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Gender and Development in Popular Education: The awareness raising and agency
experiences of indigenous women from rural Quito – Ecuador

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of
Arts

in

Latin American Studies (Gender Studies)

by

Gabriela Maritza López Alvaro

Committee in charge:

Abigail Andrews
Luz Chung
Nancy Postero
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2017

The Thesis of Gabriela Maritza López Alvaro is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

DEDICATION

A mi hijita, Ma. Doménica.

En honor a su ternura, a su generosidad y paciencia que me han motivado a estudiar, trabajar, leer, escribir, ser esposa, migrante, viajera e idealista mientras tengo el privilegio de ser su madre.

Quedan grabadas su mirada y sonrisa brillantes entre cada una de estas letras.

A ella, pues mi lucha tiene su rostro.

A Juan S, mi esposo, novio, amigo y compañero,

Quien me animó a estudiar esta maestría. Porque siempre ha creído en mí. Gracias por ser un apoyo incondicional, cocinar, cuidar de nuestra hijita, empujarme a tomar aviones, a hacer mi trabajo de campo, ir a conferencias, a hablar y escribir en inglés sin miedo. Pero, sobre todo, por despertarse cada mañana a mi lado y amarme de la manera más locamente racional que existe, y como nadie más en este mundo.

EPIGRAPH

Nací en un barrio donde el lujo fue un albur,
por eso tengo el corazón mirando al sur.
Mi viejo fue una abeja en la colmena,
las manos limpias, el alma buena.
Y en esa infancia, la templanza me forjó,
después la vida mil caminos me tendió
y supe del magnate del tahir,
por eso tengo el corazón mirando al sur.

Mi barrio fue una planta de jazmín,
la sombra de mi vieja en el jardín,
la dulce fiesta de las cosas más sencillas
y la paz en la granilla de cara al sol...
Mi barrio fue mi gente que no está
las cosas que ya nunca volverán
si desde el día que me fui, con la emoción y con la cruz
yo sé que tengo el corazón mirando al sur.

La geografía de mi barrio llevo en mí,
será por eso que del todo no me fui:
la esquina, el almacén, el piberío
los reconozco... son algo mío...
Ahora sé que la distancia no es real
y me descubro en ese punto cardinal
volviendo a la niñez desde la luz,
teniendo siempre el corazón mirando al Sur...

- *Eladia Blázquez*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CJP	Club juventud y progreso
PE	Popular Education
FOJ	Federación de Organizaciones juveniles
FUNSAD	Fundación Salud y Desarrollo
INEPE	Instituto de Investigación, Educación y Promoción Popular del Ecuador
FAO	Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura

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Thanks to my dad, my mom and my sister Valeria (I love you, woman-lioness), because despite the distance, you are always present at every moment of my existence, supporting each project and rising from each fall as well. Thank you for the life you gave me, for your care, for your unconditional love, for being an example of what dreamers call "new citizens."

To my grandfathers, in heaven and on earth, to them living in my blood and in my actions, this thesis in their honor, and in honor of their legacy of search for social justice. To all my parental and maternal family: uncles and aunts, cousins, and nephews. Special gratitude to my cousin - milk sister Andre, untiring translator, despite everything this time has challenged her. To her, my energy, because we close together another stage.

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Thus, the title I achieve now at the end of this work bears my name, however, it is the product of an effort not only mine, but of a whole group that I call "my community." I,

without this network of wonderful people, would not have done anything. Thank you all, or rather, "pai" as it is said in Quichwua, one of the indigenous languages of my Ecuador.

San Diego, CA, July 2017

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Gender and Development in Popular Education: The awareness raising and agency experiences of indigenous women from rural Quito – Ecuador

by

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Master of Arts in Latin American Studies (Gender Studies)

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Nancy Postero, Chair

Paulo Freire stated that there are two ways to be in this world: a "non-reflexive" one, which implies being an object of history, and a "critical" one, which means being a historical subject. As part of his pedagogy, this Brazilian educator designed a transition methodology between one conscience and the other, in order to liberate the oppressed people. This proposal has been applied in a wide variety of contexts throughout the world, not only in populations with limited resources. However, there is little literature on these processes. This work is an ethnographic research that focuses on the experience of

promoting indigenous women (factory workers, housekeeping workers, store sellers) with limited education, such as elementary education only or incomplete high school training, to become teachers with not only good academic qualities but also personal ones in the Freirean project of Popular Education (PE) and Local Development of INEPE (community-based organization from La Dolorosa de Chilibulo / Isoloma) in Quito - Ecuador. It is argued that the promotion of indigenous women from Isoloma and consecutive practice of popular education and its principals of dialogue, participation and solidarity, become a path of agency and awareness raising for them.

INTRODUCTION

It is 1 pm in Quito. The bell rings and announces the beginning of the day of classes. Curi, together with her seventeen eight-year-old students, are in the yard and begin a series of exercises that include stretching, yoga and balance. Upon finishing the 15-minutes workout (daily routine of all INEPE students and teachers performed before starting classes), Curi asks the little ones to close their eyes, breathe and give thanks for the light of the sun, the air, the water, the mountains, and listen to the sound of the wind among the trees of the Andean forest that is in front of them. With an equally loving, firm tone, Curi puts her hands on the shoulders of one of her indigenous students (like her) as the child is not able to concentrate. Curi reminds him that by closing his eyes they can visualize a tree or the Unguí mountain, an imposing mountain on whose hills *Isoloma*¹ and the school were built. Before finishing the brief meditation, and once all the boys and girls have managed to get into the exercise, Curi also closes her eyes, breathes deeply, puts her hands together in her chest, thanks her children for being there, they open their eyes and all bow down together.

Curi is one of several native indigenous women who have become educators of INEPE, a community organization in La Dolorosa de Chilibulo, one of the popular neighborhoods located in the southwest of Quito. While Hall and Patrinos (2009) report that “poverty, lack of education and good quality health, as well as the scarce opportunities to secure a way of life remain as the predominant image of indigenous groups throughout Latin America²” (In: Radcliffe, 2014: 12). The situation of native (and non-native) indigenous people in Isoloma is different: there is potable water, electricity,

¹ The records indicate that La Dolorosa de Chilibulo was initially known as *Isoloma*: word in Quíchwa meaning *Iso*’s mountain. *Iso* is a native blue flower from the area, and *loma* means mountain.

² All translations, from English to Spanish and vice versa were done by myself and under my responsibility.

sewage, roads in good condition, public lighting, a metropolitan park and a school³, (including pre-elementary, elementary and secondary) of high quality.

But this is not a generalized situation among rural indigenous populations or neighborhoods, neither in Quito nor in Ecuador. How has this been achieved? In fact, residents of this neighborhood together with other men and women activists from the south of Quito, and this is how INEPE was founded as a community-based organization, more than 30 years ago. Three decades is a long period of time, and through its projects, programs and actions, INEPE has in many ways transformed⁴ the lives of La Dolorosa's residents⁵.

The most renown project of INEPE is the creation of INEPE School (day-care, elementary school and high school) where children and adolescents from the area of Chilibulo and from other different low-income neighborhoods of Quito attend. In fact, there is a significant amount of research about the new educational paradigm that is being built there (Alvaro-Lugo 2013; Cárdenas & Pillajo 2012; Marín & Sánchez; Moncayo 2011; Raza 2011; among others.). However, very little has been said about the participation

³ Recent news about this experience can be read in the Ecuadorian press:

<http://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/dolorosa-chilibulo-educacion-quito-especial.html>

⁴ The statistics corroborate in many ways the development in this rural-urbanized population: a census carried out in 2015 indicates, for example, that there has been a decrease in the average number of children per family⁴ and that the most common occupation of the persons living in the neighborhood, currently, is being a student: 39.4% of the total of the women and 39% of the men are currently studying. (Paca Caguana, & Galarza 2015)

⁵ INEPE reports indicate that the and benefits of this project extend also to several other sectors of the south of the city, and have even been taken as a new learning towards other educational experiences and of community organization in the country and the world.

of native women⁶ in the area, or about the experience of their educational process, not only as a contribution in the Pedagogy field but also to community and social development fields.

Sarah Radcliffe (2015) argues that the Latin American region experiences, in general terms, an unbalanced development in which "the skewed distribution of middle-income country growth towards the urban, the male, the rich, the lighter-skinned, the able-bodied, the unencumbered by caring responsibilities." (2) For this reason, there are still numerous neglected sectors and overlooked populations.

In her opinion, one of the causes of this unbalanced development has to do with the heterogeneity⁷ of social differences. Thus, Radcliffe finds the development policies marked by colonial ways of understanding the social categories and their interactions, and analyzes the social heterogeneity in the diversity as the construction of a postcolonial hierarchy⁸. She affirms, then, that the ladders of difference "that have emerged as a result of colonialism have been preserved when the dominant understandings of race, masculinity and femininity, and the imagined geographies of rural and urban areas were established. These relationships favored the white, the urban, the masculine and the richer over others."

⁶ There are also several stories and cases of professionalization of women from other popular sectors, but for the purposes of this study I decided to focus on native women, and / or self-recognized as indigenous from Chilibulo.

⁷ **Social heterogeneity:** the continuously reproduced and ubiquitous existence of complex lines of social hierarchy and meaningful difference (remains understudied).

⁸ Racial hierarchies are structured by the dominant national groups of mestizos and descendants of Europeans, who treat the indigenous populations as inferior. (2014: 13) "Latin America illustrates this issue (**intersectional hierarchies**) – levels of formal education, rates of illiteracy, poverty, and insecure work are progressively worse for white men, white women, mixed-race men, mixed-race women, Afro-Latin men, Afro-Latin women, indigenous men, and indigenous women (Calla 2006; Peredo Beltrán 2004; CEPAL 2013)." (2015:4)

(Radcliffe 2015: 4) Therefore, even though the indigenous women population is the most affected human group by this modern development, there is not much done by governments and development agencies to mitigate socio-economic inequalities and discrimination that push such groups to poverty and social exclusion (Vinding 1998 in: Radcliffe 2014).

Considering Radcliffe's statements, and being aware that the neoliberal state privatizes the struggles of working women, by increasing the burden of responsibilities which they carry, both as caregivers as well as citizen-consumers⁹ (Lind 2005: 89) I see as an rare phenomenon that 89% of the indigenous teachers of Isoloma has ceased to occupy positions of oppression (maids or domestic servants, textile factories workers and store sellers) in order to become educators.

