspect of the encounter as being cruel and painful and she describes the physical sensation of the encounter with her father “burning” her body, a sensation that clearly communicated that she did not “want this” for her life. Although she recounts being unable to articulate it at the time, Alejandra’s rejection of her father’s attempt to teach her to see from the vantage point of her community’s class and ethnic public identity reveals her contact with her sumak kawsay wisdom.

These stories are instructive in understanding how relearning one’s own identity can facilitate learning critical political consciousness and how this often happens alongside gaining awareness of one’s self and the embodied impact of structural forces which are aspects of self-aware consciousness. They show how learning to see and appropriating tools which enable this relearning are part of the process of becoming a member of the community of women’s organizations. In the next section I will take a closer look at the processes of learning to see as well as appropriating tools that facilitate learning critical political consciousness in organizational spaces.

*Learning is a whole self experience*

Alejandra, part of the Casa Feminista through her collective la Pepa (the Pit, as in the pit of a fruit), articulated another good example of the holistic nature of experiences which influence consciousness. In the story recounted below she describes how la Pepa, a mixed-gender leftist
urban collective that produced a magazine for many years, fell apart when the men in the
collective rejected the feminist analysis and demands of the women members as the women’s
feminist consciousness emerged. Alejandra’s words suggest that her whole self was involved.
She describes feeling alone, that she didn’t belong, then finding a place where she felt part of
something bigger. These emotions were accompanied by intellectual analysis fed by her
university studies and her physical experiences in the street as part of the indigenous uprisings.
These all seemed to come together for her in her collective where she integrated her diverse
experiences in a shared (usually) safe space in harmony and in conflict with her friends.

When I came to Ecuador, I had the sensation that I didn’t belong to this space, to this
country… it was very strong, very marked. I was struggling, I was an adolescent who
had been through many very painful crises, and it was the relationship with the
indigenous movement and with organizations… because when one went out into the
street, that is what you had… you didn’t have to look for it, it was always there – shut-
down highways, uprisings. This relationship began to make me feel that I was part of
something, and this was the first thing… to know that when I occupied spaces in the
street, in the assemblies… there was something that made you feel part of it. Maybe not
organically, not hyper-consciously, not with a political debate, but those were my
movements toward [being an activist, part of social organizations].

On the other hand in the university I studied sociology. There was a close relationship
between the Catholic University [private] and the Central University [public] – I studied
in the Catholic University – of friends, people. On the other hand there was also a line of
questioning coming from sociology of certain postmodern positions and certain
discussions. Between those two places, it all came together in the collective la Pepa
where it was a much more organic experience in our periodic meetings, discussions,
decision-making, responsibilities – all that’s implied being part of an organization –
formation processes, self-formation, relationships with other spaces. It was a small
experience in the sense that we were a very small collective. It was a very rich
experience because we were in harmony. We got along well most of the time with the
other spaces.

Obviously there were power relations in the interior of our group… One thing is that I
still get along with someone individually, and another thing is in plenary, when making
decisions, etc… the role that the men assumed most of the time was tough. And to
negotiate with that, and what it generates around them with other women is very
complicated and it burns you out, every time it happens it wears you out more. So of
course, we always talked about unity but when push came to shove… damn, how do we
do this? Because it is really very complicated. But when things fell apart, which was a
very painful and traumatic process because they were our friends, our compañeros, we shared life with them every day, the Casa Feminista was the space, was a different kind of space, a space with a different type of rigor.

In her narrative, Alejandra is recounting and analyzing simultaneously. She uses the language learned in the very spaces she is describing to analyze how conscious she was at certain moments, and to examine the relationships between people in different institutions. In this dialogue she codes for the power and gender dynamics that existed within her collective, and describes the varied natures of the diverse spaces she inhabited. In the spaces she describes, she learned with various parts of her self different but complimentary ways of seeing and speaking about the world and its injustices. The education literature suggests that learning happens “in our experiences as embodied beings” (Gustafson & Diana L., 1992, p. 250) where the body is “an epistemological site” (p. 251). Alejandra has appropriated the codes, language, and ways of seeing she learned in organizational spaces. This is evidenced by the fluidity with which she used them in this interview, conducted years after the experiences described.

Reading her (translated) words, we can also see how what happened, how it was experienced and remembered is a product of her intersectional embodied identity, the result of how her unique self is situated in the world. Hers is the body of a grown child, with its memories and wounds. It is remembered as the body of an outsider, a mestiza, an activist, a sociologist, an intellectual, a young woman. Hers was a body expressing resistance and finding belonging on the streets, with others. It was present in university classrooms and in the Pepa, thinking, speaking, writing, organizing, debating; it was burned out and worn out by conflicts and constant discrimination based on its femaleness. Alejandra’s story illustrates how both oppression and consciousness of it mark physical, emotional, and mental aspects of our selves.
Removing the Blindfold: How Critical Political Consciousness Is Learned in Organizational Spaces

(*Learning new ways of seeing and coding as part of learning critical political consciousness*)

When initially reading through my interview transcripts, I was struck by the number of times the women I interviewed used metaphors related to sight and vision when recounting events which to me indicated a shift in consciousness. “My blindfold was removed,” “my eyes were opened,” “I learned to see,” are all phrases I heard over and over. Other metaphors were also used which indicated a new type of mental state or movement. “I woke up” implies a feeling of being fully present and aware of one’s surroundings, and “doors were opened to me” is an architectural metaphor implying new spaces for movement and new opportunities.\(^{80}\) I was intrigued when I later discovered the sight metaphor used in sociocultural theory to describe the learning process.

If we put the women’s comments into the framework of sociocultural theory, we can understand them to be saying they had learned a *new* way of seeing, one that replaced what they had learned to see up until the moment of transition they were narrating. The opposites of these metaphors are “blindness,” being asleep, closed doors, all metaphors which could be translated as ignorance, reminding us that epistemological ignorance must be unlearned for those with privileged public identities. The metaphor of sight seems apt to describe these changes because when consciousness shifts interpretations change and everything is perceived differently. As sighted people rely heavily on vision in daily life, saying that things are “seen differently” is an easy way to convey the sense that everything is different. “Learning to see” is a metaphor that communicates that what goes on around us is interpreted (or coded), perceived, and ultimately understood. It is not meant to convey that input from the other senses is invalid.

\(^{80}\) Thank you to John Burdick for helping me analyze and identify these different metaphors.
How do people learn to see hegemonic social structures, those structures’ relationships to public identities and their intersectional nature? How do they come to believe that the inequality caused by these structural factors should be replaced by equality and justice? In other words, how do people learn critical political consciousness? What role do their organizational communities of practice and group consciousness play in these moments of learning? In this section I attempt to answer these questions using sociocultural learning theory’s framework to examine how people code, learn to see, appropriate tools and become part of communities of practice.

Cecilia, a member of Movimiento Mi Cometa and Cepam in Guayaquil, recounted learning critical political consciousness when she learned to see the world and her place in it differently. The first workshop she ever attended was called “Women’s rights: I have the right to have a complete life.” “That workshop,” she said,

…opened my eyes, and it opened the doors for me as a subject of rights. I have the right to health. I have the right to make decisions. I have the right to study, to work. I have the right to do all that I want to do. In addition to the constitution which protects these rights, there are legal rights, national and international [rights], and agencies that support us and that are there for us to take advantage of. Only because of ignorance and lack of awareness, we women put up with so many violent situations; but the law is there to help me and to protect me.

Cecilia learned new ways to code women, including herself, in this workshop. She began coding women as subjects of rights, who can freely make decisions about their lives. As she joined and became fully part of Cepam, she acquired tools including the ability to code for and thus see violence and inequality. This quotation reveals that she has appropriated the tools of language and knowledge of rights and uses them to explain how things are, and perhaps more importantly, how things should be. These tools and this way of seeing have enabled her to imagine a different reality for herself and others.
The critical political and self-aware consciousnesses that developed in her communities of practice have led Cecilia to a certain understanding of violence against women. Part of the solution for her is that women lose their ignorance and become aware of what oppresses and what protects them. They must see themselves as subjects of rights. She is personally and intellectually aware of the social structures that oppress women and other minorities, and her words illustrate her belief that inequality and injustice should be replaced by equality and justice, an important component of critical political consciousness.

The codes that allowed her to “open her eyes” were those that coded her and all women as subjects of rights rather than as objects (as described in the introduction). This change reveals a crucial shift in her way of understanding the world and herself in it. It would appear that what was said at the workshop resonated with some part of her which already knew these things – her sumak kawsay wisdom – or she would not remember the first workshop she ever attended as being what transformed her. It likely took much more time as a peripheral member of the organizational community to learn the language and rights analysis as completely as she articulates them in this quotation, but from the way she describes what happened in her in this workshop, some part of her recognized the new way of seeing being taught.

This is something that has struck me when talking to many women who connect immediately with the new ideas, codes, and languages presented to them at formaciones and in other spaces, particularly given the criticisms of the concept of human rights as Western and foreign to Latin America (Peterson, 2004; Reus-Smit, 2011; Skegg, 2005). Rights language communicates something about equality and justice recognizable to the part of the self that has sumak kawsay wisdom. This knowledge was not always as accessible to Cecilia as it was to Ofelia and Isabela, who reported always being in contact with this wisdom. Most people with whom I have spoken
are more like Cecilia in terms of encountering this knowledge. They originally appropriate hegemonic beliefs from their original communities of practice and need to come in contact with certain tools, including language, and ways of seeing which enable them to recognize and express “what they always knew” about sumak kawsay relationships.

The connection between codes and learning is crucial as codes directly affect the values and meanings assigned to things. For example, a man hitting a woman could be seen as “what happens when a woman disobeys her husband.” This could then be seen as “wrong.” Codes give people new mental categories that partially facilitate their “seeing,” either because they allow specification and differentiation of things previously lumped into large categories (what was seen as “wrong” is now seen as “violence” or more specifically understood as “physical violence” or “economic violence”), or because they alert the learner to the existence of a new thing in the world for which one begins to look (Goodwin, 1994; Webster, 2013). For example, if I learn about all the types of gender violence, I begin to see physical, structural, symbolic, spiritual violence.

As Carmelina uses the metaphor of sight to describe how her understanding of acceptable behavior between couples changed as a result of participating in organizations (the emphasis in the following quotation is mine), we see once again several elements fundamental to learning critical political consciousness.

When I was young, and still when got married I thought, and was very convinced that the woman was under the mandate of her husband. I was very convinced. But the meetings and the training processes, and deepening the topic of what it means to be a woman… helped me to see life much better, including that I had understood violence as natural… My mom talks about how when we were little my dad hit her, but I don’t remember, I don’t remember having noticed that my dad hit my mom… when my mom told me about these things, what indignation! [I felt] so much indignation. But later looking at it… I judged… I thought that because [a neighbor] was at fault [her husband] hit her one time.
But this [organizational] process permits you to see rights, it permits you to see that we are equal human beings, [and should have] equal conditions… [You see how] because of being a woman one doesn’t know the reality of women, because as a woman they weren’t able to study, because as a woman, their dad and mom decided not to send them to school. It breaks your heart… because living injustice in this way… when we are human beings.  

Carmelina grew up becoming part of a community of girls closely connected to the community of women that relied on hegemonic codes portraying men as dominant over women in couple relationships. In this understanding, the man is seen as responsible for dictating “his woman’s” actions and disciplining her when she does not obey. As can be seen by how Carmelina had “understood violence as natural,” the way of seeing she learned in her home was one that coded husbands’ physical violence as an acceptable part of a relationship, likely assuming that the woman deserved it for having done something wrong. Once she became part of a community of activist and feminist women Carmelina recoded these dynamics, including her father hitting her mother, as “violence” and thus re-interpreted such behavior. This re-coding and her mastery of the analytic tools and language of rights, equality and justice “permits you to see that we are equal.” In other words, she has learned to see hegemonic power structures and how they distort interpersonal relationships.

Although she does not say it here, Carmelina is clearly and solidly part of both feminist and indigenous communities of practice. Each gives her different tools, including language, and different codes, which are not always in agreement with one another. Through her participation in both of these communities she has learned critical political consciousness. Her mastery of activist and intersectional ways of seeing gender and verbal and analytic tools to talk about it, in

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81 All interviews that I conducted were done in Spanish, and the translations to English are mine. The interviews that were conducted by Magdalena Fueres in Kichwa were translated into Spanish by Cristhian Fueres and then I translated them into English.

82 In Ecuador and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world, rather than saying “my wife” men typically say “my woman” when referring to their partners. Women however, never say “my man” but always “my husband.”
addition to her commitment to working for equality and justice have led her to become more and more involved in the women’s movement in Ecuador, particularly around indigenous women’s issues. She is recognized at a national level for her activism and leadership for indigenous women’s rights, and has travelled internationally speaking about these topics. In a country where indigenous men are stereotyped as “wife beaters” and where the indigenous organization itself pays little attention to problems of gender violence outside of the “women’s organizations” that typically are separate but part of the larger organizations, Carmelina and other women with similar experiences and skills are strong voices speaking out against violence from within indigenous communities. They recognize the existence and pervasiveness of violence while rejecting stereotypes and emphatically valuing and centering the Andean indigenous cosmovision and culture.

As they participated in women’s organizations over the years Cecilia and Carmelina learned to code for power dynamics, inequality vs. equality, violence, rights’ violation, along with other terms and dynamics which make visible hegemonic power structures. They are both aware of those structures’ intersectional nature and how that translates into different vulnerabilities and forms of violence for the women and others in their communities. They have both appropriated rights language and argue for the application of rights and the cessation of violence and inequality. Through the critical political consciousness they have acquired in organizations, they have relearned what it means to be a woman for themselves and for the women around them.

*Language as a tool for learning critical political consciousness*

Language and learning are interconnected. The expert vocabulary in activist communities gives people the ability to communicate things they had been previously unable to express (Tappan,
A good example comes from Sonia (MI) who explained to me in an interview:

Little by little we have made distinctions, that it’s not the same to be a boy or a girl, but we are all in a system, and we all saw it as normal, to live in a society where the woman had to meet certain parameters, [where] the woman was useful for some things, but little by little that has changed in the education and also as leaders we have been conscientizando…

When I asked her where she learned to realize that this system existed she replied:

Ten years ago my husband went to a workshop on gender equality… and he brought home a lot of material that I took and I read and read and read, and from there, it was like I was opening my eyes… and then also in that time the AUCC began to organize women, they would have workshops… We have participated in the leadership schools, more than anything, everything that has to do with what it means to be a woman, her political participation and everything. So, so I learned to distinguish and I learned to be conscious of what it implies… Reading that [material], the first thing I understood was that as women we don’t have to… that no one can force us to have children, to do things, to be in the kitchen, that women are equally capable of doing things as men. We can drive a car, we can arrive at owning a business, be bosses. We can be equal to men.