But, how has this shift affected their lives? Although teaching at INEPE is not another traditional employment, but rather a "communitarian action" as they describe it, it is still a structured job within the capitalist system. So, I wonder if the teachers report the same critics and problems as Sarah Radcliffe's Ecuadorean indigenous women participating in development programs do. If not, how is this communitarian action an alternative to colonial development, especially for the most marginalized social groups? I aim to understand the principals and strategies applied by INEPE's members and evaluate how they have or have not helped to change those postcolonial hierarchies identified by

⁹ In her text, Lind explains that "As the neoliberal state is privatized, women have become the bearers of what were previously state welfare responsibilities: they are now service providers in the realm of community development, family, health care, day care and local produce markets. Through development policies and practices, including those of both international agencies and nation-states, these sectors of women have been brought into the visible fold of development. In conjunction with this, they have now become models of the new market citizen and of 'modern economic woman'..." (Lind 2005: 89)

Radcliffe. In other words, how working as a popular educator of INEPE have shaped the Isoloma's indigenous women daily lives. Thus, by arriving to INEPE and observing the *compañeras*¹⁰ in question, and talking to them, what strikes me as a good focus for research is their particular critical awareness, characterized by a deep knowledge of themselves; and also, their special energy - agency that nothing has to do with feminism or gender ideologies.

Paulo Freire (1973) said that there are two ways of being in this world: a "non-reflexive" one and a "critical" one. Whoever has a non-reflexive consciousness is an object-being: someone without choice and therefore subjugated to the decisions of others. On the contrary, whoever has a critical conscience is a subject-being. Being-subject or subject-person is the one who has understood his/her reality of oppression, but also his/her potentialities; therefore, this subject is able to make decisions and participate creatively to transform that reality. Then, Freire speaks of "awareness" as a process and ability to be able to move from one consciousness to another; he proposes a specific methodology for this, but emphasizes that "No one educates anyone, no one educates oneself. Human beings educate each other mediated by the world." However, his proposal is not designed specifically for the development of literate indigenous women.

Inquiring more into the topic of the development of consciousness or awareness I find the article of Jennifer Shirmer (1993) on the collective CoMadres from El Salvador and the widows of Guatemala in which the researcher raises a need to explore how women

¹⁰ The term "compañero" or "compañera" is used to refer to a person who is more than just a colleague; a comrade, a companion with the same commitment to life and who has taken this option of life working in this community-based project.

(non-Western) conceive and give meaning to their conflicts. The case of these Isoloma's women is not the same as the one of the oppressed workers that inspired Freire in Brazil or Colombia. And is not either the same as the Salvadorian or Guatemalan ones. So, I wonder how have the indigenous-female teachers of INEPE developed their critical awareness in order to give meaning to their conflicts?

But, as well as the special female awareness, the agency of these women also stands out from my perspective because they all have a full time agenda. They are teachers, in addition to be mothers and/or wives, but most of them are also leaders of different projects. Consequently, I wonder about their ways of living/performing their gender, because without alluding to any feminism approach in their narratives, I see them overcome patriarchal practices and traditional gender discourses. Therefore, my next question and subsequent hypothesis is if the fact that teaching at INEPE is an action that involves female agency. If so, how is it that an activity as a teacher becomes so politicized as to go beyond the classical task of transferring knowledge and pushes teachers to be subjects and agents of their own lives?

Finally, and by examining and analyzing the obtained data, I discover that all the previous research questions could be addressed from the same main argument: **The promotion of indigenous women from Isoloma and consecutive practice of popular education become a path of agency and awareness raising for them.** Therefore, this will be the general statement that I will develop in the following lines of this dissertation.

SECTION 1: Literature Review

What is happening with the development of Ecuador and Latin America? How are other ideas, programs and projects working to improve education and quality of life in rural, low-income general populations and / or populations of indigenous women? Have the development policies implemented in recent decades by the Ecuadorian governments and the region worked well? What are the difficulties, needs and criticisms that have been reported in the literature on these issues? How is this research important?

In order to answer these initial questions and to problematize my research, below I present a synthesis and comment on the debate proposed by Sarah Radcliffe, anthropologist and professor at the University of Cambridge, who has devoted much of her life and work to research on topics regarding Gender, Ethnicity and Development in Ecuador and the Southern Cone.

Ecuador and social differences

It was previously explained that there is an unbalanced development in Latin America, and for Radcliffe this has to do with the heterogeneity of social differences. In Ecuador, social differences are found everywhere (as well as in other developing postcolonial societies), and have major impacts on the life chances of vulnerable populations (because of gender, ethnicity, insecurity in the economic income or instability in the location-housing). “Social heterogeneity produces highly unequal distribution of secure livelihoods in terms of life chances, dignity, and decision-making.” (4) The question

of social differences is so serious that Radcliffe in fact asserts that every social difference multiplies the disadvantages of the individual or the groups.

“Yet social difference is multifaceted, generating entangled and multilayered consequences for poor populations as gender, race-ethnicity, location and income security each multiplies the disadvantages experienced by individuals and groups.”
(5)

And although certain aspects and dimensions of social differences such as gender, income and racially discriminated groups have been studied and considered by academics and development institutions, and although policies and measures have been developed to deal with them partially, the results are worse for people in rural spaces than in urban ones (Radcliffe 2015). All this leads her to argue that, despite being a problem, social heterogeneities within diversity are not taken into account.

With all of the above as an alert, the next question we are asked to answer in order to contextualize this research would be: how do the aforementioned social hierarchies in Ecuadorian social diversity affect indigenous women in rural areas?

Indigenous women and development

Contrary to the image that could be obtained through publicity in the media about interventions by governments or international agencies, the reality is that, in the chain of beneficiaries of development projects and programs, indigenous women are the last in line. "Indigenous women globally are most affected by modern development," said A. L. Vinding (1998) more than 20 years ago. (In: Radcliffe 2014: 12) Despite the time that has elapsed, many changes have not been reported and, to this day, the same can be said, since

women are not considered, neither by planning institutions nor by development agencies. (12)

In Ecuador there are numerous scenarios that verify the disadvantages of indigenous women compared to indigenous men. One example is the way they experience development projects "because of the ethnic-cultural variations in the relationships between men and women, as well as the geographic variability in ecosystems and livelihoods" (12).

While it is true that in this country "poverty rates differ only marginally in gender" (Technical Secretariat 1998, Gallardo and Nopo 2009), it is also the case that ethnic-racial discrimination intertwines with male-female hierarchies¹¹, and with poverty and rurality, "that further complicates women's lack of security of resources, making them even more invisible in public policy debates" (Radcliffe 2014: 12) and, I would add that many times too, ethnic-cultural variations make it difficult for women to delink from their communities. Thus, the opportunities of indigenous women, compared with other demographic groups disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, are smaller. (Radcliffe, ongoing).

Another complaint recently voiced by Ecuadorian indigenous women and reported by Sarah Radcliffe in her book, *Dilemmas of Difference* (2015), has to do with the exclusion they experience (like many rural women in Latin America) since "policies and state programs do not consider them producers or managers" (20), but only recipients of such projects or laws. And a rather recurring criticism, mentioned by Radcliffe, but also by

¹¹ Radcliffe uses the term "man-woman relations" instead of gender relations because most indigenous peoples in Ecuador reject the term "gender", considering it an imposition of Western feminism.

many other studies is that, in addition, development programs are generally short-term and characterized by a minimum sustainability over time and a misunderstanding about particularities of women, their desires and their perspectives.

“In other words, in addition to the problems faced by many rural women in the South of the globe, project structures and their poorly constructed assumptions in their policies on gender, race and ethnicity intersections have additional specific consequences for indigenous women.” (20)

Moreover, development policies very often assume what the “recipients” want, do not want, what is important or better for indigenous women, without considering that the realities and lives of those making decisions are quite different from the realities of indigenous women. As a result, women as a collective "are often not considered as producers in development policies and this is especially serious for indigenous women, whose central role in rural and agricultural livelihoods is well established but at the same time invisible because of the lack of census data, public understanding and reluctance to recognize their importance". (21)

A final and third problem, which is analyzed by Maruja Barrig in her book *What is justice? Indigenous women in Andean development projects* (2006) has to do with the conception that exists in the narratives of the mestizo promoters of development, that contextualize the situation of indigenous women under the assumption that "there is a balance between men and women in communities and that the benefits of development permeate both groups"(109). The reality is that this is often a myth in indigenous communities, and by assuming it as true, promoters deny specific requests from women, says Barrig, and she adds:

Promoters for development, therefore, perpetuate the restrictive and harmful stereotyped visions about indigenous women. Believing that they are 'culturally purer' than indigenous men, development professionals are reluctant to introduce indigenous women to 'modern techniques' of development and training (Barrig 2006: 110).

As a result of the factors mentioned above, development efforts may cause more difficulties than solutions for indigenous women. Interventions can double the daily burden of women, as they often add tasks to their responsibilities. For example, "the racial geographies of investment in water and irrigation make the work of indigenous women a much heavier task than that of any other urban woman or other racial group." (Radcliffe 2014: 22)

In short, machismo, policies and programs imposed from a post-colonialist¹² perspective of those in power, unsupported interventions, and lack of consideration of ethnic-racial and / or ethnic cultural variations are factors that impede the development of indigenous women in Ecuador and, in the worst of the scenarios, add more conflicts than solutions to their lives.

And now that we have a general panorama about the situation of Ecuador and Latin America in terms of development, specifically for indigenous women, it is important to focus on the theoretical framework used for this study where critical awareness and agency

¹² Michel de Certeau (1990) explains that post-colonialism can be defined as a "critical reflection on Western hegemonic discourse: the representation of the "Other "(postcolonial) by the colonial subject is questioned. The omnipresence in literature, historiography and in the media among others, is questioned from a discourse that starts from a Eurocentric conception and that denies the identity of the Other to reaffirm his own. (199) Translation of the quote: Brigitte Adriaensen

are key concepts. How do human beings become subjects and agents? What does the theory say about these issues? We will reflect on this in the next section.

SECTION 2: Theoretical Framework

Agency is a process consecutive to awareness, not only for students, but also for their teachers within a type of critical and liberating education. My first months of field research led me to affirm this. Later; however, further investigation and a deeper analysis of the data led me to conclude that the reality of INEPE teachers is different.

As this is an analysis of a Freirean experience, I summarize and comment on what this author said about awareness and its transformation, a key concept that is part of his work and is mentioned in his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire 1973) under the field of critical pedagogy. In the same way, the subject of agency and what it means to "be an agent" will be revised.

On Critical Awareness

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), one of the most important Latin American educators of the 20th century, wrote reflections, considerations and questions about pedagogy as a process of liberation, with an absolute faith and conviction that human beings can improve themselves despite inequities.

The practice of freedom will only find adequate expression in a pedagogy in which the Oppressed has the conditions to self-discover and self-conquer themselves, reflexively as a subject of their own historical destiny. A culture woven with the fabric of domination, however generous the intentions of its educators, is a closed barrier to the educational possibilities of those who

rise in the subcultures of the proletarians and marginal people. On the contrary, a new pedagogy rooted in the life of these subcultures, from them *and* with them, will be a continuous *reflexive return* to their own ways of liberation; it will not be a simple reflection, but a reflexive creation and recreation, to go forward in those ways: "method", "practice of freedom", which, being such, is intrinsically incapacitated for the exercise of domination. The pedagogy of the oppressed is thus liberating for both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Inspired by the postulates of Marx and Engels (1848), who argued that the history of humanity is a history of class struggle that could be summed up in the confrontation between oppressors and oppressed and, recognizing the importance of developing a class awareness, Freire developed his concept of liberation and a consequent theoretical and philosophical proposal to stop the suffering of the poor and end oppression, which, quoting his words, "is not only material but also spiritual" (Freire, 1970).

“To this day, the history of humanity has been a history of class struggle. Free people and slaves, patricians and plebeians, feudal lords and serfs of the land, teachers and officers, in a word: oppressors and oppressed, always face to face, confronted in an unbroken struggle, sometimes disguised, and others frank and direct, in a struggle that always leads to the revolutionary transformation of society or the extermination of both belligerent classes" (Marx and Engels 1948: Online).

Freire understood oppression as "a form of violence that destroys and maintains in neutrality the concrete possibilities of thinking, of questioning reality" (Sanhueza 2013: 11) and explained that, if there is no form or mechanism for decoding of this concept by the working class, it is very difficult to move towards emancipation¹³." (11)

¹³ According to Telma Barreiro (1974), a pedagogue and scholar of Freire's work, emancipation is "a condition and an aspiration originated by the presence of one element: conflict." (46) In that

Critical awareness as a path of freedom

And just as literacy, understood as a process of ideological emancipation, is a path to liberation within the philosophy of Paulo Freire, so is critical consciousness. Therefore, if the first dimension of his methodology is literacy, the second is awareness. In his words: "Awareness was always inseparable from liberation" (Freire, 1973) and liberation occurs in history through a radically transforming praxis, and must be understood as a 'pedagogical method of liberating illiterate peasants'¹⁴. Consequently, Freire spoke about developing the "awareness" process as the result of a progressive increase in the "becoming aware" process, producing the ability to be able to move from one non-reflective consciousness to a critical one (1973).

Thus, there is a difference between critical awareness and becoming aware and developing awareness. Awareness is fundamental and needed in order to identify oppression, according to Freire. Nevertheless, it is not enough; it is only the beginning of critical awareness. Therefore, one can speak about two levels of awareness: "becoming aware" and "critical awareness". Becoming aware doesn't automatically produce

sense, Barreiro asserts that in the work of Freire a cultural and historical conflict is recognized which is given by the oppression of the ruling class, the one of greater privileges and the one that obtains infinite benefits through the exploitation of the working class." (47) On the other hand, Sanueza (2013) says that "emancipation is the concrete answer to a contextualized and understood situation of oppression, which makes this dimension valid to understand the initial foundation of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and therefore, Freire's thinking about this social problem." (12) Both agree that emancipation occurs only if, first, the oppressed has absolute clarity of the origin of social conflict. And the mechanism, for Freire, is literacy. But not the literacy that has as a unique purpose to learn how to read and write; but the one that allows, quoting Sanhueza, "to find truths, to discover concepts and elements from which the dispossessed classes have been relegated." (11) In other words, critical literacy and education constitute a bridge to real liberation, in order to generate our own capacities and thoughts and, therefore, a vehicle to break with the dominant oppression of the people.

¹⁴ Today we can speak of the use of Freirean postulates in all types of education and all kinds of society, poor or developed

appropriate answers for action. Therefore, “becoming aware” can easily lead to reflection without action. It is confined to the realm of thought, according to the author (1972).

“Developing” or “gaining awareness” is characterized by a frank and, above all, demystifying dialogue. Freire (1973) adds: "the liberation produced by awareness demands a total demystification." (39) And, therefore, he explains that "the work of humanization cannot be other than the work of demystification. For this very reason, awareness is the most possible critical view of reality, and reveals it to know it and to know the myths that deceive and help maintain the reality of the dominant structure." (39)

"Critical awareness", on the other hand, "facilitates the analysis of the context of problematic situations, allowing people to transform that reality. It is not reduced to understanding or accepting reality. The transformation, therefore, is a consequence of a critical perspective. Through it, subjects begin to see how social practices are organized to support particular interests. It is also the consequence of a process by which understanding is used as the basis for activating political intervention directed towards social change, with the aim of eliminating inequality relations. Freire states that the individual must be a participant in the transformation of the world through a new education that helps her/him to be critical of his/her reality. For this author, “there are levels of consciousness in the real contexts associated with historical-cultural conditioning.” (Freire 1990: 85-113)

Therefore, in methodological terms, Freire (1973) looked at awareness as a process in three phases: the magical, the naive and the critical. In each of these phases, the oppressed defines its problems, then reflects on the causes and, finally, acts; in other words, the oppressed fulfills the tasks necessary for the accomplishment of the liberating

objectives that have been proposed. Let us now review the Freirean conception of the process of awareness.

Stages of awareness

In the first phase, or magic phase, the oppressed is in a situation of total impotence before the oppressive forces that overwhelm him, that does not know, and cannot control. Therefore, he does nothing to solve problems. He gives up to his fate or expects it to change by itself. In the second phase, the naive, the oppressed can already recognize the problems, but only from an individual position. When he reflects, he only partially understands the causes. He does not understand the actions of the oppressor and the oppressive system. (40) As a consequence, "when it comes to action, he very typically takes the behavior of the oppressor and directs his aggression toward his peers (horizontal aggression) or to his family and sometimes towards himself (*intra-punition*)." (Lawrence 2008: 57)

In contrast to the above, in the critical phase, one can fully understand the oppressive structure and clearly see problems in terms of community. In the same way, it is understood how the collaboration between the oppressor and the oppressed takes place for the operation of the oppressive system. In this last phase, "the oppressed recognizes his own weaknesses, but instead of self-pity, his reflection leads him to increase his self-esteem and confidence in himself and his equals, and he can already reject the ideology of the oppressor." (58)

So far, it has been explained how the postulates of Freire contribute two ideas relevant to the theoretical framework of this study: on the one hand, the articulation of pedagogy with social transformation and, on the other hand, the concept of "awareness".

At this point, I find it important to add a third category to the theory: the dialogue of knowledges. Since it was very much mentioned by my interviewees it is going to be useful to review and to comment on this category in order to understand the interviewees narratives and practices, and because it will be used ahead on the analysis.

Dialogue of knowledges

Even though it is not possible yet to speak of a single established definition of what is the dialogue of knowledges or what it consists of, in simple terms it can be understood as the incorporation of knowledge from different cultures in the educational task, without disqualifying their empirical wisdom compared to the formally scientific ones. What is certain is that this is a dimension of Popular Education¹⁵ - in construction from theory and practice - in INEPE.

The dialogue of knowledges is born in the Freirean proposal of liberation which states that awareness needs both dialogue and the dialogical action as fundamental inputs.

Orlando Fals Borda, one of the most lucid researchers and critics of Freire's work, said that the dialogue of knowledges is a "notion connected to the Latin American tradition of the social sciences of claiming popular and ethnic knowledge, which is inherited from the postulates of active action research" (Fals Borda 1999). For De Souza, another thinker on the same line, the dialogue of knowledges seeks "the construction of a meaningful knowledge for local subjects and for the territory as a space of relationships, and promotes

¹⁵ Lilián Alvaro (2017), explains that Popular Education is a ?

a knowledge built on the basis of that exchange."(Pérez & Echeverry 2010: 2). Alvaro-Lugo (2013) contextualizes this dimension and explains that:

“Since the end of the last century, the expression ‘dialogue of knowledges’ has been used in the spaces of Popular Education to express the conceptual and methodological foundations of various educational praxis, built on Paulo Freire’s thought. With the active and conscious participation of the people, there was reflection on the conflicting existence of scientific knowledge and the people’s knowledge, both in educators and students, and the dialogue was proposed as a possibility to guide the educational actions of the people. Knowledges were located in the wide universe of cultures, which led to the assertion that the praxis of Popular Education, understood as a dialogue of knowledges, is not only a problem of knowledge construction, but also a critical and conscious expansion of the participants’ universe of knowledge on the educational facts.” (12)

As can be seen in all the contributions mentioned, it is a term that comes directly from the practice of Popular Education. Therefore, it is difficult to define or conceptualize from a single perspective or a classical academic perspective. However, it is clear that it is the effort to exchange, incorporate and use the knowledge of the different cultures in the educational task, without disqualifying the empirical knowledge compared to the scientific ones, and deeply respecting both, bringing them to dialogue to guide education and development.

There are many challenges currently posed by the theoretical and methodological construction of the dialogue of knowledges in the context of Latin American and world crisis in this new century and millennium. Santiago Castro Gómez, who in his book *El giro decolonial (The de-colonial twist)* (2007) addresses the issue of the colonization of knowledge, explains that the dialogue of knowledges "is not only that the knowledge that comes from a discipline can be articulated with the knowledge coming from another, thus

generating new fields of knowledge (...). This is only an aspect towards which assimilation of complex thinking would take us, and of which there are already certain signs, although still timid", says the author. In his opinion, "the other aspect, which is the most difficult and which still does not show signs of life, has to do with the possibility that different cultural forms of knowledge can coexist in the same space." Thus, "the dialogue of knowledges has been impossible to this very date, due to the epistemic colonialism of the Western science¹⁶." (80) However, the dialogue of knowledge is not impossible in the experiences I analyze, as I indicated earlier. In fact, it is one of the practices linked to the awareness raising and agency of INEPE's popular educators, but we will expand this analysis later.

Now, I would like to focus on the second big concept of this thesis: agency.

¹⁶ In his book, Castro Gomez explains the epistemic colonialism of Western science from the Cartesian thought. Gomez argues that "Descartes was convinced that the key to understanding the universe lay in the mathematical structure of thought, and that this structure coincided with the mathematical structure of reality. The vision of the universe as an organic, living and spiritual whole was replaced by the conception of a world similar to a machine. For this reason, Descartes privileges the method of analytical reasoning as the only one adequate to understand nature. The analysis consists of dividing the object into parts, dismembering it, reducing it to the greatest number of fragments, and then recomposing it in a logical-mathematical order. For Descartes, as later for Newton, the material universe is like a machine in which there is no life, no telos, no moral message of any kind, only movements and assemblages that can be explained according to the logical arrangement of its parts. Not only physical nature, but also humans, plants, animals, are seen as mere automata, ruled by a machine-type logic. A sick man is simply a broken clock, and the cry of a wounded animal means nothing more than the crunching of a wheel without oil. Well, it is this type of epistemic model that I want to call the hubris of the zero point. We could characterize this model, using the theological metaphor of Deus Absconditus. Like God, the observer observes the world from an unobserved platform of observation, in order to generate a truthful observation and beyond doubt. As the God of the metaphor, modern Western science is located outside the world (at the zero point) to observe the world, but unlike God, it does not manage to obtain an organic look at the world, but only an analytical gaze. Modern science aims to place itself at the zero point of observation to be like God, but fails to observe as God. That's why we talk about the hubris, the sin of excess. When mortals want to be like the gods, but without being able to, they incur the sin of hubris, and this is, more or less, what happens with the Western science of modernity. In fact, hubris is the great sin of the West: trying to get a point of view on all other points of view, but without a point of view from that point of view.