Learning codes and language which allowed her to express the freedom women should have was part of Sonia’s transformation. She learned to code for, and thus also see “the system” through reading and attending workshops. Through this process she unlearned and then assigned new values to different gender categories. She describes this process as opening her eyes to see a system which had previously been invisible in its normality. Her story reflects Carmelina’s and Cecilia’s in that what she learned (including language) allowed her to analyze, denormalize and form a different idea of what it means to be a woman. It also seems to have resonated with her sumak kawsay wisdom. All three women recounted connecting immediately to these new ways of seeing as well as the tools they encountered.

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83 This is a basic part of feminist practice – teaching ways of seeing and language which allow the birth of consciousness. This was a central practice of traditional feminist consciousness-raising groups.
Language tools in the AMPDE

Becoming part of a community of practice, in this case becoming part of women’s and feminist organizations, entails learning the group’s way of seeing, acquiring language and knowledge tools which together lead to full membership in the community and eventually identification with the group. As is true of learning anything new, codes and language often crystallize in the repetition of analysis and terminology in organizational spaces as new members are taught by older members through guided participation. As an example, in this section I examine several languages that stand out as important in the AMPDE. First, language which makes visible that which had been invisible and should be valued – things such as housework, caring for children and the elderly – is important and can change how those things are perceived. Second, I look at language that enables people to verbalize what they are seeing as they recode, to name and criticize the invisible power structures that shape society. Included in this language are words such as capitalism, sexism, racism, hegemony, power relations, the prison industrial context, etc. Third, language that allows imagining a better present and future – such as sumak kawsay, equality, justice, autonomy, freedom, harmony, peace, rights – is central to social change. I think the language of human rights is powerful and well-received in the world, because it connects with the aspect of sumak kawsay wisdom that knows that all people have equal value and because it paints pictures in our minds of what the world could be like. It is a language of hope, and as we have seen, hope is a powerful force.

The AMPDE engages these languages and teaches them to new members. Some of the most frequently used terms that visibilize and value women’s work are: “economy of care” (economía del cuidado) which serves to highlight the unpaid devalued care work that women do, and the global workload (cargo global de trabajo) which refers to the sum total of the paid and unpaid
work that women do (Altamirano & Aguinaga, 2012; Hill et al., 2012). There is an attempt to translate the debates into practice. In line with their discourse around the economy of care, children are welcome at AMPDE events, and members use these terms to debate how labor is divided among group members.

Language that makes visible and allows women to critique hegemonic forces is consistently present in AMPDE spaces. Terms such as machismo (sexism), gender violence, feminism, patriarchy, the state, extractivism, neoliberalism, capitalism, and the devaluing of the feminine are, among others, part of organizational discourses and are important tools for analysis. These terms are taught to newcomers by organizational leaders through their use; rarely if ever do leaders stop to explain or define unfamiliar words or phrases.

While all the women who participate in the AMPDE would not identify as feminists, because the leaders of the organization do, intersectional feminist thought and analysis are constantly part of the conversation. While the language of feminism is not as widely accepted as that of rights language, it is slowly gaining acceptance in women’s organizations and Ecuadorian society. At one of the IEE workshops, Margarita (CF) explained the problem with the feminist frame. “Just like communists were said to eat children, feminists are said to be man-hating lesbians who destroy mixed-gender [organizational] processes.” I asked almost everyone I interviewed what they understood feminism to mean, and many understood feminists to hate men or to want to dominate them. This made me question the AMPDE’s practice of not defining or debating words unfamiliar to new members. On the other hand, several women who thought they did not identify with that label have surprised themselves by eventually identifying as feminists as a result of being part of women’s organizations. This is one example of how interpersonal learning from other organizational members can lead to changes on a personal level and to
participatory appropriation of membership of a community of practice, and the role of language in that shift.

Language that allows women to imagine alternative ways of doing things and how life could be different is consistently present in AMPDE spaces. “Bodily sovereignty” (soberanía del cuerpo) is a term emphasizing that women should make all decisions about their own bodies (Aguinaga, 2010; Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y Diversas del Ecuador, AMPDE, 2013; Carrión, 2010). “Food sovereignty” (soberanía alimentaria) describes communities’ food independence and the capacity to access food suitable to their health and cultural needs (Aguinaga, 2010; Asamblea de Mujeres Populares y Diversas del Ecuador, AMPDE, 2013; Fueres Flores et al., 2013). The new possibilities imagined are often drawn from human rights theory as well as the indigenous cosmovision. Food sovereignty is often linked to bodily sovereignty in creative ways, violence against the natural environment to violence against women, and sumak kawsay is debated as a real alternative to “economic development.”

A language of rights, equality and justice is also present in the AMPDE and many local organizations. In interviews and participatory observation I have found use of human rights language to be almost universal. It is obvious from how they describe their work that many activist women in Ecuador, across ethnic, class and other public identity lines, have internalized the idea and language of rights. This is the reality, despite the Western cultural assumptions which undergird the concept of human rights. An explanation is offered by Claudia de la Costa who centers agency in her argument that people take what serves them from “imported” ideas or theories and mold them into arguments relevant and useful to the local context (de Lima Costa, 2006). The activists with whom I have worked are smart, conscious of North-South and other
power differentials and savvy in how they interact with international exchanges of ideas and people, at least looking outside of their own communities of practice.

*Other tools*

Leaders of the AMPDE, particularly those from the Casa Feminista in Quito, seem to be aware of the importance of symbols (including language) and to use them strategically, as techniques of signification (M. Foucault, 1993). When explaining how they chose the name “The Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador,” Judith Flores (CF), a founding member, explained that just as the Constitutional Assembly wrote the constitution and the National Assembly writes Ecuador’s laws,

> We had to name ourselves an assembly because we want to construct the laws, we want them to listen to our voices, we want “voice and vote” in the construction of laws. And because we are not from the elite generations of feminists who have always lobbied, because we are from the popular social classes, because we are poor women, because there is that class distinction, and because we are aware of the diversity among us, we had to call ourselves popular and diverse women, even though it is terribly long, because that’s who we are.

Judith also explained the significance of where the first Assembly of the AMPDE was held. She said,

> The meeting had to be held in the National Assembly, so we held it in the old Senate chamber, and it was very symbolic that the indigenous women participating were in the Senate, holding the microphone to speak and to vote. We did this because we also attempt to make use of symbolism as well, we said that it was vital that we play with those processes.

Women like Judith who organized the first AMPDE meetings clearly understood the importance of language and symbols as tools for creating change and used them in their efforts to contest state domination and claim power for women’s organizations. A practice of the AMPDE in its early days was to assign meaning to things – to signify events – in these ways.
Critical thinking is another tool that is important to learning and acquiring critical political consciousness. Without this skill, knowing codes and language would be less valuable since the person would not know where to apply them.

*Language as a tool of power: Inclusion and exclusion in organizational spaces*

Irene (MUC) describes the relationship between language and the personal power she feels having learned the language of the Mujeres Urbanas’ community of practice. When I asked what she has learned in that organizational space, she said,

> The workshops are very good, that they have given us… to be able to speak because [before the workshops] you didn’t talk, you could hardly express yourself very well… We are not society women who have been outside. We have always been housewives; we have always been inside. It has been difficult for us [to learn], if it is possible to read now. So we have learned to let go a little, to learn our rights which are fundamental… How many of us have learned from this? Because every day we learn. No one is wise, no one is born knowing. We have learned to speak, to express ourselves, to know our rights that were so fundamental. At least ever since we began, since they gave us “personal growth” [workshops].

The Mujeres Urbanas has been an empowering place for Irene in terms of learning a new language to express herself and to gain confidence by occupying the space provided by her community of practice and becoming a part of it. At the same time, within a single group, different people learn different languages and appropriate different levels of feminist and gender-focused language tools. Often the *leaders* of an organization will manage a technical language (academic language and/or NGO terminology, often necessary for grant-writing) that the *members* of the organizations do not. There is little evidence of organizational processes which teach that language to members who don’t already know it. There are power dynamics inherent in the discrepancies in the appropriation of tools such as language, grant-writing skills and contacts within foundations and international agencies. As Webster (2013) describes, professional and technical languages facilitate communication and understanding. When the
type of language that allows for communication with funding agencies and/or governments is only spoken by a few people in an organization, it is logical that power differences exist between those who are and those who are not able to communicate in these terms.

Beatriz is one of the oldest members and at the time of the interview the current secretary of the organization of Mujeres Urbanas in Cotacachi, an organization comprised of roughly 30 women from the urban center of Cotacachi which has been lead by Ana for most of its history. In an interview with me, Beatriz explains why.

Ana is a very good president... she has let us down sometimes in meetings, because of her work, but she’s always attentive. And how many years has it been now since the organization was created, and I think that until death Ana will be the president, because – how can I explain it – she already knows about these situations. Of course she wants to give the opportunity to others [to lead the group] but we don’t feel able. It’s not that we can’t do it, but we see that she is the one who knows. We’re new to the situation. Of course we’ve been told that we can help, but I don’t see myself as able to be, for example, president. We’ve talked, and neither do the other compañeras. Because it’s a big commitment, right, to be leading an institution, [you need] time, and sometimes the economic situation restricts you. And you have to be able to do things well, so you don’t upset anyone, and everyone has to be in agreement about what is done.

I understand her explanation of Ana’s knowledge “about these situations” as Ana’s analytic and linguistic expertise in gender-related issues as well as her contacts with people in NGOs, international institutions and foundations is extensive. As developing members’ leadership and grant-writing skills are not often group goals, it makes sense that little to no attention is paid to the transfer of these skills in organizational communities of practice. I use this passage to illustrate this dynamic in the Mujeres Urbanas, but it is true in almost every organization (women’s and mixed organizations) in Ecuador with which I have collaborated that there is little transfer of power within organizations. The same people tend to be elected over and over, and

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84 Since I did not have the opportunity to interview this woman for my dissertation I was not able to ask her if she preferred me to use her name or not. I have invented a name here.
even when they do not officially hold a position of power, they often influence the newly-elected leaders from behind the scenes.

While organizational leaders are often focused on making visible hegemonic power relations in society, it is important that they also critically examine these dynamics within their own organizations, looking to see how they can generate greater levels of equality and solidarity between members. This includes evaluating how they can teach specialized language and other practical tools, such as grant-writing and leadership skills, that will enable women who are not current power-holders within the organization to gain confidence in themselves, and take steps to become leaders. Turning critical political consciousness inward to examine dynamics within one’s own community of practice is often difficult, but necessary if organizations are to be spaces of solidarity. This activity is also crucial for gaining awareness between the individual and the communal as an aspect of self-aware consciousness.

**How Self-Aware Consciousness is Learned**

While political consciousness involves understanding how public identities position people in the hegemonic social structure, self-aware consciousness includes awareness of how that positioning affects different aspects of the self and that self’s relationship to other living beings. It is a general *awareness of* one’s body, emotions, thoughts, connection to the spiritual, and/or awareness of energy. Different cultures and peoples have different ways of conceptualizing and verbalizing this. In my research I observed that ideas from Western psychology and the Kichwa indigenous Andean cosmovision helped people understand and articulate aspects of their selves and experiences. These tools were learned both in and outside of organizational spaces.
Within women’s organizations in Ecuador, self-aware consciousness is most visibly cultivated in self-esteem workshops and in organizations where the indigenous cosmovision with its holistic understanding of the self, health, and people’s connections to the Pacha Mama is centered. In these organizational spaces, becoming part of organizational communities of practice includes learning to code for, see, and talk about the holistic ramifications of life experiences. Sometimes women learn other tools that help them listen to, rather than ignore or suppress, different aspects of their selves, especially their bodies, emotions, and desires. Other tools facilitate connecting with other living beings, for example, learning the medicinal value of plants or how to interpret dreams to better understand oneself or what ancestors or the Pacha Mama need. Outside of organizational spaces, women often talk about their experiences with psychology, spiritual practices yachaks (shamans) or other wise people as to where they gained the types of tools that facilitate self-aware consciousness.

Self-aware consciousness can also be *impeded* by organizational practices which ignore or minimize people’s emotional, spiritual and bodily needs or the individual’s connection to the community and the Pacha Mama. The cultivation of self-aware consciousness in organizations is very often contradictory, and one of my primary recommendations for women’s organizations based on my dissertation research is to purposefully cultivate it as part of the organizational community of practice. This will strengthen not only the individual, but also the organization and the women’s movement in general, especially if self-aware consciousness is cultivated in ways which teach tools necessary for solidarity-building (to be explored in Chapter Seven).
In Western society, what we understand as emotion is usually coded with terms originating in the field of psychology that have become part of Western common sense. Only recently are Western scientists showing what other cultures have always known, that what happens in our emotional lives affects our bodies (Littrell, 2008), that what happens in one part of the self affects the other parts of the self. Despite this, the rational is valued over all else in the Western cosmovision (Lugones, 2008a; Lugones, 2010; Martin, 2000) and is thought to transcend “the body and its various limitations” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 104). This is probably why, in part, many people feel disconnected from their emotions and their bodies, even though it is actually impossible to separate reason from the body, its movements, perceptions, relationships to others and impossible to separate its lived experiences from its intersectional embodied identity (Alcoff, 2006). In interviews, many women drew on psychological language to code the emotional and sometimes the corporeal aspects of their lives. They described “learning to see” the relationship between experiences, emotions, body and behavior as liberating and healing. Learning tools that enabled listening to themselves, expressing emotion and other non-mental sensation also emerged as central.

Women often identified self-esteem workshops as where this learning took place. When I asked Irene (MUC) what she learned from the Mujeres Urbanas’ formaciones she talked about “personal development” workshops, which she described:

They gave us massages; they had us liberate ourselves from this heavy weight that I opened up with you [Dana] when I cried… this is what they did with us there. They gave us those workshops where they drew how we are… [these] workshops have served us personally. I have learned how to speak, I’ve changed in my home too. Like I mentioned I haven’t been able to give affection very easily… on top of the fact that I never received affection, I was always busy, always thinking about working so that we’d have enough to
Irene relates the lack of affection received in her childhood with the difficulty she has being affectionate towards her children; using linguistic and analytical tools she says she learned in these workshops that taught her the basic developmental/psychological idea that our early life experiences affect us as adults.

From her description, it is evident that the facilitator(s) used pedagogical techniques in the workshop which integrated the body (massage, drawing), emotions (she cried) and intellect (learning to articulate the developmental framework). Irene credits the workshop as freeing her from a heavy burden, allowing her to be less bitter, and teaching her how to speak. Many other women also cited self-esteem workshops as having given them similar tools.

Self-aware consciousness is not only learned in spaces of formaciones but also in the interactions between compañeras in communities of practice, where women deliberately try to teach new members self-aware ways of seeing the world and themselves. Luz María, a long-time leader of the Comité Central de Mujeres UNORCAC, explained how she has tried to raise women’s self-esteem over the years.

I remember in the communities where we were, me and Rosa… we compared our experiences, looking at the reality of how each had been, and we went along talking a little bit, another little bit with the women, and saying that we [women] can also do things. We would talk about experiences from other [geographical] parts helping the compañeras so that, as they say, “through the eyes it enters.” [We were] observing what they learned. I remember we would go to meetings and their husbands would reprimand us. So there I would say to them… because generally women say, “It’s that I can’t speak, it’s that, chuta,” I’m thinking and I forget.”

“But no, compañera, you can, yes you can. Listen, who makes the food in your home?” “I do.” “And your husband?” “No, I do it by myself.” “Who is saving every penny?”

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85 This name is invented.
86 “Chuta” is an expression used a lot in Ecuador. It is somewhat a space-filler, like “gosh,” “geez,” “man.”
“Me.” “So who manages the finances – you do. So look – you have worth to cook, to do what else? Who takes care of the wawas?” “Me.” “And who takes care of them for nine months in the belly?” “Me.” “That is very important,” I told them… I made [each woman] see how important she was as a woman, what her virtues were.

As Luz María explains, teaching women to re-code, unlearning what they were taught their whole lives about their ability to think, to speak, to be in the world, can impact their confidence in themselves. It can also begin to heal emotional impacts of life experiences, something that is implied in ideas about “self-esteem,” in conjunction with other factors (Warren, 1976). As communities of practice, Ecuadorian women’s organizations generally encourage women to learn to express their emotions, and their activities create greater awareness of the relationship between experience and self. The degree to which self-esteem is a focus varies greatly from organization to organization, but typically such workshops are introductory and do not go deeply into either the causes of poor self-esteem or healing processes.

*Psychotherapists and yachaks: Emotions and spirituality*

Other women relayed having gained similar skills and the perspective they offer from having engaged in individual processes with mental health professionals. María Isabel (CF) adeptly used psychoanalytic language throughout her interview. This is evident where I quote her in Chapter Five talking about the repression of women’s sexuality in her family. In her interview, she explained where she learned this language and way of seeing the emotional aspects of her life:

I hadn’t discovered myself yet, back then… I wasn’t very conscious of how this [my construction as a human] crossed my life, how to construct myself in these sensations of myself – with my mom… Some time ago I did psychoanalysis and this helped me to break some things that were stuck [laughter] but there are other [things] that I feel are still stuck, that need to be untangled.
In her interview Enith (CF) also talked about how an experience with psychoanalysis helped her understand the relationships between the members of her family. “I had a psychoanalyst… with her I began discovering things, I went and asked my parents things…” Through psychoanalysis, Enith and María Isabel also learned to code life experiences for their emotional impact.

Just as hegemonic social structures can be imperceptible because of their “naturalness,” experiences’ impacts on the self are often invisible before codes reveal them. Awareness of the dynamics between experience and self can be empowering as it enables seeing how the people and places around someone create certain situations and how those are perceived in ways that affect the person’s thoughts, feelings, health, etc. This awareness offers new information to be considered when thinking about whether or not to stay in or remove oneself from certain relationships, workplaces, living situations, etc.

For indigenous as well as mestizo people in Cotacachi, psychology and Western medicine exist alongside traditional indigenous ways of understanding emotions, mind, body and spirit, which are not as separated as they are in the Western cosmovision. Both the indigenous and mestiza women interviewed see psychologists and Western doctors, several stating their treatment by psychologists was helpful in dealing with traumatic life events. They also see hierbateros, curanderos, fregadores, parteras, yachaks,¹⁸⁷ and the other health specialists in the communities. Based on my limited observations, it is more likely that women from middle/upper class backgrounds and/or from urban settings access individual Western mental health services. Sometimes women see psychologists or counselors as part of social services in hospitals or, for example, as part of their treatment in the Centro de Atención de la Mujer y Familia, a center for

¹⁸⁷ My friend Magdalena Fueres has explained these different types of healers to me. They are people who know how to (in the order above) cure sickness with plants, energy, set bones. They are midwives and wise healers with great wisdom. There have been articles written about this medicine. (See, for example, Cachiguango, 2011; Cavender & Albán, 2009).
domestic violence victims in Cotacachi. Aside from these situations, access is limited by people’s financial situation. In addition, many people from rural, primarily indigenous communities do not want to set foot in Western medical institutions because of the discrimination they face there. In interviews with rural indigenous women their answer to the question “Where do you experience discrimination?” almost universally included “in the hospital and on busses.” Not only are they discriminated against as individuals, but their communal and ancestral knowledge and wisdom is often mocked in these places. Aside from this, many people find traditional healers more effective for their maladies.

One woman (CCMU) recounted,

Some drunk mestizo men tried to rape me and I defended myself. I fought with them and I won. Ever since then, since that happened to me, I got sick a lot. For 4 years I lived like that and I haven’t had a good life. I was always sick… I went to the doctor but they didn’t say anything and finally I went to see a yachak [shaman] in San Roque [a nearby indigenous community] with my mom and he gave me some things and he cured me little by little from the susto88 that I had.

Here she affirms that while the Western medicine doctor was not able to do anything for her, the yachak who understood the relationship between the trauma she experienced and her physical illness was able to cure her. The diagnosis of susto was in this case a more accurate code which allowed for seeing her illness and thus healing. Learning to diagnose, treat and heal people from the health perspective of the Andean indigenous cosmovision in Cotacachi involves learning to recognize and code for these types of illnesses (just as western medicine doctors code for things such as “the flu,” “cancer,” etc.). Learning these codes and language and the practical skills of knowing which plants cure which illnesses and the skills involved in midwifery are -becoming part of a community of practice for indigenous women healers and leaders. It is also a learning which cultivates self-aware consciousness. The Andean cosmovision’s openness to and

88 “Susto” is an illness recognized in Ecuador. It is defined by Ecuadorian curers as “an illness caused by a frightening experience that, if severe, results in soul loss” (Cavender & Albán, 2009).
understanding of energy and holistic relationships within and between living beings makes it an important source of knowledge for self-aware consciousness for anyone. The same is true for Afro Ecuadorian and mestiza women who are still connected to these aspects of their cultures (Fundación Colectivo Luna Creciente, Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres Luna Creciente, & Piojo con Sueño Comunicaciones, 2011).

The health committee is an important commission within the CCMU, the primarily indigenous women’s organization in Cotacachi. It organizes women healers and midwives from the 43 Andean communities. Many women part of this group demonstrate great knowledge about health, nutrition, birth, etc., taking into account the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental bodies and how they can be healed by cleansing bad energies and returning the self to equilibrium. Their focus on how the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical bodies are connected, and connected to leadership ability, makes Andean health practices interesting and important places for learning more about self-aware consciousness (Parteras & Benitez, 2007, 2010; L. E. " . Cachiguango et al.; Fundación Colectivo Luna Creciente et al., 2011; Lema, Baez Echeverria, & Cachiguango, 2011; Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas de Cotacachi, UNORCAC, 2009). Because the concept of self-aware consciousness only emerged in my data analysis phase, I did not explore this as thoroughly as I would have liked, and see it as an important place for future research.

Lucy (CF) is one of the few people who talked about the connection between different aspects of her self and her spiritual life (which I didn’t ask about in interviews). As we were talking about “mestiza consciousness” she told me,

I have for some time been working on… a type of spiritual growth and I do yoga… I have decided to be vegetarian – things like these – that in some way… help you to have more
consciousness of your life…in a different sense [than mestiza/political consciousness]. But in some way they are related… because for me this is about how I can grow in this aspect as well, how I can increase my consciousness.

Through the spiritual practices in which she engaged, Lucy learned new ways of coding and thus seeing the world. As do other philosophies, yoga teaches new ways of coding and therefore seeing movement, breath, food, desire, posture and energy, among other things. Understanding and mastering the tools of meditation, breathing, physical postures is part of becoming part of the yogi community (Yoga. 2013). Codes and tools all affect how a yoga student like Lucy understands the relationship between her body, mind, emotions, and spirit, thus affecting her self-aware consciousness.

The body

As it was for Lucy (CF), learning a different relationship with their bodies was an important part of learning self-aware consciousness for many women. This learning is something which happens both in and outside organizations, and women from very different groups discussed it. Irene (MUC) said:

It seems like that’s what being a woman is [about]: loving myself. Now I feel like I love myself and that is something I learned in the trainings, of course – to feel what I feel, to know what my body is asking of me, when it asks for rest.

In this passage, Irene adds listening to her body and letting herself experience her feelings to the list of tools she mentions having learned in her organization.

María Isabel (CF) had a similar experience which she learned in organizational spaces with her compañeras from the Casa Feminista, crediting feminism itself as her teacher. Talking about her childhood and adolescence in comparison with her feminist adulthood, she said:
I constructed myself in [conditions of] self-repression. So for me, feminism gives me this possibility… to look back at myself without feeling guilty for looking back at myself, and to assume that it is a need that I have, and that it is also politically necessary. The act of rediscovering myself… in alliance with feminism and with other women [allows us] to realize possibilities and to rediscover ourselves in our own potential… this is ultimately what makes you feel good and makes you happy in this world [and] satisfied with yourself. I don’t know if in all of Latin America, but in Ecuador women repress ourselves a lot, [living] in a system which creates self-repression.

In this passage she uses psychology-derived codes to analyze how she and other women interact with their emotions and bodies in mainstream Ecuadorian society. She describes how she relearned to relate to herself as she became part of a feminist community. She reports that the new perspective and relationship she has with herself in itself offers happiness. This passage reinforces what has been made evident by others; that feminism offers codes and tools that teach both critical political consciousness and critical self-aware consciousness.

Magdalena (CCMU) talked about the relationship between the different bodies that comprise the self, how one’s perspective, openness, and spirituality all reside in the body, affecting it and its relationship with the Pacha Mama.

How you see the world from within the cosmovision – seeing that life comes from nature – how plants and animals are born, grow, reproduce – is an enchantment of all the senses. The spiritual part of the cosmovision is also an enchantment. Being in nature is mentally and physically relaxing, it complements the senses: smell, touch, taste – all that gives sensation, pleasure, satisfaction to our bodies.

The individual, communal and the Pacha Mama

The women I interviewed also discussed how learning to value and acquiring tools that facilitate listening to one’s own body, emotions, thoughts and spirit (holistic self) allowed them to connect with their desires, hopes and dreams. Tanya (CF) talked about the freeing possibilities of feminism and how the organizational processes in which she has been involved have allowed her to find peace with herself.
Recently I read a text… by Marcela Lagarde about making feminist pacts. This has… made me think about what is a feminist pact, what is a feminist pact with myself, how can I feel good with myself, do the things that I want and that I withheld, that I set to the side… because I had the huge task of transforming the world; my things had to come later. [Now I see that] my things were to transform the world…

The new way of seeing that has shifted Tanya’s self-aware consciousness has shown that her relationship with herself, including responding to her own desires, is actually important for the transformation of the world. She has learned a new way of seeing transformation that centers the micro, that prioritizes connecting with herself.

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed how women learn both hegemonic and nonhegemonic teachings as part of identity-based as well as organizational communities of practice. Group agency and group consciousness support these resistant activities and the creation of self-aware consciousness. Magdalena (CCMU) beautifully articulates the relationship between the communal and the Pacha Mama, painting a picture of this important aspect of self-aware consciousness.

Where families grow food for their own consumption, there is a strong connection between women, land, and seeds, which is related to their fertility and reproductive capacities. Andean women have traditionally been responsible for storing, taking care of and planting seeds so that they reproduce. Women love, care for, and carefully store seeds, talking to them in Kichwa because the words are more loving and enable the seeds to hear. Women give advice, they ask for things, for example saying, “Alpamamita fukuchipangi burrebiksha burrebiksha wawakunatami charini” which means “I have children with donkeys’ stomachs, donkeys’ stomachs. Please produce, mother seed, so I can feed my children.” Women might say “Don’t go bad but produce because I have many children,” or, “You are very beautiful, I don’t want you to be lost or to go bad.”

While Magdalena is from the Andean highlands and uses different language than Andrea (AMPDE), from a small city on the coast of Ecuador, there are similarities in the connection they express their relationship with their communities and the earth. In her explanation of her organization, Andrea said to me:
In our province… we have worked on the land question, we have also worked on the close relationship with nature, without knowing what now [we know] that it’s called food sovereignty, solidarity economy, well, so many things, recent names they have put [on these ideas]. But 20 years ago we didn’t know that this was exactly the process of caring for nature, as has been established now. We did it because inside the heart [one knows] to take care of nature where one lives.

In the face of much discrimination against indigenous and campesino ways of life and knowledge, organizations in Cotacachi have actively cultivated this part of self-aware consciousness in an effort to keep it alive. Codes and language and becoming part of a community of practice are important in these spaces as well, although sometimes they look different. For example, encouraging young people to speak Kichwa is part of the language skills that are part of this consciousness, for, as linguist Carmen Chuquin says, in a language is contained the culture and the cosmovision of a people (Chuquin, 2010). The Comité Central de Mujeres UNORCAC has worked tirelessly since the late 1970s for the rights of the indigenous peoples and rural communities in Cotacachi, in ways which integrate the self, the community, and their relationship with the Pacha Mama. I quote Magdalena (CCMU) again as she explains some of the initiatives of the group.

In the nineties, seeing that our compañeras were very timid and frightened, we decided to begin to do cultural events with the women, to go to their communities, and organize them to present a small cultural program for women’s day. We did that for three years. In 1998, 1999 we began to organize around food to raise awareness of health issues, because we had noticed that the compañeras weren’t preparing our own traditional food because they were embarrassed as people had always scorned our food as “the Indian’s food.” We said, “Why should we be embarrassed of our food – our grains, quinoa, potatoes?” and so we organized a food market. The compañeras went although they were ashamed and prepared our traditional food for our day, March 8th, international women’s day. Little by little this worked. People bought the food; the women stopped being ashamed of it. A couple years later we organized a produce market where they could bring their produce and medicinal plants to sell, we organized a produce exchange with women farmers other regions, and later we began doing a seed exchange where the compañeras would bring all the varieties of seeds they had.

The CCMU offers wonderful examples of ways to integrate different aspects of the self and the different types of consciousnesses in activities that, while they may not seem to be directed at consciousness-raising, do serve that purpose. They also put into action alternative ways of living, offering hopeful examples that can be experienced in embodied ways, to inspire and provoke change beyond their group. The markets that Magui described have shifted Cotacacheños’ perception of traditional food, a change which influences not only the valuing of the Kutacachi Pueblo’s culture, but also impacts what grains and vegetables are grown and can be sold. This, in turn, influences the robustness of local seed variety, food sovereignty, and the local population’s nutrition.