On agency

To understand agency and the discussion that has existed in relation to this term, it is necessary to locate it first within Social Theory, in which there are two great and different perspectives: structuralism and subjectivism.

Structuralism and subjectivism

The first perspective focuses on the structures that organize society. Those who support this vision, speak of *social structures* generated by repeated acts of people. These structures, in the understanding of the most classical Structuralism views, are considered statics. In other words, individuals regulate their behavior according to those structures, and this makes the human coexistence possible. But the structures do not change.

The second perspective, fully developed by Durkheim (1858-1917), explains that society is more than an “aggregation” of individuals and thus, *social structures* would also be separate from individuals and would be determinants of what people do. Those who support this perspective suggest, for example, that “people are what they are because of what *society* has done to them” (Herz & Sperling 2004:34) and that society gives people the roles they must play. As a consequence, “psychology and the choices of individuals are largely irrelevant to social process and social change.” (p.35)

There is a third view that combines both points of view, stating that “individuals are always social and that *social structures* are embodied in their activities.” Therefore, “they are not simply the pattern of motivated acts, but their means and product”. Thus, a person can act “voluntarily,” even “rationally,” but not only his/her desires and beliefs are

“structured” (by their learning), but so are the alternatives and opportunities available. That is, agents can always make choices, but their choices are enabled and limited by who they are and by their situation at the time of the election.” (p. 32) This last view also considers that, as all individuals are born in some society, *social structures* preexist for individuals; but individuals do not exist independently of what we do; they are produced, in the sense that they are reproduced by our actions.

Practice Theory

A representative of this latter line of thought between Structuralism and Subjectivism was Anthony Giddens (1979). From his Theory of Structuring, Giddens asserted that there is no primacy of structure or subject, but that both structure and subject are influenced and are in permanent relationship, dialogue and exchange through *recurring practices*. And so he criticized the deterministic approaches of the social sciences that did not recognize that "social actors are aware (to some extent) and have some (if not complete) information on the conditions of reproduction of the society of which they are part." (Giddens 1979: 5) For this reason, he also postulated:

“No matter how subordinate the actor is in a social relationship, it will always be of a dialectical nature, since the very fact of being involved in that relationship gives him a certain amount of power over others.”. (Giddens 1979: 6)

From his vision, what the structure would do is providing a kind of mold for the subject; but at the same time, subjects have the ability to transform structures. Agency is that capacity.

Feminism and decolonization

I mentioned in the introduction that the INEPE compañeras are not allied to any kind of feminism; it is not their direction or their battle. However, from my perspective, they manage to be subjects and agents, as they overcome various structures and practices of domination. What have academics said about this type of struggle in Latin America? Freire, Giddens, and all the thinkers cited so far have focused on the awareness and agency of people, but not of women. Or even more specifically, indigenous women. Therefore, I wanted to find a theoretical space in which my study can fit. And while I cannot say that the process of consciousness-raising and agency of Isoloma's indigenous educators is a form of decolonial feminism, there are several ways in which I can relate both discourses and practices.

Western feminisms and international organizations were the academic referents on the subject of women's struggles for a long time, but they have been very much criticized in recent times because of the "tension that exists between the North / South power relations, axis of the colonial keys of domination which are reproduced around genre" (Alvarez 2013: 116). In this regard, Chandra Mohanty's essay *Bajo los Ojos del Occidente* (*Under the Eyes of the West*) already raises, in 1984, an acute critique of the victimizing construction of Third World women built by hegemonic Western feminism.

As an alternative to this criticism, decolonial feminism has been proposed to discuss and rethink the decolonization of gender relations, in epistemological, conceptual and methodological terms, as emphasized by Andrea Álvarez Díaz. To this end, the cross-cutting reflections of this new line of thought include the "questioning of the universalist

notion of *women* based on a monolithic category of sexual difference, the repositioning of developmental and civilizing conceptions as a backdrop to emancipatory possibilities of women, and the search for constructions proper to women, located within a framework of power structures (which surpass and include the gender structure), capable of reinterpreting and acting in pursuit of their individual and collective rights.” Aída Hernández, co-editor of the book *Descolonizando el feminismo: Teorías y prácticas desde los márgenes* (Descolonizing feminism: Theories and practices from the margins) (Suárez, N., Rosalva, L., & Hernández, A. 2008) explains that it is "a new attitude that implies considering the feminist practice as not necessarily opposed to tradition, but sometimes closely linked to it, where we will probably find new ways to face the local, national and global articulations of power "(67). To this, Álvarez Díaz (2013) adds:

“One of the great interpretive openings proposed by the decolonial feminisms is the one oriented to question the dichotomized tradition-modernity relation. In the understanding that tradition is not a *compact or a homogeneous element*, in my opinion, we can realize this interpretive opening in two different analytical senses. On the one hand, what some organizations of indigenous or migrant women have argued is the distinction between the different elements that make up the traditions of people and the oppressive or emancipatory role that can be attributed to these elements in terms of gender. On the other hand, and from a historical perspective, it is necessary to understand the way in which pre-Hispanic traditions are articulated with colonial and modern heritages.” (119)

One last tension that this female Mexican scholar identifies is the individualistic perspective of the human being that prevails in the theory and analysis of Western feminism and that comes from the illustrated liberal ideology. This individualistic perspective of the human being is the backdrop to all the works in that line, says Alvarez,

and "opposes the non-Western collectivist imaginary of worldviews and religions in which the communion of the human being with nature, the Cosmos and their social relations are a fundamental axis." (119)

Meanwhile, and as a response, the essays of the decolonial feminists seek to show how women have managed to establish loyalties with themselves, with their fighting sisters, without ignoring their brethren of race, ethnicity, religion or nation and in spite of all these tensions. These loyalties, being human, "are not exempt from conflicts, nor from questioning and open to reformulations, according to new socio-historical contingencies and in the light of contemporary social and cultural dynamism" (122), but focus on struggles from another perspective that I believe, is very close to what I have observed in the educators of Isoloma.

And although these arguments have been disqualified by hegemonic and ethnocentric feminism, they "challenge indigenous, black or Islamic women to put their collective racial, ethnic and / or religious interests before their gender demands as women" (119) I think they have to do with what Sarah Radcliffe has already denounced and was presented at the beginning of this chapter, and that it has to do with the lack of consideration, respect and integration between the notions of race, ethnicity, class, gender and religion (among others).

Considering all that has been said, I found this to be the scholarly approach that best fits my observations and reflections. I did not want to prioritize the category of gender over others, in the way that structural, Western and classic feminism does, in my understanding. In general terms, I have explained the relation between the awareness

development experiences of local Isoloma indigenous women; however, we will go deeper into that when we reach our findings in the following chapters.

As a conclusion to the theoretical section, we discussed the fact that the conscious being is characterized as the person who has a critical view of his/her reality and the reality of the world around them, so that they can identify the myths that deceive them and help maintain the status of the dominant structure. Likewise, the person who has the capacity to realize that it is necessary to observe reality, to understand it and to seek mechanisms to appropriate it, that has a conscious goal, will be considered conscious and having a *meta awareness*.

On the other hand, agency will be considered as the capacity for action within structures. In this sense, the agent is the subject who has the ability to make meaningful decisions for his/her life after identifying available options (Leon 2013) and, if necessary, resisting the rules of domination that prevent them from developing their own interests and agendas.

SECTION 3: Methodology

This research was conceived as an ethnographic project that explores the development of critical awareness and agency in INEPE's indigenous female educators from Chilibulo, within the framework of community organization and development.

In determining the group of women with whom I would speak, I randomly selected 12 participants from among those who identified themselves as indigenous and agreed to participate.

My research lasted a total of eight months, divided in four different periods: summer and winter 2015 (first phase), as well as summer and winter 2016 (second phase). Throughout this time, I conducted 22 in-depth interviews and participant observation with the study group. The participant observation included participation in the daily school routine, visits to the classrooms of the compañeras, attendance at the coordination meetings, and visits to the homes of the teachers who agreed to have me there.

In order to triangulate the data, I worked with INEPE founders and other “key respondents”: couples, children, other non-indigenous teachers, elder neighbors and people who regularly interact with my interviewees. I also employed the cold call method hoping to find people from academia who have visited or known in some way the INEPE project. I interviewed two Universidad de las Americas, Gender professors and a FUNSAD (Fundación Salud y Desarrollo) development representative.

During my second visit to Ecuador in 2016, I was invited to teach a Latin American Literature teaching seminar during one month, and it was a very good opportunity to interact with my interviewees and observe them in another kind of scenario.

Initially, my main interest was to know the methodology of consciousness-raising utilized by INEPE as I thought it was an application of the phases methodology proposed by Freire. Therefore, I made a classification of the "levels" of consciousness that I had identified, based on the answers of the first phase of interviews. My expectation of "being aware" or "subject" had to do with the knowledge of the discourse of domination (especially about alienation, neoliberalism, and gender inequality). Therefore, the questions asked were more focused on the concepts and theory that I hoped to "prove."

However, the data I obtained was not very substantial and was quite incongruent with what I observed in the day-to-day living in classrooms and homes.

I started the second phase of my work talking to some of the people at INEPE with more antiquity, as well as to the director, and I must confess that speaking with Lilian Alvaro, who directs the Research Area and has led several of the training programs for Indigenous educators, made a difference in my approach to the subject and allowed me to understand the phenomenon of awareness without prior personal expectations or western-prejudices.

I was a student of INEPE throughout my primary and secondary school days, and when I went to college and experienced the “real” education world, I was very fascinated with INEPE and the big opportunity I got as a kid and teen, of having this education. I came back and asked to participate and I got a job at INEPE School as a Literature teacher. Later, I was also asked to be part of the Research and Communication team and I worked on that research position for a year. Then, I intermittently worked in this organization for about five years in total. And when I was starting to understand the project I had to leave because I got a full scholarship to study abroad in Spain. However, I always wanted to get back and explain the agency that I gained while at INEPE, and the indigenous women’s sense agency that I witnessed. So, when I asked permission to dedicate my field research at INEPE, I was very quickly welcomed and my presence there was very natural.

Being a familiar person allowed me to enjoy an openness that allowed me carry out my ethnographic research. Even when some of the people and the dynamics had changed, the teachers, the native people of La Dolorosa and the people of INEPE’s base team were still there and they reiterated to me I was welcomed as they had known me since my

childhood (many of them were my teachers and colleagues afterwards). Fortunately, then, it was not difficult for my interviewees, to engage in our conversations or feel comfortable during participatory observations in their homes or be honest when I asked relevant personal questions. In that sense, I cannot report great difficulties in the field work itself. In fact, from my perspective, the most difficult thing was to deal with my own logic and preconceptions to develop a critical conscience that goes beyond the cultural or political presumptions present in myself.

On the other hand, having belonged to this project implied a certain risk of bias towards the evidence. But I must say that I kept that risk clear from the beginning and that, in fact, one of my intentions when I came to Isoloma was to contribute constructive criticism, because after working in other spaces and assuming new views, I thought there was a lack of training in gender issues in the team. Thus, several of my interviews in the first phase of the investigation had that critical element. I tried to confirm my hypothesis that there is a great fatigue in women educators and leaders as a result of the lack of "fight" for equality in their family spaces.

In the same way, I had the presumption that the formation as educators was a kind of imposition. Then I carefully inquired into that too. And, as I said already, my general idea about consciousness-raising was very different from what I finally discovered. Therefore, I can claim there was always an effort on my part to avoid being biased in my observations and interpretations and not to fall into overvaluation or hyper-criticism. In that sense, one of the greatest lessons that this ethnography has left me is the flexibility that I had to learn to develop as a researcher to understand a phenomenon, beyond my own

prejudices. I affirm that because what finally showed the data which will be shown as findings in the following chapters was for me, unexpected.

The first chapter of this thesis presents the research scenario, as I discovered that the context in which these women have lived and worked is very important in their awareness process. The second chapter talks about the relationship between the Popular Education (PE) and agency; the main objective of this part is to demonstrate how being a popular educator in INEPE implies being an agent. This is followed in the third chapter with an exploration of the role of agency in the process of awareness of the INEPE indigenous educators from La Dolorosa.

Using reflections from previous chapters, the fourth chapter expands the issue of gender awareness and its development as a necessary focus for the selected study group, which is totally feminine. The last chapter presents the conclusions of my work.

CHAPTER 1:

THE RESEARCH SCENARIO

The following chapter describes the research scenario, as you will see in later chapters, the context in which these women have lived and worked has been very important in their awareness raising process. First, I present a brief summary of the history of Chilibulo so that one can appreciate the *ancestrality* of the area and then, the history of the formation of INEPE.

1.1 La Dolorosa de Chilibulo neighborhood in Quito-Ecuador

“Getting to La Dolorosa neighborhood of Chilibulo is complicated, -I realize-. However, being a native of Quito and having spent almost all my childhood and adolescence "climbing" to INEPE daily from my house in Quito, made me see as natural taking that route that is quite labyrinthine and not well maintained by the city. Perhaps the routine prevented me from realizing that this is one of those sectors that politicians commonly call "forgotten" because they are so high, hidden among the mountains¹⁷ and inhabited by poor people. "The city" may be a few kilometers away but the rural and the urban are completely different worlds: cobbled, ballast or muddy streets; ravines, shrubs and weeds. (Field notes)

¹⁷ In Quito (as in many other Andean cities), indigenous populations, migrants from other cities and with scarce resources settle or invade the slopes of mountains and live on the highlands, which are, with the exception of certain few high-class districts, synonymous of poverty,

La Dolorosa, also known as *La Dolorosa de Isoloma* is a popular neighborhood belonging to the Parish of Chilibulo¹⁸, located in the south west of the city of Quito-Ecuador. It has a particular geography due to its location on the slopes of Ungüí hill. And although the neighborhood is only four kilometers away from the center of the city, the average Quito citizen is unaware of its existence since this is a rural sector and there are no banks or supermarkets, shops or important State offices around. In addition, and like many other popular neighborhoods in the south part of Quito, it is located in the highlands, so it is even physically separated from the city. High, very high, at an average altitude of 2,910 meters (9,547 feet) above sea level, Quito's view from La Dolorosa is spectacular, but from Quito, La Dolorosa is not viewed, literally and metaphorically speaking: this is a neighborhood in which "more than seventy percent of its inhabitants survive their very low income situation" (Raza, 2006).

The records indicate that the sector was initially known as *Isoloma* (word in Quíchwa meaning *Iso* mountain. *Iso* is a native flower from the area) and is found within the semi-urban perimeter of the city. It is also known that in the 70's, when the neighborhood becomes cartographically part of the city, the Quíchwa name of the place

¹⁸ (...) Chilibulo, a place that extends on the slopes of Ungüí hill, in one of the southern foothills of the Rucu-Pichincha an extinct volcano that rises in the Western Cordillera of the Andes and on whose eastern slopes have grown the city of Quito. Being on the slopes of Ungüí, Chilibulo has an inclination from west to east of about 45 degrees and extends north to the gorge of La Raya. This habitat, besides gathering conditions for hunting and the development of agriculture thanks to the abundance of water, offered to the old inhabitants a natural protection against possible enemy attacks. This has been read by archaeologists in this cultural complex found on the site. They tell us that no great variation is observed in the body of material culture or in the frequency of atypical elements which may suggest a violent conquest of people from different origins prior to the Incan invasion. They then clarify that this has been observed over a long period of time. (Guerrero, M. 2005)

was eliminated and changed into Spanish, baptizing it as La Dolorosa, in honor of the same named Catholic Virgin of Quito. (Espinosa, 2006)

History: Indigenous and peasant settlement

"Chilibulo is a millennial zone that appears in the Quito Phase of the Period of Integration of the History of Ecuador¹⁹, which means that in its beginnings Chilibulo had the presence of *ayllus*²⁰, who maintained a productive community structure that allowed them to have a better use of the natural environment, and the way in which the labor force was organized is what helped developing a system of agriculture on climatic floors. " (Yugcha, Tello, & Yugcha, 2007)

Studies on the sector are not abundant, but they are not scarce either: from History (Espinosa, 2006) and Archeology (Moreno Yáñez, 1981) it is possible to find contributions indicating that in this sector there was a native indigenous settlement²¹. That was later

¹⁹ Several samples have been submitted for dating through the carbon 14 method. A prime example is that of carbonized corn grains found in a pitcher, which date between 500 and 600 BC. The information obtained indicates that Chilibulo belongs to the integration period, ranging from 500 BC. to 1500 AC. The oldest strata are located in the Regional Development phase, i.e between 500 BC. and 500 A.C. (Guerrero, 2005)

²⁰ *Ayllu*: "[...] The concept of ayllu then comprises a population group linked by ties of kinship - more or less narrow - with a specific territory, history and culture, forming a relatively homogeneous group" (Restrepo, 2004).

²¹ The results reveal that Chilibulo was a settlement of farmers, distributed in probably dispersed villages. These in turn formed population units close to the fields of cultivation. The abundance of grinding stones found prove that corn was the main food and that beans, quinoa and potatoes were their inseparable companions in the diet. In addition to agricultural production, the subsistence food system included hunting deer, rabbits and wildlife on slopes, ponds, and relatively nearby sites. (...) Collecting "churros" or small snails and breeding guinea pigs complemented this alimentary vein. As for the llama, it is not yet known whether there were already in these homes before the arrival of the Incas. Knowing the truth of this matter is of cardinal importance since, if the domestication of the llama is pre-Inca, scholars will have to find their incidence in nutrition, transport and relations of exchange. The degree of development reached in the pre-Inca phase is evident when we observe the construction of terraces of cultivation on the slopes, platforms that were exceptionally crowned

combined with migrant peasants from other indigenous populations of the country, mainly from other provinces and rural sectors of the Ecuadorian Highlands.

It is also known that during the feudal period, the inhabitants of Chilibulo worked in the surrounding haciendas. "This population organized in the Chilibulo - Marcopamba - La Raya commune had access since 1908 as owners to the agricultural lands located in the upper parts of Ungüí Hill" (Jarrín & Arévalo, 2006). In fact, there are testimonies of residents who say that when the agrarian reform occurred, for example, the owners of the hacienda Carrión (one of several haciendas owned by mestizo landowners at the time) located in what is now known as La Raya and La Dolorosa neighborhood, delivered the edges of the ravines to their *huasipungueros*²² so that they settle their houses. For this reason it is said that these neighborhoods are the product of a process of elimination of the *huasipungo* and the formation of initial *caseríos*²³. (Alvaro L. 2013)

Everything pointed out here is an indication of the importance of this area in Ecuador's local and national history. More vestiges have been found lately, however, they have not yet been investigated. Anyway, what we know explains quite well why when one gets to this type of sectors in Quito, there is a sensation of having moved to some small, rural, indigenous town in the process of urbanization. Let's review the following quote:

by platforms of houses, which probably were manufactured like a quadrangular room of walls of pressed earth or mud wall, with roofs made of straw. (Guerrero, 2005)

²² *Huasipunguero*: It was the main labor force in the haciendas since the seventeenth century, and was considered "part of the hacienda and was bought or sold along with other properties of the hacienda" (Ehrenreich, 1991).

²³ *Caserío*: Small farm in the countryside formed by a group of houses: "Each farm operates internally with its true autonomy and has the capacity to make decisions and fulfill them when the subject or the need is of common interest" (Almeida Vinueza, 1995)

"As you go up you find yourself with less and less cars until, in the one we travel –whether it is a bus or your own car- becomes the only one. Cows, calves, llamas are part of the landscape. There is no shortage of neighbors and members of the community in their native clothes who are herding cattle, as well as children walking alone. Many of them smile, others greet, the labyrinth continues and the landscapes continue changing: there are fewer houses and more forest, the smell of smog suddenly disappears and I am welcomed by the majestic Ungüí hill. It is not easy to get to La Dolorosa, I had to wait more than 35 minutes for the bus that brought me from the nearest main strip in order to change buses in "Las Lavanderías" stop, then count four curves, get off and walk. But it is refreshing, cold (almost like on the moor), green, clean, real: different. Moving to live outside Ecuador has definitely changed my vision of the world" (Field Notes)

With a population of approximately 1200 habitants, this neighborhood, which was originally a territory of indigenous settlement, is currently made up of mostly native people (87%). The rest, non-native, have declared they migrated from the countryside, in other provinces of the country. (Paca Caguana, & Galarza 2015)

And although as the studies point out (REFERENCE), new waves of immigrants have arrived to Isoloma from rural areas of the city, there are still many native families that keep their ancestral culture and traditions, such as their attires, sowing techniques, and animal grazing traditions. These cultural elements are part of the identity of most of INEPE students and teachers; they have, therefore, been taken into account and valorized by the educational proposal of this organization . But what role do these elements play in the educators' consciousness rising and agency process? We discuss it in next chapter.