Conclusion: How Critical Political and Self-Aware Consciousness Are Learned in Ecuador

The stories analyzed in this chapter have shown that how identities are understood as well as the behaviors that result from those understandings can be and are relearned in organizational spaces as a result of critical political and self-aware consciousness. But how? In many organizations, part of becoming a member of a community of practice involves learning to see one’s identity in a different way, and if one is lucky, learning critical political and self-aware consciousness. There are several teaching techniques that facilitate these learnings. First, new members are
taught new ways of coding and therefore seeing things that were previously invisible or ignored because they were so normalized. Accompanying the new coding system is the language needed to express novel understandings of relationships and behaviors. Second, older members of organizations teach tools to new members that help them envision alternatives: a language of rights and dreams which help them communicate alternative ways of behaving and thinking. They also create opportunities to envision different realities through organizing meetings, formaciones, and “exchanges” where women are able to witness and talk to people living and embodying these alternatives.

*Learning critical political consciousness*

**Coding.** Women are taught codes which enable new ways of seeing, a powerful metaphor expressing how one’s perception of the world changes with a new interpretive frame. In organizations they learn to code for women as subjects of rights, as agents of change, as equal to men, as having their own desires. They learn to code for and therefore recognize things such as “gender violence,” “spiritual violence,” “rights,” and “racism.” The power of coding lies in that it assigns new values to the same things people have always seen – watching a man hit a woman is no longer coded as “a disagreement” but as “violence” or more specifically “physical violence.” Learning a new coding system allows one to see the social order in a new way. In order to learn critical political consciousness, one must learn codes which *make visible* “the system” or “hegemonic force” that quietly shapes society. Having consciousness without this vision is impossible.

**Tools.** Language is one of the most important tools people learn as they become part of a community. In communities of practice that are women’s organizations, several languages are
important: language that makes visible what was invisible because of hegemonic norms and values (body sovereignty, global workload, care economy, intersectionality etc.), language that allows for criticizing the power structures (patriarchy, racism, sexism, ablism, homophobia, etc.), and language that makes it possible to imagine a different reality. This last type is often related to human rights or feminist language (equality, rights, etc.), but also includes terms such as sumak kawsay which enable those of us from outside the Kichwa nation’s community of practice to imagine something beautifully “outside the box.” Another language that is part of organizational communities of practice but not always taught to general members is the technical language necessary for writing grant proposals and formal documents. It is important to pay attention to which languages organizational leaders teach and which they do not teach with members, and to analyze how that plays into group power dynamics.

Non-language tools used by communities of practice to concientizar include symbols, such as holding an AMPDE meeting in the senate chamber or naming the group an “Assembly.” Critical thinking is another tool that is often taught and without which critical political consciousness would not be possible.

*Self-aware consciousness*

My research indicates that activist women in Ecuador most frequently learn self-aware consciousness in self-esteem workshops, or outside organizational communities of practice in personal interactions with psychologists/therapists and yachaks or other elders or healers in the indigenous communities. In these spaces people learn about the connectedness of the different parts of their selves, learn to code for and talk about how life experiences have impacted how they think and feel, their health and spirituality. Sometimes self-aware consciousness is impeded
by organizations which discourage women from engaging holistically with themselves and/or which place demands on them that lead them to a state of imbalance with themselves, their communities, or the Pacha Mama. I suggest that organizations pay greater attention and actively attempt to cultivate this type of consciousness among members. I also assert here that people from the Western world have much to learn from indigenous Pueblos who are open to teaching them about the connectedness of all life as an important part of self-aware consciousness.
Photo 7: This photograph of an altar set up for a ritual for the Pacha Mama in Cotacachi was taken by Zamia Guitarra, one of the members of the Cotacachi photovoice group. This is what she wrote about the image for its display in an exposition: “The customs and traditions are what enrich each of our cultures and we have to fight to maintain them.”
When I see you and how you are,
I close my eyes to the other.
For your Solomon’s seal I become wax
throughout my body. I wait to be light.
I give up opinions on all matters.
I become the reed flute for your breath.

You were inside my hand.
I kept reaching around for something.
I was inside your hand, but I kept asking questions
of those who know very little.

I must have been incredibly simple or drunk or insane
to sneak into my own house and steal money,
to climb over the fence and take my own vegetables.
But no more. I’ve gotten free of that ignorant fist
that was pinching and twisting my secret self.

The universe and the light of the stars come through me.
I am the crescent moon put up
over the gate to the festival.

(Rumi, 1996, p. 138)
Chapter Seven: Consciousness, Conflict, Transformation and Solidarity in Organizational Spaces

Consciousness, Conflict and Organizational Strength

In interviews and focus groups, activists discussed how structural issues often create and/or exacerbate conflict between individuals and organizations. Things such as resource scarcity and the global financial crisis’ impact on project funding, the shortage of time for the unpaid work organizations require, the ingrained patriarchal culture in Ecuador and the ability of the government to divide social movements all lead to fractures and divisions between women and their organizations. Even more frequently mentioned were the spoken and unspoken conflicts between members of the same and different organizations, many women naming their loss of trust in organizational leaders because of perceived hypocrisy, close-mindedness, and infighting over power as their primary reasons for dropping out of organizations. Some interviewees argued that what appear to be personal conflicts are caused by structural forces. While this may be true, for many people the decision to leave still boiled down to the concrete behaviors and discourses of their compañeras. This suggests that while problems may be structural, it still may be possible to find ways to strengthen organizations and interpersonal relationships on personal and interpersonal levels.

For many organizations, concientizando for critical political consciousness is seen as a necessary precursor to changing hegemonic social structures, and this consciousness is understood as

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89 Examples include: In the IEE project described in Chapter Four, many participants expressed concern that if the UN created a national level leadership school they would use all the funds for that type of activity and the organizations’ local and regional level procesos de formación would be left without resources. Members of the MUC talk about how the other women’s groups in Cotacachi receive more funding than they do; the scarcity of resources provokes a sense of competitiveness between their members and other women’s organizations. This sense of resource scarcity leads to other tensions and dilemmas as well. For example, early in its history AMPDE leaders conflicted with a funding agency who wanted to determine the content of AMPDE formations they were financing (Hill, 2013) and when they decided to reject the funds and project to maintain autonomy, several local organizations withdrew their affiliation with the group.
fomenting political and social action. How do organizations and movements deal with their own weakening and dissolution because of what are perceived as personal conflicts? Based on my observations, groups do not have specific strategies to deal with these issues. I suggest that solutions may be related to cultivating self-aware consciousness and to directly confronting in a holistic way the effects of violence, epistemological ignorance, appropriated oppression and privilege. Facilitating the acquisition of conflict resolution and communication skills by group members is another practical strategy.

In this chapter I explore the relationship between consciousness, conflict and solidarity in organizations by closely examining conflicts I witnessed in and between organizations as I attempt to understand how they relate to critical political and self-aware consciousness. I consider the conflicts’ structural influences and how they manifest on a communal as well as individual level. I will then look at the relationship between solidarity and women’s openness, listening skills, ability to hope and dream.

**Put Yourself in Our Shoes: Critical Consciousness and Epistemological Ignorance in Communities of Practice**

I begin this section by sharing Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous women leaders’ perspectives on their difficulties participating in “diverse” women’s organizations looking closely at two urban mestiza women’s organizations and the different ways members relate to the indigenous aspect of their mestizaje and analyzing consciousnesses’ role in their contrasting perspectives.

*The AMPDE and national coalitions*

One Afro-Ecuadorian leader explained why her organization sometimes participates in national coalition spaces for women’s organizations but often does not:
If I put myself in the shoes of the other compañeras I understand that they try to talk about women with an equality discourse. But those women don’t put themselves in our shoes to understand that this equality discourse doesn’t fit because we are different… When… some question of “women in Ecuador” comes up we have to say indigenous women, black women, women of different sexual orientations – in other words, all the differences that we have as women. And in this context we also have to think that because of these same differences [we have different] demands… While they might be talking about the same issue – if we talk about poverty – but there are different particularities of poverty because… of genotypes.

She explained that the women in her organization do not feel like their perspectives are seen or understood in those spaces or that their interests are represented. Her statement that the leaders of these organizations do not put themselves in the shoes of Afro-descendent women is a strong statement about the need for creating empathy and solidarity and unlearning epistemological ignorance and appropriated privilege.

When I asked her how others could be in solidarity with Afro-Ecuadorian women’s lucha she replied,

Accepting the differences, accepting that differences exist, accepting that the problem exists, because the negation makes things continue [as they are]. And as much as possible supporting, working together with these minorities, working together with the Afro-descendent groups to support their agenda, their causes.

She echoes what women of color feminists have talked and written about solidarity (see Chapter Three), emphasizing the importance of listening, of playing a support role to the community in question. This has proven to be difficult for organizations around the world.

Women of color and from the provinces (outside the major cities) have also shared with me their observations of patriarchal “helping” behavioral patterns between women in positions of more and less power in the AMPDE. They have also perceived that it is primarily urban mestiza women who make decisions in the name of the organization (there is no formal or structured system for decision-making or the selection of leaders) and who benefit financially from NGO
funding for projects, while other organizations provide the “diversity” that funders want. They have also commented that women from urban centers, who are often the actual even if not formally-named leaders of the organization, tend to focus on national-level policies to the exclusion of the local issues that are often priority for local and regional groups.

The urban mestiza women on the receiving end of this critique would not agree with these assessments, but these differences are not directly debated. The observations of the women whose intersectional embodied identities place them more on the periphery geographically and/or in terms of public identity characteristics point to the presence of epistemological ignorance, appropriated privilege, and the inability to see the intersectional nature of identity (a defining factor of critical political consciousness) in their more privileged compañeras. Those observing the conflicts and contradictions, from inside and outside the organization, suspect that they are also fueled by unresolved tensions, old competitions, generational and ideological differences.

*Cotacachi*

During the time I lived in Cotacachi, I witnessed tensions between individuals and groups of urban mestiza women (MUC) and rural campesina (MI) and indigenous women (CCMU). The context of Cotacachi is such that 40% of the 40,036 inhabitants identify as indigenous (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos), many of whom have significant economic and political power, as explained in Chapter One. This means that there is not a clean-cut divide between the white-mestizo upper class power holders and the rest of the population as is the case in many other places. Rather there are rich as well as poor indigenous and mestiza families,
those with great political power and those with little. I offer two examples of tensions involving epistemological ignorance and appropriated privilege/oppression.

In the early 2000s the Mujeres Urbanas (MUC) spearheaded an effort to found the Centro de Atención Integral a la Mujer y la Familia – the Center of Integral Attention for Women and Families – a center that has become nationally and internationally recognized for its “intercultural” treatment of victims of domestic violence. The Center fills an extremely important niche for women victims of violence in Cotacachi, and employs innovative and successful methods, although its leadership structure is not ideal (Hill et al., 2012). The woman who spearheaded opening the center has always been its director while indigenous women have played supporting roles and the other members of the MUC have had even more peripheral involvement. As the Center is known for its intercultural approach to gender violence, focusing especially on supporting indigenous women, this is a debated topic. Various indigenous as well as mestiza leaders from Cotacachi have told me they think that the MUC, especially the woman who founded the center, has a patriarchal helping attitude toward indigenous women. This has not been publicly debated or directly addressed, but rather talked about in individual or group conversation where women feel safe to express their opinions with others who think similarly.

Another specific manifestation of the tension between mestiza and indigenous women in Cotacachi evolved because for many years, an indigenous woman held a leadership role coordinating activities for Cotacachi’s women’s organizations. She wrote grant applications, directed gender-focused projects, supported the organizations’ activities, and made presentations on the women’s organizations to outside groups and funders. She and other local leaders perceived discriminatory and racist attitudes and behaviors, including patriarchal “helping” mind-sets, among the members of one group of women under her mandate. She observed that
they were often unwilling to collaborate with other women’s groups in spaces where power was shared. Over the course of many years she perceived the group’s long-time leader, who is successful at obtaining outside funding and had in the past held positions of power relative to her, did not treat her and other indigenous people as equals. Based on her education and knowledge about political participation she also evaluated that the group was not representative of the population they claimed to represent.

Likely because of this, both this leader and the organization in question observed that while she fulfilled her obligations to this group, she did not have the same warm relationship nor work as closely with them as with the other groups. When a new member was elected president she told me she had hoped for leadership support from the coordinator but had felt that the coordinator wasn’t interested in helping. Another woman cried in the interview as she expressed her frustration that the organization and its members’ hard work were not recognized in public spaces by this leader and that she didn’t work as closely with them as she did with the other women’s groups.

The dynamics described in these different situations and contexts are not unusual; they have been written about many times by women around the world. In addition to being common, they are painful, and they weaken the women’s movement. Ignorance, appropriated privilege, oppression and contradictory consciousness all get in the way of collaboration and effective activism. With the idea that true solidarity offers a way through, I seek to understand what women need to be able to think and act in ways that are conducive for building relationships based on solidarity. In my attempt to answer this question, I examine mestizaje and its relationship to indigeneity as they play out in different individuals with the hope that this will shed some light on identity construction as part of self-aware consciousness. I also examine the role that violence, trauma,
and exposure to different realities play in women’s ability to develop empathy, critical consciousness, and to create relationships based on solidarity.

From the Communal to the Individual: The Simultaneous Appropriation of Oppression and Privilege and the Confusion of Mestizaje

Laura and Irene\(^90\) are both members of the Mujeres Urbanas of Cotacachi (MUC). Laura, who grew up in the home of the family for whom her mother worked, told me that she has always identified as mestiza. She calmly told me why:

My mom is from the indigenous culture, but they always dressed me… the owners of the house were mestizas, so their grandchildren’s leftover clothes were passed on to me. And I didn’t want to be indigenous [laughing], I didn’t want to be indigenous, I don’t know, I think because of the discrimination that there was, that never left me. Now I think how silly. But I imagine I decided this because there was a lot of discrimination… They felt like they were the owners of my mom; that she belonged to them.

My mom told me that her sister went to sell her there when my mom was four or five years old; her sister took her there and… told her to stay there until she got back, and my mom grew up and grew old there. Since they felt like the owners of my mom… they didn’t respect or take her into consideration; she just had to serve, like a slave at their service, whatever they said, until the hours that they said. So, for example, they had her plant, harvest, wash. And on top of that, when she had us, her three children, they told her that she had to figure out how to feed us, so she went to work outside the house washing clothes for the sons of the woman, and they paid her, and that’s how she bought our food.

Stories of Laura’s childhood are stories about how she was not allowed to watch television, to make clothes for her dolls, to play with other children, because she had to serve, to work. But she remembered,

Sometimes I would escape… when the grandchildren of the woman where we lived would come over… they would say to me, “Let’s go play!” “But if your grandma sees me she’ll hit me.” “But grandma went to visit someone, so let’s play now.” And we’d go play, and then I wouldn’t notice, and she arrived home and there I was, playing.

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\(^90\) Laura and Irene are both invented names.
This story of escaping to play with other children, to run around outdoors and have a few minutes of childhood vividly illustrates that agency and resistance can coexist alongside restrictions on freedom from an early age.

In general, Laura’s story encapsulates how structural violence can literally turn to slavery for people whose intersectional embodied identities leave them vulnerable: what can happen to a poor indigenous girl child whose family decides, at the intersection of all that structural violence, to sell her, and what happens to the daughter of that child turned adult. In what she now recognizes was a decision made to protect herself, Laura claimed a mestiza identity despite her mother’s indigeneity. She made other decisions to separate herself from a life of servitude as well. She remembers turning 15 in that house, and then saying to herself “I can’t take any more.” She left, finding odd jobs and living in other parts of the country until her mother went blind and she moved back to Cotacachi to remove her from that house and take care of her. In Cotacachi she got married, had her own children, and eventually joined the Mujeres Urbanas.

The theme that constantly ran through my interview with Irene was that of the discrimination she received as the only “non-white” child of her mother’s, her father a dark-skinned mestizo man who died soon after Irene was born.

People used to be more racist than ever. My mom had brothers who were very machista; of course, my mom didn’t know how to read. She didn’t hear, she was deaf… She was a domestic worker, she went to serve, and she had a son, she had [children] of the patrones; and then she met my dad, but… my mom’s family had been… a “good family” but poor, but they were racist… really racist… They say that they hit my mom for marrying my dad… because my dad wasn’t good enough for them… So they didn’t love me, because I was fruit of the man who wasn’t good enough for them. So I grew up only with my mom. My brothers and sisters were looked upon well by my grandparents and my uncles and aunts… We lived renting rooms, houses… alone with my mom… I don’t have much [of a relationship] with my brothers and sisters… they always made me feel badly.

Now to call someone indio (Indian) or longo (a pejorative term for indigenous) isn’t a big deal because now the indigenous people are almost superior, but before when my sisters
and my uncles and aunts called me that, they would say “longa sucia, longa puerca, lárgate de aquí” (dirty Indian, Indian pig, get away from here), it hurt. So I never had a family that one hopes for; when my dad died he left us unprotected, especially me. My brothers and sisters lived with my grandparents – my mom’s parents – they were loved, they gave them a lot of attention.

Irene suspects that her mother’s other five children were the result of rape by the patrones, the employers, who obviously saw her as their property and as especially vulnerable as a woman without hearing. Her story follows the same pattern as so many other domestic employees who have been raped by employers (Casanova, 2013). The difference between how Irene’s brothers and sisters were treated versus how she was treated is a perfect example of how different types of violence feed on one another. In this case, abilist and sexist structural violence resulted in sexual violence for Irene’s mother and racist and classist structural violence meant that Irene’s white siblings were privileged in affective and material ways over her, the dark-skinned daughter of a consensual sexual relationship.

Structural violence at the intersection of abilism, sexism and classism then denied Irene’s mother and Irene the pension her father’s work at the municipal government should have provided to them upon his death. When Irene was an adolescent, a rich older man told her he knew who was stealing the pension and that he could help her get it back. When she went to his house to discuss it with him he tried to rape her, and later communicated to her through a third party that he would help her if she would be his mistress. She never received the pension.

These violent experiences as well as her public identity haunt Irene. She was 57 when I interviewed her (in 2011) and she said that recently someone had asked her whose daughter she was. When she told the woman her mother’s name, the woman said, “Aaah, you’re the daughter of Ester, so you’re the ugly, ugly, ugly one.” Irene said she simply replied, “Yes.” She explained to me that her dad was mestizo, but that he was “moreno,” dark-skinned. Because of
that the light-skinned, green-eyed members of her mother’s family who considered themselves white and therefore better insulted Irene by calling her Indian and longo. Throughout the interview, Irene described herself as “morena,” always in association with the violence she endured from her family, and always with a negative connotation. Irene didn’t go to high school in order to work and help her mom make ends meet, “working like a man” her whole life. While my interview with Laura was punctuated by (uncomfortable?) laughter, my interview with Irene was with tears. It is obvious that she is still hurt by the events of her youth: the discrimination, violence and poverty she endured.

When I asked in the interview if she felt a difference between mestizos, Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous peoples, she said that indigenous people these days think they are better than other people, even though there are no “neto” (pure) indigenous people now, because everyone is a mix, everyone is mestizo. She said that some people have just “worn pants” before others, meaning they stopped wearing traje, or traditional indigenous attire, and called themselves mestizos. Saying this, she implies that clothing is the only difference between those who call themselves indigenous and mestizo. She said she doesn’t understand why “they keep talking about 500 years of colonization – we’re not the ones at fault anymore.” She says there are just a few indigenous people who still wear the traditional clothes, and those who wear those clothes and are rich are just out to think they are better than other people. “It’s no longer like it was when they greeted you with more respect, now they don’t greet you anymore.” As related in Chapter Three, she also said about indigenous women’s participation in organizational meetings, “I don’t like it when they are racist, for example… what we have seen at meetings, they’re only talking in Kichwa… they are people who speak Spanish and we are all there. Just speak Spanish.”
Both Laura and Irene have both had violent encounters with hegemonic social structures in their childhood, experiencing severe poverty that affected their nutrition and made formal education inaccessible. It also meant that they worked as children, as did their single mothers were unable to protect them from the multiple types of violence they constantly encountered. While they both identify as mestiza, they were both subjected to violence as children for their “indigenous roots” – Irene for the color of her skin, Laura because of her mother’s enslavement as an indigenous woman. They both expressed in some way their perception that it is better to be mestiza than indigenous. They are also both are members of a group where I frequently heard negative comments about indigenous people and which is perceived by many cotacacheñas as having a discriminatory organizational culture. While I have never heard Laura say anything negative, the fact that she remains a member of the group and doesn’t challenge those comments is significant.

The question I want to try to answer is why these women are comfortable being around and/or making negative comments about an ethnic group to which they are close not only in proximity, living in Cotacachi, but also “by blood,” as people in their family tree have identified as indigenous in the not-so-distant past. I will try to address this looking at it through two different theoretical lenses.

**Contradictory consciousness**

First, I want to return to the idea of contradictory consciousness, focusing my analysis on Irene. It is apparent that her contradictory consciousness goes hand-in-hand with her contradictory identity. She is mestiza, a “mixture” of white and indigenous ancestry, the dominant ethnic identity in Ecuador. Her white-mestiza family judged and rejected her because she is a “morena”
(dark-skinned) mestiza, although no one would say she is indigenous. Irene’s ethnic identity is both simultaneously privileged (as mestiza, non-indigenous) and oppressed (the morena part of the mestiza). While she protests how she was treated, good sense arising from lived experience, she also accepts that as the “dark one” of her mother’s children she is “the ugly ugly ugly one”– her common sense uncritically accepting hegemonic and dominant ideologies (Sturm, 2002, p. 20).

This contradictory consciousness leads to contradictory thought and Irene demonstrates simultaneously the behavior of the oppressed and the oppressor. Her comments about indigenous people can perhaps be understood from two perspectives. First, the part of Irene which has been treated with disdain and told that she is less appropriated oppression. Her behavior falls in line with Freire’s description of oppressed people who

> cannot perceive clearly the “order” which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized. Chafing under the restrictions of this order, they often manifest a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their own comrades for the pettiest reasons (Freire, 1970).

In addition to demonstrating this reaction to having lived the structural violence that is materialized in the lives of the “oppressed,” Irene has not been part of communities of practice where she has been taught to code for, to see, or to talk about the social order imposed by hegemonic forces. While women in the MUC are taught to code for patriarchal relations between white-mestizo men and women, the group’s analysis is not intersectional. Social structures, intersectional theories, etc. are not discussed in that space, and Irene has not participated in other social organizations in a sustained way. She has not been taught the language, codes, or analytical skills to be able to make those connections and see the reality of

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91 The idea that the oppressed take out their anger and self-hatred on one another has been written about by many, observing colonial and post-colonial societies. Fanon also wrote “the colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people” (Fanon, 1963, p. 52).
the dominant social order. The fact that she accepts, rather than contests, that lighter skin is better reveals that she has indeed internalized the image of the oppressors, as Freire suggested. Many of the oppressors in her life, in this case, were her own family members. Their images are literally in her. They share her genetic makeup.

Irene’s situation is not simple, for while she is lashing out against other “morena” people, she is also saying negative things about indigenous people as a mestiza woman in a country where mestiza is the normative racial/ethnic identity. While she has appropriated oppression, accepting that she is “ugly” and somehow less, she has also appropriated privilege, and adopted some of her family’s attitudes which see indigenous and other darker-skinned people as below them. The tools that her family as a prejudiced white-mestiza community of practice taught her are “tools… marked by… [w]hite-supremacist, male-supremacist, classist, heterosexist ideologies that are promulgated in and by the dominant culture and then appropriated by both the oppressed and the privileged” (Tappan, 2006, p. 2128).

As both oppressed and privileged, but having internalized the colonial hegemonic ethno-racial order of things, Irene understands that while she is not at the top, she is also not at the bottom, and appears annoyed by those indigenous people who have money or pride in their indigeneity. Her answers to my questions reveal the epistemological ignorance that accompanies appropriated privilege, a lack of awareness of the realities of indigenous and other minority groups. Irene and Laura occupy both oppressed and privileged spaces. There, they have learned the tools, including language, of oppressed and privileged identity communities. Importantly, these tools are based on the same values and hierarchies, making it easier, as Irene demonstrates, to move seamlessly between oppressed and dominant identities.
Trauma, openness to solidarity and possibilities for healing

Examining Irene’s comments through a different theoretical lens, I wonder if she would be open to learning a critical perspective and developing empathy if she were in situations where those skills were taught, or if she has actually had the opportunity but avoided participating in those types of spaces, which do exist in Cotacachi and in the AMPDE, because they do not appeal to her. There does seem to be a lack of openness, at least on Irene’s part, to learning to see ethnic and racial relations from a different perspective, an openness that I have identified throughout this dissertation as necessary for learning.

I suspect that Irene and Laura, and many others, experienced trauma from the violence experienced growing up. There is a body of literature which discusses the traumatic (Carter, 2007; Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012; Herring, Spangaro, Lauw, & McNamara, 2013; Kenneth T Ponds, 2013; Lowe, Okubo, & Reilly, 2012) and physical (Gee & Ford, 2011; Manson, 2012) effects of racism, as well as of gender violence (Labrador, Rincón, de Luis, & Fernández-Velasco, 2004; S. C. Taylor, Pugh, Goodwach, & Coles, 2012). One of the symptoms of trauma is experiencing “anger, sadness, shame, fear,” helplessness and/or hopelessness in relationships with others, and prioritizing “personal safety” and protecting oneself over connecting with others (Johnson & Williams-Keeler, 1998, p. 25-26). In their interviews with me, Irene and Laura said that what they told me are not things they talk about often, if at all, and they thanked me for listening, a pattern that repeated in many interviews.

These comments lead me to believe that many people do not have opportunities to process and heal from traumatic life experiences, and that the self-protective mechanism resulting from trauma to prioritize personal safety over connections with others, makes women emotionally...
closed in certain ways. Emotional barriers might partially explain why it is difficult for these women to form the kinds of relationships with indigenous people that would shift their perspectives about indigeneity, as the perspectives of Rosa Ana and Isabela were shifted when listening to stories of people “different” from them (Chapter Four). Openness requires making oneself vulnerable, and this is difficult when one has been deeply hurt.

If my analysis here is correct, and women like Irene and Laura who have experienced structural and direct violence have been traumatized by it, creating conditions for them to learn empathy and solidarity might require treating the effects of trauma as well as looking for ways for them to unlearn appropriated privilege and oppression. I want to emphasize that addressing both individual and structural issues are necessary. It is both important that people know the violence endured is not a reflection of the individual self but a result of the structural factors that shape social relations and that they can, as individuals and communities, heal from violence and resist oppressive forces.

If trauma and other repercussions of negative life experiences are treated holistically with an understanding of the relationship between the parts of the self and the individual, community and Pacha Mama (L. E. K. Cachiguango, 2010b; Durckheim, 1956, 2004; Schiller de Kohn, 2006), the process should teach both self-aware and critical political consciousness. A holistic approach to healing teaches self-aware consciousness because holistic treatments for difficult life experiences explain the connections between lived experience and the self and teach tools to heal and change counterproductive beliefs and/or behaviors developed in response to hurt that get in the way of life. It facilitates tools for critical political consciousness because in its understanding of the relationship between individual, community and the universal, it teaches codes and
language to be able to see and analyze social structures, linking them to negative effects on the individual and communal self.

“Loving the Indian part” of mestiza identity: Unlearning hegemonic norms

The stories just described are quite different from those related by members of the Casa Feminista, who are mestiza women living in Quito, Ecuador’s capital, a city with 2,239,191 million inhabitants and a primarily mestizo population. Only 4% of quiteños identify as indigenous (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos). This setting contrasts greatly with Cotacachi where 40% of the 40,036 inhabitants identify as indigenous (INEC, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos).

Many members of the Casa Feminista in Quito seem to value the “indigenous part” of their mestiza identity, and in interviews, talked about the importance of the indigenous movement for them politically, organizationally and personally. Judith (CF) explains the joy of joining the indigenous levantamientos – uprisings – in the 1990s and how the movement impacted her mestiza identity.

So we were already part of this [Christian base community] movement, and June of 1990 comes along, and it is the indigenous levantamiento. That totally hooked me. I say that we are the children of the indigenous levantamiento – because that was when we got hooked… We did days of solidarity – it was a marvelous thing, because also none of us had kids yet, we didn’t have anyone to notice [that we were out in the streets], so we joined [the levantamiento].

I have thought about how I so liked, I got so hooked because of this – I could feel my condition, that my indigenous characteristics that I have from my indigenous condition weren’t bad – that they were useful, that they were part of a process of 500 years of resistance. I think this happened to a lot of us in Quito… One of the graffiti that we painted, that the youth painted was “I love what I have of Indian” [amo lo que tengo de indio]. I think this graffiti says it all – love: to be able to reencounter your Indian characteristics, because, really, we are very much Indians… How we eat, how we talk,

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92 Quiteño refers to someone from Quito.
how we raise our wawas, how we cure our children. I can assure you that all the people— all the girls, the youth— if the child doesn’t get better, they cure him or her of “mal del ojo,” you cure with herbs; we are very nuclear, we try to be from the community— at least in the neighborhoods it is still that way… this thing of being a community is ultimately an indigenous legacy.

According to my interviews, the indigenous movement has had a tremendous influence not just on Judith’s, but on many Ecuadorians’ consciousness. It was mentioned by indigenous, mestiza and Afro-Ecuadorian women for its personal and organizational impact. It also paved the way for feminist critique of the leftist organizations to which members of the Casa Feminista belonged as it presented the first challenge to the dominant idea that if the class struggle was resolved, all other social issues would be solved.