1.2 INEPE and community organization

Understanding the History of Chilibulo, knowing how it has achieved the establishment of a community organization in Isoloma, as well as recognizing the efforts and struggles

that involved makes it possible to look at awareness-raising and agency from a collective and solidarity perspective, opposite to views characterized by the empowerment of individuality and the insertion in the economic system, goals raised by several international organizations.

What is INEPE? And how did it appear? I ask in one of my interviews.

INEPE emerged and wrought by pain and commitment to life. It is a community-based organization whose pedagogical activities are reflective of themselves. Almost thirty years of an educational praxis as an act of freedom = solidarity, as an adventure of thinking creatively and critically, has enabled the INEPE team to concretize the infinite possibilities of community thinking-feeling-acting. (Alvaro 2012: 9)

INEPE (Institute of Research, Education and Promotion of Ecuador) is a living community-based organization led by women and men, both from Isoloma and other surrounding neighborhoods in the south of Quito. This organization was born more than 30 years ago, based on the work of the neighbors of the sector together with members of the *Federación de Organizaciones Juveniles*²⁴ –FOJ- (Federation of Youth Organizations), one of dozens of projects of youth groups with ideas of social justice that

²⁴ The *Federación de Organizaciones Juveniles –FOJ*, (Federation of Youth Organizations) was founded "at the First Meeting of Youth Organizations held in the city of Quito on November 20 and 21, 1982, which brought together young people from the neighborhoods of Quito and Santo Domingo de los Colorados." (159) The motivations behind the emergence of the FOJ were that young people and children represented approximately 60% of Ecuador's population, particularly young people who sought an explanation of the problems that existed in the country and the world, who wanted to affirm their personality, to discover their vocation and from the work of their youth clubs (which had been mechanisms of their own organization) to be participants of a social change. (López Alvaro 2013: 61)

were self-organized in that time of dictatorship²⁵. Lilian, one of the women I interviewed told me how it began.

The organizational work in the sector of Chilibulo and specifically in La Dolorosa began in 1981 as an extension of the work of La Raya (a neighborhood nearby) because in La Raya we had formed the neighborhood committee, we had the youth group that belonged to the Federation of Youth Organizations (FOJ) and there was the popular education center. Then, compañero Maria Caiza, a very active woman, part of the group of organized women and resident of La Dolorosa, told me that it would be great to extend the organizational work "upper". As committed young people, we accepted. I remember that at that time we went up the ravine and there were at most 5 houses in the neighborhood. It was a totally rural sector, the neighbors maintained therefore that organizational structure of an indigenous community: the relations of kinship were totally familiar, there was no western structure of "neighborhood" -the type of organization we have now-; it was rather the community structure from its one hundred percent indigenous roots. (Lilián)

The *CJP -Club Juventud y Progreso-* (Youth and Progress Club) was invited by the leaders of the Chilibulo-Marcopamba-La Raya Commune²⁶ to teach literacy to adults who could not read or write. Thus, the young literacy tutors, together with the leaders of the

²⁵ In the Latin American case, the twentieth century showed the presence of youth movements that starred in the "University Reform of Cordova" in 1918, youth riots of Mexican origin by the discrimination of the Chicanos in Los Angeles in 1949, the youth protest of Tlatelolco in Mexico in 1968, the student and worker demonstrations that ended in "El Cordobazo" in May 1969, the "Zapatista Revolution" of Chiapas led by Subcomandante Marcos and the so-called "Revolution of the Boys", held in Managua, led by the Sandinista militants of the FSLN to power in August of 1979. Despite the absence of historical research on youth in Ecuador, María Andrade, Gonzalo Herrera and Pablo Ospina pointed out that the youth movements were formed by groups belonging to "dissident university students and middle class young people who reproduced in the large cities and with the legacy of the left-wing movements of the 1970s", in which "many of their militants are the children of old militants." Herrera pointed out that for the young people who fought in Ecuador in the late 1970s and early eighties "to be a rebel was a kind of example ... one grew up among young people of highly valued conscience who were following the path of previous years inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Cuba. It was a generation that watched the liberation war of Nicaragua, the value of the Sandinistas, The Theology of Liberation with the insurgent and liberating Christ. That youth heard the enthusiastic stories of "May 68." (López Alvaro 2012: 54-55)

²⁶ A commune is a grouping of generally rural neighborhoods that, organized by their leaders, work together to achieve common goals.

neighborhood, began the first educational work characterized by maintaining solidarity, participation and dialogue, as a way of respecting native practices, as Lilian told me:

I remember our friend Ancelmo, for example, an indigenous neighbor, a native of the sector, who used to say when we met to talk about a problem among neighbors: nowadays people want to solve everything with a lawyer, before we would solve them simply by meeting and talking. So, for example, if problems are solved by consensus, they are solved by conscience and not by repression, that is exactly one of the principles of Popular Education, and we have maintained this both in INEPE and with the parents of the Educative Unity, the neighbors, and in the neighborhood organization.

These principles (dialogue, participation and solidarity) have been professed and defended since then in INEPE, as they have guided the encounter and joint action between young and adult, women and men, indigenous and mestizos, urban and rural, native and not native people of La Dolorosa. After the literacy campaign action was extended to other needs of the neighborhood that were raised as urgent and emerged from the same community:

When we started the literacy work, La Dolorosa was a neighborhood where there was no water, there was no telephone, there was no sewer, there was no electricity service, there were no good accessible roads, and the neighbors said that there were no good human relations among them because the neighborhood was divided by religion issues brought by churches and people from outside. (Patricio, interview in depth, August 2015)

Currently INEPE has a team of approximately 108 people: 85% are women and 77% (of the total), indigenous people from La Dolorosa and other rural sectors of southern

Quito²⁷. INEPE promotes Popular Education processes at regional and national level²⁸, through its areas of Research, Local Development, Education, Teacher Training School, Talent Education Program, Organic Garden and Community Health.

Given that the experiences of the teachers are of interest in this work, I cannot stop and describe each of the areas of action of this organization as I would like. However, the characteristics of the educational action and promotion, through the testimonies and their analysis, will be described in next chapter.

²⁷ The other 23% has self-identified as middle class and middle class illustrated, perhaps because they do not live in rural but more urban neighborhoods.

²⁸ They speak of a national outreach organization because, the professionals of INEPE have been invited on several occasions by other leaders to train indigenous teachers from schools in the provinces and rural areas of the country.

CHAPTER 2:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POPULAR EDUCATION AND AGENCY

In this chapter, the characteristics of INEPE's educational action and popular promotion are analyzed from the narratives of the interviewed indigenous women and they relate to the theory of "being an agent" Giddens. In this way, it is argued that the educational action of INEPE results in and promotes the agency of its teachers.

2.1 Agent "per se"

I found that all my interviewees are agents "per se", based on the decision they have made to be part of INEPE community project. Being agent "per se" means being a natural agent. It also means looking for the most complex options of resistance and rebellion as an innate call to improve their lives by finding not only better paths but also unconventional, new, and different ones and to live these options on a daily basis with or without awareness of motive. The latter would be the essential difference between the agency that is "earned" and/or learnt.

The whole team of the Nursery and Elementary School in INEPE is composed of indigenous women, native of Chilibulo and/or other nearby rural sectors, who **have asked to participate** in this project, generally after a relative or a close acquaintance talked to them about INEPE²⁹. An example is the testimony of Sisa, an indigenous woman in her forties, who entered the organization when she was very young and going through a deep

²⁹ This is how it is explained that INEPE is, today, a network of indigenous families (only 10% of the team is mestizo).

depression caused by sexual violence: *"I saw the transformation achieved by Popular Education in my mother, who is the one who brought me to a workshop when I was in a difficult moment of my life, full of bitterness, resentment and fears. I remember my mother told me that she wanted to take me to a place, and, if I like it, I could come back next time"*. Once Sisa got to know the project, she decided to join INEPE as she felt things there *"were different"*. That is, she was attracted to the idea of living her life in a non-conventional way.

Cori (32 years old), another native woman from Chilibulo, made the choice to go back to the organization *"to find light at the end of the tunnel"*. Cori became an orphan when she was 1 year old, after her father, a native construction worker, died when he was very young suffering from cirrhosis due to his alcoholism. Although her indigenous, peasant and alcoholic mother, who remained in charge of five children, went out daily to markets and plazas to sell *mote* and other foods derived from corn, the economic resources were always scarce, and the living conditions of the family were very poor.

Cori was an elementary student at INEPE as a child. In fact, on occasions we even shared classrooms. I remember her as a humble, active and clever child. I stopped seeing her when we return to classes in high school after summer vacations, now I know she had to drop out of school to work as a maid, seamstress and dish washer in a restaurant. All her older siblings migrated to Spain, and they were heavily indebted. Cori's mother told her to switch to night school to help her support the family and that is what she had to do.

In the *"nocturna"* (night school) she met other boys and girls her age and older, living under similar socio-economic and family circumstances. There, she began to consume alcohol, joined a gang and even started to rob.

"Cori came one morning and told me and another colleague that she wanted to work at INEPE. I had already heard what she was into, as this is a relatively small neighborhood. So, I asked her if she was aware that, to work at INEPE she needed to stay clean and change her life style. She said 'yes, actually that's why I am here'." (Angela)

Cori began to work helping in the nursery and after showing "eagerness" to graduate from high school and effort to transform her own life, she was offered to be an assistant in the Nursery. That is how she began her path of promotion as a popular educator. Five years ago Cori got her Bachelor's Degree in Education and currently, besides being an elementary teacher at INEPE, wife and mother of 3 children, she leads a local folkloric dance group for La Dolorosa de Isoloma youth, with the purpose of opening spaces of culture and healthy entertainment, especially for those at risk of consuming alcohol and joining gangs.

Not only for Sisa and Cori, but for all the women I interviewed it was clear from the beginning that they were not only looking for a "job" but also they were after changing their routines and lives when looking to become part of INEPE.

The training process of the popular educators is very intense, especially for the recently joined teachers who are aware of the large work load required before becoming part of the project. Since the beginning they know that their positions would demand putting extra effort on top of their wives' and mothers' routines; that they would have to culminate their elementary or high school education, learn a nontraditional methodology, and stay long hours after teaching to coordinate, plan and do research (I address this deeply later).

The victimizing concept of Western feminism, as pointed out by Chandra Mohanty, as well as other folkloristic visions, frequently leads us to imagine indigenous women as women-statues: culture-drenched, tenacious farmers, fertile and physically strong, but also

weak victims and subjected (to their husbands, to tradition, to the system, etc.). Therefore, without power of decision, without word and without desires. In that sense, they are not seen as "real" or "legitimate" in their "contemporary" desires to be professionals, for example; this last one illustrates very well the dichotomy tradition-modernity of which Andrea Álvarez speaks. However, the testimonies of the group of indigenous women I interviewed show me in various ways that they are special beings agents "per se", precisely because they are legitimately human: with pain, fears and tough stories to bear, but also with all the courage to make decisions at their own risk. Or as Magdalena León said in explaining the concept of agency: *able to define their own agendas*.