Casa Feminista members’ history with indigenous resistance and positive relationship with indigeneity have allowed for stronger relationships between their groups and indigenous organizations. Although some of these relationships have become fraught over time in the space of the AMDPE, many indigenous women and their organizations have a higher level of trust with them than with many other mestiza women. There is much less collaboration between Afro-Ecuadorian women’s organizations and the AMPDE, as explained above. Although I have not spoken with members of the GLBTIQ and other identity-based organizations about this topic, I suspect they have similar reasons for not participating regularly in the AMPDE or other collaborative spaces for women’s organizations.

The problematic discourses around ethnicity and race found in the Mujeres Urbanas are absent in the Casa Feminista; the women seem to have much more critical political consciousness about the issues separating them from women with other public identities and from other organizations, something which has enabled them to accept and feel proud of “the indigenous part” of their

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93 “Wawa” is the Kichwa word for “children” that has been incorporated into everyday language in Ecuador. There are many Kichwa (and English) words that have become part of the Ecuadorian “Spanish” lexicon.
mestizo identity. Their critical perspective on their own and others’ intersectional identities and the appropriation of indigeneity into their subjective identities (revealing self-aware consciousness) has allowed many of them to build stronger relationships that incorporate elements of solidarity with indigenous women.

Why might these women have more critical political consciousness? Members of the CF have been involved in leftist and feminist organizations and as part of those organizations, in consciousness-raising activities, for many years. Located in Quito and dedicated to social activism, they have also been exposed to and surrounded by diverse social movements. Some of the practices of their community have been to challenge each other both intellectually and personally. Many of the women express a real openness to learning from others and attentiveness to the constant transformation their consciousness undergoes.

Differences in the self-aware consciousness between the women members of these two communities are also noticeable. Quite a few members of the CF have been through psychotherapeutic processes where they learned to see and express how their experiences have impacted their selves, and they seem to be aware of their power to change themselves and society. Many are well-known members and leaders of the women’s movement in Ecuador. Based on women of color’s observations about the power dynamics within the organization it appears that CF members have more appropriated privilege and epistemological ignorance to unlearn.

The women I interviewed from these two groups have also had very different experiences in terms of the levels of structural and direct violence experienced. While many members of the CF were part of “popular” (lower class) sectors as children, and engage in informal or contract
work (which implies a lack of benefits and periods of time without work) as adults, they have not experienced the severe oppression, poverty and violence as some of the other women whose stories I have told. They all had access to education, could all be currently categorized as middle class university-educated mestiza women. As Carrión’s research shows, many of these women draw on memories of their early lives to talk about themselves as from the “popular classes” although that is not their current reality (Carrión Sarzosa, 2013). Consciousness continues to prove itself to be contradictory.

**Self-Aware Consciousness and Interpersonal Conflict**

One of the contributions I hope to make with this dissertation is drawing organizations’ and academics’ attention to the importance of cultivating self-aware consciousness in members. In this section I will examine how interpersonal conflicts are related to organizational members’ consciousnesses, especially to self-aware consciousness. I will first explain several common interpersonal conflicts which plague organizations and then tell stories that reveal how having critical self-aware consciousness can contribute to more harmonious relationships and more stable organizations.

**Leadership and participation**

Women feeling bullied, ignored, or otherwise devalued by other group members often drop out of organizations. Several women with whom I collaborated confided that the attitudes and actions of certain leaders of their organizations have driven them away from the group. They perceive that these women do not consider opinions which differ from their own, and I have witnessed them use verbal and nonverbal strategies in and outside of meetings to assert their power and make decisions for the organization. I have never heard the women who are
perceived as squelching others’ opinions reflect on this issue nor have I seen organizational strategies developed to either analyze or take action to resolve what is perhaps not seen as a problem by the leaders themselves. It is perceived as a problem for many of the women who have left organizations, some of whom I have observed return when new leaders entered organizations with elections and rotating leadership.

In the AMPDE, part of the problem may be that there is a lack of changeover in leadership. In an attempt to avoid power hierarchies in the organization, for the first few years of its existence there was no formal or debated leadership structure (Hill, 2013). I observed that in this time period, and even now that there is a board, it is the same small group of women who make decisions, apply for grants, organize procesos de formación, and coordinate events. In the absence of a formal structure, an informal one took root and there have been few opportunities for new women to lead, perhaps in part because the women who hold power were both founders of the organization and already well-known feminists in Ecuador. Not many people have voiced concern about the lack of rotation of leaders, perhaps because it takes a huge amount of time and energy to maintain the organization, and few women feel they have the (mostly unpaid) time required to do that work.

*Feeling betrayed by communities of practice*

Several individuals from the CCMU, AUCC and MMO also talked about how other members of their organizations encouraged them to run for office (in local government or mixed-gender organizations) but later did not support their candidacy. They all talked about this as a painful experience. In some cases the women who had endorsed them later backed male candidates, in others cases they simply did not show up to support the woman running for office. While this
may not have to do with consciousness, the lack of direct communication with the compañera running for office shows a lack of awareness or consideration for her feelings and material situation. While this is an interpersonal issue, it has implications for organizations as well. Feeling abandoned by their organizations made these women less interested in retaining their membership and left them feeling betrayed by women they had thought were friends and compañeras.

**Patriarchy and complementarity**

Many interpersonal conflicts in women’s organizations are related to women’s relationships with men and the contradictions that arise from being a woman in a patriarchal society. These situations bring to mind Freire’s discussion of horizontal violence and how oppressed people often strike out at one another (Freire, 1970).

UNORCAC, the mixed campesino and indigenous organization in Cotacachi with whom the CCMU is affiliated, has a patriarchal culture. Never, in its 35 year history, has a woman been elected president, and many of its practices are based on patriarchal assumptions. This struggle for power and representation in UNORCAC is intertwined with the political party membership of both male and female leaders and long-standing rivalries between powerful families who are part of the organization. Together these dynamics create tension between women members of the CCMU.

There is a constant struggle within the CCMU community of practice, which is both part of, and independent from, UNORCAC over how to confront this and interact with UNORCAC’s male leaders. Certain women leaders attempt to ensure that the CCMU as a women’s organization maintains its autonomy and power of decision, while other women look to male leaders of
UNORCAC for leadership and decision-making. These women as well as the male leaders who were in power when I lived in Cotacachi often referenced the indigenous ideal of male-female complementarity, saying that men and women have to work together. I frequently heard the argument that the president of the CCMU is like the mother of the organization and the president of UNORCAC is like the father.

There are many ways to interpret these women’s perspectives and actions. On one hand, the women who wanted male support in their roles were not paid for their work while the men were, and thus did not have as much time to dedicate to the organization. Letting or asking men to complete some of the woman leader’s duties can be understood as a strategy on her part to conserve time and energy. The technique of identifying the person with the most power in the organization and allying with him can also be understood as an agential strategy to protect the individual and her organization. Finally, these women might not have seen a power differential because they didn’t have the codes and language that would enable seeing it. Perhaps they had not been in situations which would conscientizar them around this particular set of issues, perhaps they were closed to learning the tools offered by organizations necessary for cultivating critical political consciousness.

In certain ways, the dynamics of the community of practice mirror the social realities of many women who are part of it. Until recently, the CCMU was not legally or economically independent and depended on UNORCAC and NGO funding for recognition and economic stability. The fact that the president of UNORCAC, who has always been a man, is the only elected leader who is paid, gives him a certain level of freedom to dedicate his time to the organization. This dynamic makes him indispensable and other leaders less able to participate.
The structural forces which create economic independence for and offer positions of power to men in society are replicated on an organizational level.

While the principle of complimentarily is important to indigenous cosmovisions around Latin America, many indigenous women have argued that the concept has been misunderstood and (mis)used by indigenous male leaders to effectively deny women decision-making power and maintain dominance over them (Duarte Bastian, 2001; Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas, FIMI, 2006; Paredes, 2010). As I have mentioned, Carmelina responds to the argument that men and women should have relationships of complementarity in organizational spaces by saying “without equality there is no complementarity,” a similar argument to the one made by Paredes (Espinosa Miñoso, 2010; Paredes, 2010) and other women who appear to have critical political consciousness. They argue that what they are currently being offered is not, in fact, complementarity.

For the CCMU, cultivating critical political consciousness is important for women to learn skills to critically assess their larger mixed-gender community of practice, to see power relations and envision their ideal so that they can work to transform the practices and eventually the community that is the organization. Self-aware consciousness is also important in this situation so that women can identify the objectives underlying their actions and see what strategies they developed in response to difficult situations in their personal lives that may not be helpful when applied in organizational settings.

*Competition*

Competition over male attention is another point that was mentioned by several women. When I asked Nancy (CF) if there was a certain way of thinking or acting that used to seem normal but
that she saw as problematic after her time in women’s organizations she said, “The tendency to compete with other women, principally for a man’s attention – for the approval on the sexual plane… I frequently found myself in triangles…” Alejandra (CF) told me, “It’s not like there haven’t been tense relationships because one likes the same guy as the other, or because one has a better relationship with the [male organizational] leader and the others look at you funny.”

Both women acknowledged how their consciousness around this issue changed as a result of their organizational participation and experiences. Nancy said,

Later you realize that this is absurd, it’s stupid… how could one even risk friendship relationships with another woman for the recognition of a man who later won’t mean anything in your life? This you know in that same moment… but it doesn’t matter to you because in that moment the construction of symbolic capital as a woman worthy of admiration by a man [is what matters to you]. I regret that a lot.

Alejandra talked about what she has seen develop in light of consciousness about this tendency for competitive relationships to affect women’s organizations,

But what has prevailed is a profound ethic… a profound relationship where you know that neither he, nor the leader, nor the gossip is the priority; that the priority is your relationship with your compañera… This priority implies sitting down with her and if that means she tells you off (mandarte al diablo), that’s what has to be done, because… it’s just not possible that women’s organizations break because of these types of things. And women’s organizations always break for these types of things – because of the super strong relations of power that are mediated by third persons who define the relationships between us. That’s why I think that the ethic that has been key is to not enter in competitions [between women].

The role of critical political consciousness (awareness of relations of power and symbolic capital) in shifting their perspective is obvious in what they say. Nancy also demonstrates self-aware consciousness in her reflexive awareness of how the different parts of her self interacted in a particular moment: her desire for male attention conflicted with knowledge of how it might affect her friendships with women. These consciousnesses are, like others, contradictory. Some of the conflicts that have debilitated the Casa Feminista over the last few years have had to do
with disagreements between women about how to deal with the sexist behavior of male compañeros in work and personal spaces. They have revealed once again how structural issues become manifest in interpersonal actions, embodied in individuals, and how important it is for groups to think of strategies to avoid letting these issues weaken communities of practice.

**Contradictory practices in community: Feminism experienced as liberating and restrictive**

As critical political consciousness shifts, conflicts between the person whose consciousness is changing and other people in their lives are common. In interviews, members of the Casa Feminista recounted the conflicts they had as they gained critical political feminist consciousness with the male members of their leftist collectives and decided first to create women-only feminist groups within their mixed organizations to meet and discuss feminism in their lives. Many women told stories similar to Alejandra’s (Chapter Five), where she described how the men in their organizations were incapable of seeing, accepting, renouncing their own patriarchal and sexist practices and being in solidarity with the women as they nurtured their critical political feminist consciousness. As happened in leftist organizations around the world, men maintained that all other issues were secondary to class and that once the class revolution succeeded all other social ills and inequalities would be resolved (Saporta Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren, Chuchryk, & Alvarez, 1992; Stephen, 2000). The women eventually tired of this discourse and in what they described as painful ruptures with their male friends, left their organizations and joined other feminist collectives in Quito which eventually came together in the Casa Feminista.

After taking that step, a different sort of conflict emerged. Interviewees recounted that once they were on their own, they created an organizational culture that was inflexible, made people feel judged and ultimately drove members away. As Enith (CF) explained, the first conflicts within
members of the organization happened when one of the group’s leaders died suddenly; not only was it a very difficult loss emotionally but also organizationally.

It left a vacuum, and there began to be some ruptures within the organization between the compañeras… My hypothesis is that they were accommodating certain discourses [they didn’t actually agree with], for example the discourse that I don’t want to be a mother, so we’re not going to have kids, or that we don’t want to get married… while in reality… some compañeras did want those things… They assumed they couldn’t do them in the organization so they left the organization…

Since then we have done a self-critique and let’s just say that at that time we were an organization that was quite rigid… that put the militancy above everything. It came first. So you could leave your family, you could leave your partner, you could abandon your studies, but you could not fail the organization. This was, at times, an imposition.

This analysis is shared by other members of the Casa Feminista. They recognized that the inflexible group norms affected not only those who left the organization but also the ones who stayed. Many of the women dropped out of the university in the 1990s in rebellion against a system which demands university degrees and because they were too busy with their activism, which was their priority, as Enith explained. In recent years they have returned to school to graduate, as they have realized that job opportunities are limited without a degree and that they enjoy academic learning.

This example is interesting because it reveals how at one level critical political consciousness was being fomented, while at another, needs, desires, individuality, subjective identities and ultimately self-aware consciousness were being squelched by the organizational culture and norms. Listening skills and a capacity for empathy were not being encouraged but rather, at least in the hidden curriculum, the idea taught was that being a feminist meant adhering to a set of strict norms and rules. These were the rules of the community of practice of the Casa Feminista, taught by one woman to the next, who if she did not agree, often felt she had to leave.
Thinking back to the evaluation of methodologies for consciousness creation discussed in Chapter Four, I understand that a safe space for expressing differences was not created in the early days of the Casa Feminista. The inflexibility of the organizational culture served to isolate people and did not allow for solidarity to be built between, in this case, women with similar public identity characteristics, but different desires and realities. When I first encountered the Casa Feminista in 2010 this culture appeared to have changed in some ways. There were members who were married, single, separated, dating men, women, with children, without children, and the women talked about how accepting these differences as well as their own mistakes was necessary. In interviews many of them reflected on their selves – their emotions, thoughts, and actions – contrasting how they thought about themselves now as opposed to their early days as feminists, revealing that their self-aware consciousness had heightened over the years. Even with this increased self-aware consciousness, the Casa Feminista no longer exists. While the dissolution of the organization could be explained by saying that people simply grew apart over the years, at the moment the rupture was complete (which followed a slow decline in meetings and activities), I observed missing dialogue skills for communicating strong disagreement. Had these skills and the aspect of self-aware consciousness that allows one to observe and not completely identify with emotions, thoughts, etc. been present, group members might have been able to continue working together.

Hope and dreams

In this section I want to look at some examples of how women have relearned identities and consciousnesses in ways that give hope and tools for building relationships of solidarity. The ability to dream is wrapped up in women’s processes of transformation and reclaiming of themselves. The appropriation of oppression – the idea that you have less value or worth and
that life just is as it is – robs people of their capacity or desire to dream. When one is taught that women’s purpose is to serve others, why bother having dreams for oneself? The facilitator of a workshop I attended with the women from the CCMU in 2010 asked them, “What are you here [on earth] for?” Many of the women answered: to cook, clean, take care of the children, the house, my husband. With this answer they demonstrated the extent of their participatory appropriation of normative teachings about what it means to be a woman. In so doing it appears they also learned that their own desires, pleasures and personal growth were not an important part of their lives.

Their answers contrasted with the stories I heard in interviews of how as children the women I interviewed wanted to climb trees, ride bikes, play. They contrasted with the stories I heard about how some women as adults have found space to listen to, love and transform themselves. The stories about childhood longings remind me of those told in the book Playing with Fire, collectively written by a group of activist women from India about the violence they endured growing up and their own processes of transformation. They write,

In addition to formal education, another dream had been denied us as women. This dream had to do with riding bicycles and chasing the new skies over our villages. By the time we had reached adolescence, the same childhood that had bound our feet and taught us the definition of a good girl took away our courage to realize the dream of riding bicycles. We had almost completely forgotten it after once so greedily pursuing it as little girls (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006, p. 107).

The Sangtin Writers go on to recount how they eventually remembered their dream and, as adults, overcame opposition by their husbands and families to buy and ride bicycles. They express a pattern I observed in the stories of many of the women whose stories are included in my dissertation – of dreaming, then learning not to, and then reconnecting with one’s own desires.
For example, members of the Casa Feminista often relearned self-aware consciousness in the same places where they acquired critical political consciousness. Organizational, social movement and psychotherapy spaces made them reconsider their learned identities and their emotional, intellectual and corporeal understandings of life. They learned to code personal experiences of oppression as caused by structural factors. They learned to see that hegemonic forces exist in their society and shape not only their material realities but also their identities.

As part of my definition of self-aware consciousness I included the knowledge that one is an actor and an agent, that one’s thoughts, actions and feelings influence and shape one’s life and the world. Knowledge of one’s own agency/power is related to hope, as I have asserted. This is important to consciousness. When people do not see themselves as having agency, but have political consciousness, there is the chance they will either get depressed and feel hopeless about the world (people have told me, “life was better before I was conscious”), or they take on the role of victim, seeing things through this filter, and are disempowered by this vision of themselves in the world. As was made clear in Enith’s analysis in the last chapter of what different women do in reaction to their newly found consciousness about gender inequality, the presence of hope is essential for the kind of consciousness which leads to social change.

Although it is not usually named “hope,” this idea is also present in social and social movement theorists’ definitions of consciousness. For example, McAdam includes in his definition of insurgent consciousness the belief by oppressed groups in the possibility of changing one’s reality (McAdam, 1999). In his discussion on the pedagogical importance of dialogue, Freire writes about hope.

Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men’s [sic] incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in
communion with other men. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice (Freire, 1970, p. 80).

Here Freire links hope to dialogue, which is another important factor for conscientización.

Dialogue includes both speaking and listening. This was proven important in Chapter Four when I discussed the importance of methodologies for procesos de formación which create spaces where women feel comfortable to share their stories. It resurfaced in this chapter in stories about the Casa Feminista – that dialogue and listening, rather than demanding and judging, are kinder ways to treat members of a community of practice and ultimately strengthen organizations.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have focused on some of the conflicts and contradictions that are part of the organizations with which I have collaborated, zooming in especially on Casa Feminista, the Mujeres Urbanas and the CCMU to examine how consciousness or lack thereof affects women’s relationships with one another on individual and collective levels. Epistemological ignorance and lack of awareness of the intersectional nature of identities by women with relatively privileged identity characteristics emerged as important factors that drive women with less privileged identities away from participating in their organizations and activities, even if they are intended to be for “diverse” women. This is the same dynamic that has been described for years by women of color about their participation in the women’s movement (Espinosa Miñoso, 2010; Paredes, 2010; The Combahee River Collective, 1983; Vargas, 1998). What is to be done about it?

First, it is important to recognize the contradictory nature of consciousness (Gramsci et al., 1972, 1971; Sturm, 2002), and that people can appropriate privilege and oppression simultaneously
because they have both privileged and oppressed public identity characteristics. With this knowledge, it is important for organizations to design different strategies for unlearning appropriated privilege and unlearning appropriated oppression, including when they are both present in a single person. Organizations should also consider how to create critical political and self-aware consciousness among different people with different experiences.

Thinking about the experiences of women from the Casa Feminista who learned to love and be proud of the “indigenous part” of their mestiza identity, my analysis suggests that conscientizando for critical political consciousness is effective. A basic understanding of social structures and intersectionality are necessary for people to see how and why their lives are structured and embodied differently from those around them. Without critical political consciousness, including an awareness of the intersectional nature of how hegemonic social structures become embodied, it is difficult if not impossible for individuals and communities of practice to move beyond what hegemonic forces have taught them about themselves and others, whether that be that they are of lesser or greater value. This type of consciousness facilitates developing empathy and building relationships of solidarity with people from different public identity communities or within their own community of people “like them.”

Not just critical political but also self-aware consciousness was shown to be important for solidarity. A lack of self-aware consciousness contributes to situations where women feel excluded, hurt, silenced and betrayed, often leading them to drop out of organizations. Listening skills, reflexive sharing, conflict resolution, nonviolent communicative and dialogue skills are all important for people to be able to express themselves honestly and still remain friends with other members of their community of practice (Freire, 1970; Schirch, 2004). These are specific skills that can be taught but which I have never, with the exception of “mediation skills,” seen included
in a workshop in Ecuador. I recommend that organizations teach them or other relevant skills to help members resolve differences while keeping the organization intact.

Another important function of self-aware consciousness is that its presence indicates a certain understanding of how past experiences have impacted how people think, feel, their health, and how they relate to other people. It can also offer insight about behaviors, perceptions, and can help one see how individuals’ and group’s behavioral patterns often emerged in response to life experiences. Behavioral adaptations to violence and trauma (Johnson & Williams-Keeler, 1998) are especially pronounced. Once this is visible, one can evaluate if the observed behavioral patterns are helpful or harmful in the situations where they play out. If an individual or group doesn’t like some of their thought or behavior patterns, self-aware consciousness should provide greater awareness of their root causes and hopefully enable better identification of what to address to change them. The general awareness of one’s self that results from self-aware consciousness can be empowering as people learn to identify where things come from, things such as emotional reactions, thoughts, and behaviors that one previously thought were “just that way.” This knowledge can be liberating.

The simultaneous presence of critical political and self-aware consciousness is important for people with privileged intersectional embodied identities to be able to look reflexively on how privilege and ignorance operate in their lives. Having done that reflection they can think with others about when to renounce it and when to put it to work in service of the community of practice’s greater goals. Likewise, it is important for people with oppressed public identity characteristics to examine how oppression operates in their lives, how they can challenge it, and where they can find support so they don’t have to face it alone. It is only with such heightened
awareness that individuals and groups will be able to unlearn hegemonic teachings and be in solidarity with one another.
Photo 8: Tayta Inty, Father Sun. Latacunga, Ecuador
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This research has been motivated by a desire to understand how social organization and social change happen from the inside out, in line with what I quoted Gloria Anzaldúa as saying in Chapter Two,

Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads (Anzaldúa, 1987b, p.109).

I wanted to investigate what and how things shift in people that make them look critically at hegemonic social structures, at their complex selves, and how these new ways of seeing change their relationship with themselves and those around them. I have also wanted to understand how the whole self is implicated in processes of consciousness creation and what role unresolved personal hurt, often resulting from violence created by hegemonic structures, plays in individual and collective efforts to resist and change those structures, including people’s in/ability to form relationships of solidarity. I was drawn to do my research with women activists in Ecuador because of their critical consciousness and the important history of social movements in the country that is layered on top of a colonial history. I have had my eyes opened by the Kutacachi Pueblo’s cosmovision and have tried to incorporate that wisdom into this work, starting by centering the connection between the individual – communal – universal in my analysis.

To frame this research I asked: How are different aspects of consciousness learned and relearned by members of women’s organizations in Ecuador? How do women’s critical political and self-aware consciousnesses affect their relationships with themselves, others, and social organizations? My answers to these questions are based on three years of participant observation (2010-2013); 80 interviews; and the focus groups, interviews and surveys conducted as part of a
team at the Institute of Ecuadorian Studies (IEE) researching gender-focused procesos de formación in 2012.

In this conclusion, I will first review four key concepts on which I have relied for analysis in this dissertation, two of which I developed and hope contribute to discussion of consciousness. They are critical political consciousness, self-aware consciousness, sumak kawsay wisdom, and solidarity. Then I will review what I have found in response to the two questions I posed and talk about their importance in Ecuador today. Finally I will discuss the implications for my findings: first for the academia, and second for organizations and activists.

Central Concepts

Critical political consciousness

My definition of critical political consciousness as a basic awareness of hegemonic social structures comes from definitions of consciousness in social science and social movement literature. I link this type of consciousness to an awareness of public identities, which I understand as how hegemonic structures are embodied in individuals. Awareness of the intersectional nature of public identities is important for understanding the very different realities of different social groups and the uniqueness of every person’s life experiences. It has shown itself to be difficult to grasp by many people, but essential for the creation of empathy and relationships built on solidarity. The last piece of my definition of critical political consciousness is a question of values; it is the belief that equality and justice should prevail rather than the inequality caused by structural forces. Without this conviction, awareness of social structures and intersectional identities just creates people conscious of their unfair advantage in life but willing to appropriate privilege and benefit from injustice levied against
others, or people who have appropriated oppression so deeply that while they are conscious of their unfair disadvantage, they do not think equality should prevail.

**Critical self-aware consciousness**

Psychological and common sense dictionary definitions of consciousness alongside the observable effects of violence and trauma in women’s lives in Ecuador brought me to the idea of centering *critical self-aware consciousness* in my work and looking at it alongside critical political consciousness. I define this aspect of consciousness as a reflexive awareness of one’s intersectional public and subjective identities. In order to observe herself in the world, a person must be aware of how others see her and how she sees and constructs herself as an individual. It is also an awareness of the relationship between experiences and the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual parts of the self. Moving outward, it is awareness of the relationship between the individual, communal, and Pacha Mama. Finally, it is knowledge that one is an actor, and that one’s own thoughts, actions and feelings influence and shape one’s life and the world.

Analyzing how women learned this type of consciousness I observed that it was typically through contact with psychology (whether in a clinical or informal workshop setting), feminism, the Andean indigenous cosmovision or a spiritual practice which taught ways of seeing and talking about how material experiences and realities in the world impact emotions, bodies, thoughts, and connection to the spiritual. The codes and language learned in these settings seem many times to be the first step toward observing rather than totally identifying with the emotions, thoughts, etc. provoked by certain events. Complimenting this awareness of how material experience relates to the embodied self is the aspect of self-aware consciousness which entails awareness that the individual is part of community, and that both are part of the Pacha Mama,
which translates from Kichwa as Mother Nature or Mother Universe. This piece of consciousness reminds us that what we do has repercussions not only for the different (but always interrelated) parts of ourselves, but also for our communities and the Earth.

The last aspect of my definition of self-aware consciousness is the understanding that one is an actor and that one’s own thoughts, actions and feelings shape one’s life and experiences. In this, it is related to hope. Without this, self-aware consciousness might lead people to overlook their agency and power and just see themselves as victims. It is also important as we think about how to translate consciousness into action and activism.

*Sumak kawsay wisdom*

*Sumak kawsay wisdom* I define as the deep knowledge that all living beings should live in harmony and in balance, and that we all have equal worth and should be treated with dignity and respect. It is a concept based on the Kichwa term sumak kawsay which roughly translates as “good life” and which encompasses being well spiritual, mentally, emotionally, physically, being in harmony with nature, other people, yourself, your family and community. It means nurturing, being respectful and in solidarity.

It is connected to people’s sense of personal and collective power and agency in relationship with the Pacha Mama. It is connected to the part of critical political consciousness that is the belief that structural inequalities should be replaced by equality that respects intersectional differences, and to the agential aspect of critical self-aware consciousness that leads people to act based on the strong convictions that this wisdom provokes. Some women seem to be in contact with this wisdom their whole lives, regardless of the fact that their communities and society are trying to teach them opposing ideas based on hegemonic values and hierarchies. Others seem to
recognize this wisdom in themselves later in life when they come into contact with codes and language centering dignity, rights, justice (or other language expressing similar ideals), teaching them to see structural inequalities and their ramifications and enabling them to unlearn hegemonic teachings, appropriated oppression and privilege.

**Solidarity and consciousness as a tool for its construction**

In this dissertation I have centered solidarity, the common political commitment by a group of people who have decided to work together, as an important tool for individuals and organizations in their lucha to make society more equitable and just. I argue that it is necessary in every organization since even in groups of people with similar identities, there are differences which can and do divide people if those people are not given space and acceptance as the individuals they are with their particular histories, dreams and desires in the community of practice that is the organization. People want to be treated as equals, with dignity and respect. Important tools for constructing solidarity include: learning to listen, to hold judgment, openness to learning new things, empathy, conscious contact with sumak kawsay wisdom, and critical political and self-aware consciousness. To achieve some of those, it may be possible that healing from wounds inflicted by violence experienced over the course of one’s life is necessary.

Real solidarity is actually quite difficult to achieve. I have observed that it necessitates the kinds of awareness of both one’s self and hegemonic social structures that I have included in my definitions of both critical political and self-aware consciousness. While neither solidarity nor consciousness may be explicit goals of organizations, I argue that both are necessary for lasting social change, that they cannot be separated from one another, and that organizations would do well to center them and invest in promoting them for their members.
Many organizations are debilitated by personal conflicts among members, and social movements are weakened by the inability of people with different public identities and other differences to hear and act on others’ needs and priorities. In both contexts, solidarity is an important first step and offers something to focus on for people and organizations interested in social change. It offers an alternative vision of how people can interact and relate to one another, a way to move forward.

Research Question #1: How are different aspects of consciousness learned and relearned by members of women’s organizations in Ecuador?

Learning identities

Identities are learned as people appropriate and resist hegemonic teachings about their own and others’ identities. I found that women learn their intersectional identities through becoming part of a community of practice of girls, closely related to the community of practice of women. They learn to see gender as they learn to or resist learning how they are taught girlness. Some codes such as doing housework, wearing skirts or anakus, not climbing trees are fairly consistently understood as codes for being a girl. Other codes that enable seeing girlness from their intersectional communities’ perspectives differ greatly based on class, race/ethnicity, and other identity characteristics.

Children are taught how to code for their own and “other” public identities in social institutions, through interpersonal interactions, by their appropriation of codes and teaching themselves. They learn the language that accompanies these identities and use it to reinforce their own and others’ understandings of identities that fit and collide with hegemonic identity characteristics. Their learning of codes and language taught by their communities of practice, often based on their intersectional embodied identity, is necessary for becoming part of those communities of
practice, and appropriation of the community as their identity. These learning processes almost always include both acceptance and rejection of hegemonic ideas and values about identities, which connects to how much one appropriates oppression and/or privilege.