INEPE does not have any financing from the Ecuadorean Government. Most of the students are scholarship recipients and only a few of the students' parents make monthly payments, which is decided based on their income and it is usually between \$ 5 to \$ 30 US dollars. The largest financial support the institution receives and uses for wages comes from the solidarity of retired European men and women, called "padrinos" (sponsors). They send money from Spain, France and Switzerland through international organizations. The total income, per Patricio Raza, Executive Director of INEPE, *"covers more or less 50% of the staff's wages; therefore, a teacher, a secretary or the director himself knows that we will receive a worthy pay of our work, but that a large percentage of what is done is a voluntary contribution. That is one of the reasons why we call ourselves a community-based project."* In other words, INEPE's team members contribute with their work to the community project while they receive a partial remuneration.

Requesting to be part of this project, therefore, could be considered a first characteristic that shows these women as agents "per se". Additionally, the decision of becoming a teacher implies a great challenge at all levels: personal, family, social, academic and economic; therefore, it testifies of the status of these women as agents "per se", as it will be explained next. I state the latter, since this is a decision not motivated by money, but by the desire of personal, professional and community-based development.

In the middle of a group interview, I ask the question: Have you ever felt compelled by something, or by someone, to belong to or remain in this project?

- Gaby! - answers one of the compañeras, -for the last 4 years we have not been paid on time; and on many occasions, for long periods, we have worked up to 5 or 6 months without getting a penny. We have not lacked food, or the education for our children, which is the most important thing. I believe that all of us are here mainly because of a personal commitment, and then, a community commitment. (Field notes)

On the other hand, I see the interviewed women as agents "per se" when compared to their sisters or neighbors who come from very similar families and contexts. They have also the opportunity to work at INEPE³⁰, but they have chosen to stay home or in their other jobs³¹. At this point, I must clarify that my intention is not to disqualify a different choice, but to show that there is a decision that is made from awareness.

Thus, my interviewees entered INEPE with the purpose of changing their realities and improving their lives (and their families') through different efforts and actions, starting by facing themselves.

³⁰ INEPE is geographically located in the middle of the neighborhood and after 30 years of work, everyone in Isoloma and Chilibulo know it and know what the project is about.

³¹ These other women may be agents in that way. I do not say or deny it because it is not the case that I study.

I cannot affirm that one hundred percent of INEPE members are agents "per se", but I can and should speak of the group (randomly selected) that I studied, as a group of female agents from the moment they decided to join INEPE and possibly even before, because by having decided to work for a community project in full conscience, they demonstrate their capacity for action and decision.

A second idea or clue why these *compañeras* have a special energy, or agency "per se", might have to do with community development and life practices, characteristics of their upbringing. Where does that agency come from? I must admit that I do not know it entirely, but the data gave some clues. I explain this below.

Work in the field and resilience

Perhaps this is a characteristic of indigenous women in the area; I do not have enough evidence to support it, but it caught my attention that when talking about their identity, all the women interviewed, without exception, see themselves as strong women and workers (of the field, crops, homecare and their siblings' care) since a very young age. For example, this is the testimony of Yanara, a native of Chilibulo, daughter of indigenous hacienda workers who received their parcel of land in Isoloma, after the Ecuadorian agrarian reform.

"I am a hardworking, persistent, affectionate woman. I am a woman of indigenous origins, who grew up happy in a free space: in the countryside. My toys were trees, stones, woods. I had no toys of other type. Since I was a child I was very hardworking, because I went to work with my parents."

Indigenous women work since they are little girls; it is part of their reality. They do it as a natural task, or at least I perceived it in the narratives of my participants, who, with solemn, formal and sweet tone, recognized themselves joyfully in their childhood days, when sowing, reaping and helping their parents was part of their daily routine. My reflection, then, is that perhaps they always knew how to work harder than the average girl and boy; and most likely they also learned to swallow their tears and frustrations to turn them into resilience and then to achieve their deepest desires. As Sisa explained:

"(When they were girls) every day my sister and I had to wash, cook, clean, take care of the house and take care of our younger siblings, because my mom went to work. But I remember my sister and I used to do all that quickly to be able to go out and play. The thing was to be able to go out and play. Then we did things right because my mom was strict, but after that we would play for hours and she would just let us play until we got tired."

Growing up living the solidarity and community of their families

Solidarity and the struggle to preserve the integrity of the community have been detected as cultural characteristics of the families and the contexts in which these educators grew up. And probably this is one of the motivations to work for what we know as a "social cause", since they have lived those "ideals" as something natural since they were young girls:

"I remember when Angela and other compañeros came down here to La Dolorosa suggesting to us to begin the work of literacy and P.E. (popular education). For us it was nothing new to open the doors of our house. My mom always taught us to welcome people from the outside, whether they sell mats, pots, brooms or whatever, because up here there were no stores or markets. People always were coming from far away to offer us things and we always received them. We always had a glass of juice or a dish of food for them. Then, as the fellow compañeros of the FOJ came, we welcomed

them the same way and when they talked about sharing and doing things among all and for all the neighbors of the sector, we saw it as something normal. For the big ones, the little ones, and everyone, it was normal to welcome them."

Yanara tells me the above in response to my inquiry about the way they felt when people "from down town" (mestizos, young, intellectual,) came to initiate a community organization to work in projects of interest for the community such as roads reconstruction, or improving health and education of the neighborhood , and, to my surprise, she says it was nothing new. At first I did not understand what she meant. Is she comparing people who offer brooms to those who "offer" education? I am inwardly indignant, but quickly I feel ashamed by the colonialism of my reflection and begin to understand that, within the indigenous worldview of these women, all human beings deserve to be welcomed, cared for, listened to, and to receive hospitality, no matter where they come from. Therefore, I think that if there was no great resistance or struggle to accept what they were proposing, it was because Isoloma inhabitants are humble, open-minded and generous people, on the one hand. And on the other, because what was proposed as Popular Education (PE) was very similar to the traditions they already had to "do things together" and "for everyone".

Another good example of these solidarity and community customs of the sector was narrated by Manuela, another native woman who has been at INEPE since its origins. Manuela, with her strong character and intense gaze, impressed me with her firm decision not to answer several of my questions because she was not sure how she felt at the time, as *"she was having a hard time in her family life."* I respectfully contemplated her attitude as a sign of her awareness and ability to choose, to know how to say "today I do not want to

speak and it is my right". Thus, in one of the group interviews in which she wanted to participate, she spoke little, but very emphatically about her mother's saints.

"At every celebration of my mom's saints, she invited all the neighbors to eat a bowl of chicken soup, 'caldo de 31' (innards soup), chicken stew or whatever she had prepared to sell. My mom used to sell food in the laundries³², but on her saint's day, she would send the children to sell for her to allow her receive all the visitors who arrived. All the people from the neighborhood were invited."

The way to celebrate is to attend. In other words, one is happy sharing, giving, gathering together. The gift is not receiving, but giving. Solidarity has been present and continues to be present so far in Isoloma: every year there are at least three large collective (as well as personal) festivities. The feast of the Virgin Dolorosa, for example, is a syncretic celebration that takes place every April and lasts more than a week. There is a family that is *prioste* (hostess), who organizes the novena and is responsible for providing food and drinks to dozens of people that, on the last day, become hundreds of attendees (from Isoloma, Chilibulo and other rural neighborhoods). In the same way as in the previous example, I have seen the *prioste* family for years to recognize themselves as blessed and honored to be so. It is a great privilege that they express with tears and gratitude to the neighbors and community who assign this task to them.

The scarce economic resources of the families are not an obstacle to take over the party, since many neighbors cooperate "lending" hens, potatoes, carrots, and other foods from their orchards and crops, and besides they help with the preparation and food service;

³² Until three or four decades ago, there were community laundries installed by the city in popular neighborhoods that did not have piping system. In the case of Isoloma, , laundries became meeting places for the members of the community, who also came from higher parts of the hills.

this is a solidarity loan because the priestes commit themselves to return it and cooperate in the same way, when the other neighbors take their turn to be priestes. Apparently, this is a system of economic solidary typical of the indigenous world, which has existed for centuries, and continues even today in La Dolorosa, where it is known as “jochas”.

But, if there is a deep cultural richness, there is also a strong influence of the neoliberal system, brought with urbanization and the media empire. It has affected and changed the social dynamics and the conceptions of the new generations. Therefore, there are also scenes of heavy alcohol consumption, drugs usage and alienation of young people. There is still intra-family violence, dismembered homes because the parents have migrated to *developed* countries like The United Staes or Spain, and left their children in the care of grandparents, uncles, or the eldest sibling. And that costs dearly in the emotional, academic and integral development of the children and of the whole community.

"It is not uncommon nowadays to see children or teenagers here (La Dolorosa) confronting their parents because they want a cell phone, or Nike shoes, or because they want to party and stay overnight in their classmates' homes, being just 11 years old. And the parents come many times, desperate to talk to us (the teachers) because they do not have the resources to buy such things, they feel bad since it is difficult for them to deal with everything else and these problems as well." Angela says, explaining that one of the objectives of her work at INEPE School is to raise awareness to the entire educational community (teachers, parents, students and neighbors) that biopower and child/youth desire for consumption are voracious and perceived day by day in Isoloma. And that is why a different education is urgent.

Finally, considering that not everyone wants to educate, much less to practice and recreate an education with such a complex paradigm (see next section), which involves so many decisions and unconventional efforts that transgress structures. For this reason, I affirm that choosing to be a popular educator of INEPE, in the midst of all this, is to be an agent "per se".

2.2 The type of educational action pushes the agency gain of indigenous teachers

So far we have explained how the decision that my interviewees have made to participate in the community project is a first way of showing agency. Something that I also observed, and that will be the argument of this part, is that this agency is maintained and grows in the form of educational action and a particular Popular Education (PE) work which has been created in this community-based organization.

INEPE School is a nursery, elementary and high school where, in the words of Lilián Alvaro (founder) “a new educational paradigm is being built with the conscious participation of all the subjects of the pedagogical communities that share the Popular Education and the fundamental dimensions present in the Freirean proposal, which are: the dialogue of knowledges, the collective construction of knowledge, the pedagogy of the question, the subject-to-subject relationship, the tenderness toward the common house called Earth and the participative action research” (Alvaro 2016: 1). For her, "these dimensions, that from the perspective of Thomas Kuhn, give effect to the paradigm of Popular Education, which grounds the requirement of constructing pedagogical praxis as expressions of the double dialectics: freedom = solidarity ". (2)

After reading and studying some documents as the one mentioned above, that explains the theoretical postulates of PE on which the proposal of INEPE's education is based, I interviewed Lilián Alvaro. Here I asked her to talk about this new educational paradigm. It was a Saturday morning at her house, located in the south of Quito, ten minutes from La Dolorosa. Lilián lives with her husband, and her mother. They have lived in that same house since she was a teenager. Her apartment was small, colorful and filed with plants but I also noticed there were non-finished parts for example the exterior stairs are not painted and do not have guardrails, because "they don't have the money to finish", she told me while she offered me a tea, juice and cookies from the bakery across the street.