Learning critical political consciousness

Although it is also learned in other spaces, in this dissertation I focus on how critical political consciousness is learned as women become part of a community of practice of activists. In organizational communities they learn to see the hegemonic social structures that surround them, how those structures influence their public identities, and in some cases, the intersectional nature of these. They learn language that makes visible and critiques those structural forces, that recognizes and values the work and knowledge produced by oppressed peoples ignored by the system, and language which expresses and allows the visualization of how the world should be, a language of hope. The belief that the inequalities, injustices and violence created by these structures should be ended is captured by this language. It is a part of critical political consciousness closely related to sumak kawsay wisdom and learned through participation in an organizational community which values and prioritizes it, as do many women’s organizations.

Learning critical self-aware consciousness

Awareness that one is an agent is also often connected to sumak kawsay wisdom, and also learned in societal and interpersonal spaces as women learn to code for and talk about the different parts of their selves. Codes that teach women to see their emotions, spiritual experiences, bodies and thoughts as distinct but connected is part of learning to see one’s self in awareness. Codes which facilitate an understanding of how those aspects of the self are affected by life experiences teach a way of seeing that has the potential to allow people to better observe
their reactions to these different currents in themselves rather than simply identifying with them. Language also enables learning this type of awareness as it allows women to conceptualize and express things that they see with these new codes. For example, they learn to talk about how their emotions or sexual desires were repressed, how violence or the lack of affection experienced in their childhoods led to their difficulties expressing affection as adults and as parents, how almost being raped made them sickly, etc.

*Relationship between critical political and self-aware consciousness*

I understand self-aware and political consciousness to be connected in two important ways. As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the most powerful ways to conscientizar for critical political consciousness is to begin with one’s own experiences of oppression and use those to locate and discuss hegemonic structural forces. This awareness of how structural forces have shaped one’s own life is a journey that begins with recognizing public and subjective identities, part of self-aware consciousness. Looking at those dynamics from the other direction, it also becomes obvious with critical reflection that power structures that have shaped our lives and tried to teach us how to see the world and behave in it so as to maintain the unequal status quo have impacted the different parts of our selves, our communities and the Pacha Mama.

*The contradictory nature of consciousnesses*

The vast majority of people I have interviewed and with whom I have interacted have shown some critical and some noncritical aspects of consciousness and many have appropriated privilege as well as oppression. Given that learning is a process of simultaneously appropriating and rejecting hegemonic norms, oppression and privilege, this is to be expected. While the contradictory nature of both critical political and self-aware consciousness may create paradoxes
and seeming inconsistencies in the lives of the people whose stories I shared, it also offers opportunities for change. This is especially true if we define the self, as I do in this dissertation, as thoughtful, spiritual, emotional and embodied; a complex being who constantly evolves in relationship to her surroundings.

**Research Question #2: How do women’s critical political and self-aware consciousnesses impact their organizations and their ability to build relationships based on solidarity?**

A combination of critical political and self-aware consciousnesses strengthens organizations and appears to be necessary for women to build relationships of solidarity with others. While this is more pronounced between women with different public identities, it also shows up as important between women who appear to be quite similar. Critical political consciousness is especially important for unlearning epistemic ignorance and appropriated privilege, but in combination with self-aware consciousness, it is important for dealing with the interpersonal differences and conflicts which plague social organizations.

Feminist consciousness-raising processes in and of themselves have proven to be effective at teaching women to express anger, to have more self-respect, personal and intellectual autonomy, higher self-esteem, awareness of their own strengths. Women involved in these processes tend to have more friends and feel less lonely, and they are more likely to leave behind stereotypical sex-role behaviors (Warren, 1976). The process of acquiring critical consciousness has also been shown to have some of the same “curative factors” as group therapy. They are: imparting information, hope, relief, altruism, having models of behavior available, catharsis and group cohesiveness (Warren, 1976, p. 136-137). Warren suggests that organizations and consciousness-raising groups embrace this potential of consciousness-raising processes for the
benefit of the women participating. If it is correct that people must heal before they can be open to others or themselves, then this is encouraging information.

Implications of This Research

The research presented in this dissertation suggests several directions for future research: applying sociocultural theory’s tools to studying social processes, attentiveness to critical self-aware consciousness as part of the “consciousness” looked at in organizational and collective action spaces, delving further into the relationship between consciousness and the spiritual and physical aspects of the self, and analyzing how solidarity is constructed between individuals and groups. Finally there are implications for organizations in Ecuador interested in processes of conscientización.

Applying sociocultural theory’s tools to studying social processes

Applying analytic tools from sociocultural theories of learning to studies of social movements, organizations and social processes offers a way to glean practical applicable knowledge about how social change happens, at least the aspect of change that is connected to human practices among women’s organizations in Ecuador. In this endeavor I join other scholars who have used this theory to examine how social interactions are learned (Paechter, 2003; Paechter, 2006; Tappan, 2006).

In my research, I have found these theories to offer useful tools for examining how consciousnesses and identities are situated, and how what we are taught about them appropriated and resisted. These theoretical frameworks offer ways to look at, on interpersonal and personal levels, the details of how the thoughts, emotions and actions which sustain hegemonic social structures are learned, appropriated and resisted. This type of analysis is important because the
local and particular can illuminate and specify the universal (C. T. Mohanty, 2003, p. 503). This type of analysis is also practically important: while the idea of changing hegemonic social structures seems overwhelming, thinking about teaching and learning new codes, language and ways of seeing is much more do-able for activists, academics, and activist-academics.

Critical self-aware consciousness as part of consciousness and sumak kawsay wisdom

As I have noted, while certain codes and language which teach self-aware consciousness are part of self-esteem workshops in women’s organizations in Ecuador, neither the skills they teach nor the other aspects of self-aware consciousness are often considered systematically alongside or as complimentary to activities planned to conscientizar for critical political consciousness by organizational leaders. As the idea of self-aware consciousness emerged from my research, my interview questions were not tailored at exploring the different aspects of self-aware consciousness. Because of this, I did not look as closely as I now would have liked at how awareness of the spiritual and bodily aspects of the self are related to consciousness, and how that awareness differs based on one’s community, culture, intersectional social location. Further research on this and on self-aware consciousness as an idea will help develop and test this concept to see if it makes sense and is useful.

Another area for further research is how the two types of consciousness I discuss develop in people involved in groups or spaces defined as spiritual. Do they have more self-aware and less critical political consciousness? What difference does this make in their lives? I also wonder about the relationship between consciousness and activism in people who are not involved in organizations. Why do some people with critical political consciousness not get involved in organizations or social movements? Do they still resist injustice and work for change? If so,
how? The idea of sumak kawsay wisdom is another idea in need of investigation. Is it a useful explanatory concept? Would designing formaciones to help people access this wisdom of their own in relation to the Pacha Mama work?

*How solidarity is constructed between individuals and groups*

How is solidarity learned? What are the micro-learnings that enable people to build relationships of solidarity with people? How are these relationships built between people who experience themselves as different, either because of public, subjective identities or personality? A related question is how people unlearn epistemic blindness, appropriated oppression and privilege and replace them with appropriated liberation and alternate visions of a more sustainable and just world. If we are to learn better how relationships of true solidarity are built, it is important to continue research on how solidarity is learned (Brodie & Shalem, 2011; Fenwick, 2008; Masood Ashraf Raja, 2008; Murat Cemal Yalçın, 2012; Roth, 1999), and for women’s organizations, how feminist solidarity (Breda Gray, 2011; P. K. Brubaker, 1993; Hemmings, 2012; C. T. Mohanty, 2003; Sweetman, 2013) is created.

The relationship between violence, trauma, healing and solidarity is another which needs exploring. To reiterate an idea that emerged from this work and that I presented in Chapter One, I think that the following factors are important for people to be capable of building relationships based on true solidarity:

1. Healing from violence and/or trauma. The repercussions of violence on the holistic self impact how people relate with themselves and one another, in general creating distrust and distance between people. Sometimes this step makes easier the types of learning listed here.
2. Unlearning epistemological ignorance, appropriated privilege and/or oppression.
3. Learning critical political and critical self-aware consciousness.
4. Learning to feel empathy for others.
5. Learning listening skills and reflexive speaking skills.
6. Learning critical thinking skills.
7. Having hope.

While these steps are related to the acquisition of self-aware and critical political consciousness, I think it might be helpful to organizations to specifically focus on teaching them to their members with the goal of creating a space where solidarity can flourish.

_Ideas for Ecuadorian organizations and activists_

This research has led to several insights groups can take into consideration as they plan workshops. Better than banking methods of education to facilitate learning are participatory and activist pedagogies, especially those of traditional consciousness-raising groups. Also important is creating spaces where women feel safe to share their stories, listen to others and engage in consciousness raising processes where they can: (1) Realize they are not the only ones with wounds and they are not at fault for being the recipients of violence, (2) Listen with openness to the stories of people “unlike” them (public identity characteristics) to learn how hegemonic forces operate and structure society, (3) Recognize the problems they face as systemic, denormalize unjust and violent experiences, (4) Understand how experience affects the self, community and Pacha Mama, (5) Witness and be inspired by alternative ways of living, (6) Have hope, (7) Heal trauma and develop the capacity for empathy as a building block for solidarity.

From an organizational perspective, creating spaces where women are able to image a different or future reality, connect with their sumak kawsay wisdom, have hope and envision dreams gives people confidence to work for and demand change. Thus people must be “shown” alternative ways of living, of being treated, of behaving. This can be accomplished by _listening_ to others talk about what their lives look like, visiting other communities or organizations, reading or watching videos, learning what proponents of human rights say the world should look like,
among other activities. Long-term educational processes and the importance of using methodologies which connect with all aspects of the self (rather than just the intellectual part) are important. The hidden curriculum must also be carefully considered to ensure that assumptions and expectations are examined, and verbal and nonverbal messages are consistent.

Developing consciousness of the intersectional embodied nature of identities and violence around an issue that doesn’t personally affect an individual or group or ridding oneself of epistemic ignorance requires the integration of self-aware with critical political consciousness. For these types of learnings, my research points to the importance of individuals’ openness to new perspectives, ability to listen to others without judgment and being in spaces with “different” people where there are meaningful opportunities to share and listen. All of these skills are facilitated by self-aware consciousness.

Organizations can focus on coding in order to teach new ways of seeing as well as teaching language and analytic skills that facilitate these processes and becoming part of a community of practice of activists. Essential for coding as teaching a new way of seeing is de-normalizing hegemonic practices and realities. This means making visible all that has been invisibilized by its commonness and social acceptance. Recoding as unacceptable (rather than normal) things such as injustice or violence, including structural and symbolic violence, accomplishes this as does recoding as valuable women’s unpaid work and the histories of minority communities.

Important to shifting consciousness is learning language to talk about one’s new way of seeing the world. The language typically learned in the context of learning a critical political consciousness in organizational spaces is a language of social structures, relations of power, rights, intersectionality, etc. This language must accompany both the denormalizing part of
seeing as well as the visualization of new realities, where words such as Sumak Kawsay, rights, freedom, justice, equality and equity become important.

The chart below is one which I presented in Chapter Two. I have expanded on it here to include some of the practical skills I believe necessary for people with privileged versus oppressed public identity characteristics (keeping in mind that many have both) so that organizations can begin thinking about how to expand what they teach to equip members with skills to resolve conflicts, find peace within themselves and one another, and build relationships on solidarity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Privileged public identity</th>
<th>Oppressed public identity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Good sense</strong>&lt;br&gt;(important components for critical consciousness, and solidarity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Skills needed for solidarity-creation and critical consciousness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Between the repressive government, neocolonial patriarchal culture and high levels of violence against women and their communities, Ecuadorian women’s organizations have many challenges ahead. They will continue to confront these challenges with the wisdom acquired from many years of organization and the passionate commitment many of the women have brought and will continue to bring to their political work. The triumphs, setbacks and the contradictions present in their work are instructive for social activists in other parts of the world as well as in Ecuador. I hope their stories are illuminating to those whose desires and dreams can be made more colorful and vivid through examples as they learn new ways to see, remove blindfolds, and open their eyes. I hope that this eye opening is the kind that enables people to build relationships of solidarity to work together for a more equitable and just world.
Annex 1: Survey form distributed at forums part of the IEE project
## ESTRATEGIA Y AGENDA DE MUJERES: CONSTRUCCIÓN PARTICIPATIVA DE LOS MODELOS DE FORMACIÓN

### Datos de la Organización a la que pertenece

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nombre de la participante:</th>
<th>Grado (X)</th>
<th>Localización</th>
<th>Objetivos de la Organización</th>
<th>Año en que se crea la organización</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>1ro</td>
<td>2do</td>
<td>3ro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nombre de su organización</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cantón y Provincia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu organización pertenece a otra regional o nacional ¿cuál?</td>
<td>Dirección</td>
<td>-Género ( )</td>
<td>No. de integrantes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telf. Y mail</td>
<td>-Cultura ( )</td>
<td>Organización de mujeres o mixto</td>
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<td>-Economía ( )</td>
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<td>-Ambiente ( )</td>
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<td>-Derechos ( )</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Incidencia Política ( )</td>
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</tbody>
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### Áreas de trabajo de su organización

Marque con una X o escriba en “otros”

- Violencia de género
- Derechos sexuales y reproductivos
- Medio ambiente/ Ecologistas
- Derechos Étnicos y culturales
- Participación política
- Economía Solidaria
- Soberanía alimentaria
- Otros

Identidades de las personas que pertenecen a su organización

Marque con una X o escriba en otros

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identidades Étnicas</th>
<th>Indígenas</th>
<th>Montubias</th>
<th>Mestizas</th>
<th>Afrodescendientes</th>
<th>Otra</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identidades de Género (si su organización se organiza alrededor de esta temática)</td>
<td>GLBTI</td>
<td>Otra</td>
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Identidades Territoriales

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<tr>
<th>Rurales/campesinas</th>
<th>Urbanas</th>
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### Información sobre procesos de formación

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Temas en los que su organización se ha formado</th>
<th>Estos procesos fueron</th>
<th>Califique estos procesos del 1 (pésimo) al 10 (excelente) para su organización</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marque con una X</td>
<td>Talleres puntuales</td>
<td>Escuelas permanentes</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1. Derechos sexuales y reproductivos
2. Derechos de género
3. Derechos colectivos/étnicos
4. Derechos de los jóvenes y niños
5. Derechos de adultos mayores
6. Feminismos
7. Participación Política
8. Identidad y Cultura
9. Historia
10. Economía solidaria (cajas de ahorro, otros)
11. Autoestima
12. Liderazgo
13. Incidencia Política
14. Producción (artesanas, agrícola, etc.)
15. Soberanía Alimentaria
16. Medio ambiente
17. Otros
18. Otros
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nombres de personas con mucha experiencia realizando procesos de formación</th>
<th>Organización/Institución</th>
<th>Teléfono</th>
<th>Correo electrónico</th>
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Vita

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