Lilián (INEPE's Research Director) and Patricio, her husband and the Executive Director of the organization, were both elected in their positions at the last general assembly with all the members of INEPE. As mentioned before, both are part of the group of INEPE founders, on the side of the FOJ. Patricio is not present that morning because he has "gone up" to Isoloma to meet with the neighbors to discuss initiatives of the neighborhood organization. "*INEPE is a 24/7 job*", I think. And even though I have always considered myself an activist, altruistic and a dreamer, it is still difficult for me to understand these lives dedicated two hundred percent to an ideal; sacrificed lives whose meaning goes beyond the common good. Simple lives, tenacious and deep, but that still exist.

I ask her: How do you achieve the implementation of Paulo Freire's thinking in classrooms? I want to focus especially on "starting from the other" which is something that is frequently mentioned in her speech and PE proposal.

Lilián answers: The fundamental dimensions present in the Freirean proposal, the dialogue of knowledges, the collective construction of

knowledge, the pedagogy of the question, the subject-to-subject relationships, tenderness toward the common house called Earth and Participative Action Research (IAP) have been basic axes to develop this educational proposal that is unprecedented in Chilibulo. We have achieved this on a daily basis, in practice and with the participation of the entire educational community. And of course, one of the conditions for us is that in each educational act there is a relationship of equals, or "subject-to-subject." (Field notes)

In our conversation, I understand that being a teacher at INEPE implies, from the beginning, learning to look at students (children and adolescents) as equals, something that is not at all a typical practice in Ecuador where the teacher usually has a status and power that place him/her above his/her students. I have been a student at INEPE, I have seen and experienced that relationship of subjects in the classrooms. But how have the indigenous women, who are trained in the praxis, learned to be subjects and to treat the other as a subject?

Our curriculum is based, among other things, on the pedagogy of the question. An example of this is that every day teachers write and make a record of the questions and interests of our children, who raise their hands and say, for example: How many stars are there in the sky? Why is the grass green? Why are there children who work? So, that very afternoon, we go and do research on those questions.

I realize, then, that starting from the children's questions (i.e. from the other), which is implementing the pedagogy of the question, is a way of learning to relate as subjects. "It's not so simple at the beginning", says Verónica Pillajo, Director of the Educational Area in another interview, when I try to go deeper into this topic. "But you learn by coordinating and, above all, by living workshops with the students", she says. Surely it is a great challenge to balance these relationships, I think, because all my interviewees have

declared to have experienced authoritarian, dominating and unequal relationships in their own education and homes.

For more than two months I have stopped by indiscriminately at the classrooms of my interviewees. I am always welcomed and invited to sit. Something that draws attention is to observe that these educators naturally achieve the balance between speaking and listening, attentively, to their students. I also observe that they resolve with patience and affection the possible behavioral problems or situations of violence that are present, and that, using techniques of breathing, meditation, corporal exercises or songs, achieve better levels of concentration. I remember when I once, as a student in those same classrooms, did not want to work on my arithmetic divisions and after replying to my teacher in a very rude way, my teacher invited me to draw and relax (Field Notes 12).

Learning how to live equality in the classroom, I think, is not easy and it is another act of agency that should be reported because it implies going against the structures of domination that we learn as correct. To change that practice, to understand that the other, whether younger, smaller, or less "knowledgeable", is equal; that their interests are important and that they must be included in their education, is a major challenge. In addition, it changes life and shapes the personality of the teachers, as several reported that learning this new form of interpersonal relationship in equality also changed their way of interacting at home with their own children and/or their spouses and with the world in general:

Has it been very difficult to achieve this subject-to-subject relationship with your students?

I ask Bea, one of the youngest women interviewed (25 years old), who has been working at INEPE for only 5 years. *"No. For me it has been easy with the children. It has been*

difficult with some of their parents, because there is always someone who is rude or wants to impose their ideas", she answers, while she sticks her children's drawings on the wall, next to the blackboard. In her testimony, Bea lets me know that in addition to having learned to recreate this relationship of equality, she has sought it for herself and claims it as a right.

In this same logic, learning how to motivate the real participation of all the boys and girls, practicing real dialogue, researching (asking oneself why, how, and when things happen) and collectively constructing knowledge, axes of the educational proposal of INEPE, are acts that push the gain of agency of the teachers, and which are later translated into their homes and lives. And then, as I will explain later, the awareness goes simultaneously with the agency (conceived as the way to educate). In fact, action is part and simultaneous process of awareness.

2.3 INEPE's training and promotion motivates and awards the agency of indigenous women

The whole team of teachers at INEPE School is composed of indigenous women from Chilibulo and other rural sectors where the institution's programs have been promoted. This means that each one of them has lived a path of integral professionalization, which in INEPE is called "popular promotion" and that I see as an important third element to be reported, because it motivates and rewards the agency.

I have spoken of Isoloma's educators as agents *per se*, but I also maintain that this agency grows thanks to the type of educational-community project in which they develop. In that

sense, it strikes me to know that in the "professional" past of my interviewees, none of them was a teacher so I am curious to know about that transformation.

From maid to educator

I ask: *What did you do before joining INEPE team?*

Answers: *We used to sell typical foods: 'caldo de 31' (innards soup), morocho, potatoes with librillo (guts) (Manuela and Irina). I worked in a fabric factory (Flor). I worked in a grocery store (Amaya). I was a housewife (Dayuma). I was a maid (Curi).*

How does a woman with minimal education (primary and at most, secondary), who does not know pedagogy, and has no experience in Education, become a teacher? Eunice, a 30-year-old woman from Calderón (another indigenous sector in the city) has been working at INEPE for 10 years. She explains:

I now live in Chilibulo because my husband is from here, but I am from Calderón. My mother and my grandmother live in Calderón until now. (...) Calderón used to be a rural sector, we lived from agriculture and we lived especially from the cultivation and harvesting of corn. My father always worked cleaning in a hospital and my mother oversaw the house duties: to take care of us, to cultivate, to take care of the animals, to skin them and then sell them. I want to emphasize that the INEPE's promotion system is not only economic or professional but also humanitarian, because I joined INEPE with a high school diploma and no teaching experience. I was initially an teaching assistant in the day care, for 1 to 5 years old children; then I became teacher of First Grade (5 to 6 years old children) and from then on I have been teacher of the upper grades, teaching a different group in Primary School every year. Currently I am a Language and Literature teacher of high school students and I am the only professional in my family.

The practice and principle of popular promotion in INEPE is especially appreciated in the teaching of women from the rural sectors, who manage to lead a transformative action in the classrooms, the community and in themselves.

Based on solidarity, the dialogue of knowledges and even the sisterhood (support from women to other women), the construction of different curricula, for example, is a form of agency as well, since the training and self-training involved in this task is a fight in every way for my interviewees: academic, personal (because they sacrifice time with family), economic, and ideological; but when I observe them, I see that they work and study with courage, conscience and conviction.

In INEPE's philosophy promotion is not only professionalization but a "multidimensional evolution of facets: intuitive, rational, aesthetic, ecological (mind, body, spirit) engaged in a transformative pedagogical praxis. Consequently, there is no system of promotion, but each compañero(a), each person, is promoted and promotes himself/herself at their own pace." (Lilián - interview)

As explained in the previous quotation, there is no traditional promotion system; it is, instead, a synergistic and solidarity network that allows the training and formation and the consequent promotion:

Guided by their coordinators -who are other teachers (rural women too), older in the process, and who have previously gone through the same way-, junior teachers research and plan every afternoon of the week (after teaching the entire morning) to achieve the construction of an interdisciplinary and community curricula, which starts from the concrete reality of both children and their teachers. Thus, the Feast of the Virgin Dolorosa, the sowing season in the Andean mountains, the history of Chilibulo, or the properties of medicinal plants of the area, which are learned by interviewing older indigenous dwellers of Isoloma, are typical topics of the school curricula at INEPE, varying in levels of complexity, I could see that in the lesson plans of several groups. This is important because in this is how teachers have come to discover their roots and their history when they teach

and because they are completing their training with planning the education of their students.

And something else, the fact of integrating the indigenous world into the academy is an experience that revalues the human condition of my interviewees. In other words, talking about the history and culture of these women in the classroom has made them dignified in front of their students and the world.

"When I was a child and I was going to school "down" in the city (outside of La Dolorosa, since there was no public school here but only in the more urbanized areas), I never told my classmates where I came from or that I lived up here in Isoloma because saying that you are from the mountains was a reason for discrimination and mockery. So, along with my siblings we lied and said that we lived in El Pintado (another nearby neighborhood, but in the lower areas of southern Quito). -Irina

But not only being from the mountain, but also carrying an indigenous surname³³ was a reason for discrimination and mockery for Yanara, who is now a high school teacher of Language and Literature. In one of her testimonies, she tells that *"she has studied several times with her students the origin and meaning in Quíchwa of the indigenous surnames that some kids have in the class"*, she says cheerfully and confidently. *"Some mean strength, others have to do with animal names"*.

³³ Many *quiteños* (people born in Quito) have Spaniard surnames coming from the conquest and this is often associated with better "social class". Or, as Radcliffe would explain it, a superior hierarchy in social diversity.

The struggle for training

What are the implications of all this? Is this an enforced task? Has there been any kind of opposition or rejection to this daily training, which is the planning/construction of different curricula? Somehow, this is a requirement to be a teacher at INEPE. I also see that the compañeras make a big personal sacrifice by staying in the evenings and coordinating for hours. Does this mean they are being free and happy? What about their children? And their homes? *"The compañeras have always struggled for their training"*, says another of my interviewees, who is now coordinating coordinators. *"Studying and working is not beyond our expectations"*, she tells me, as if she were challenging me a little. And then I understand that my question is colonialist that it denies me the possibility of looking at these women as I look at myself. I am very similar to them: an Ecuadorian woman, mother, wife, student, worker and migrant, and I believe in education because I have found my freedom and development there; I look at training as a great possibility to improve my life and that of my family. I appreciate every workshop, every book, every new job. Why should the desires and aspirations of these women be any different? Because they are indigenous? Or because I, being a mestiza born in the urbanized part of Quito and having a Spanish lastname, have not yet come to look at them as equals? I check my material and find a video that clarifies my ideas:

It was Tuesday afternoon; it's been a month and three weeks since I got to do my field work at INEPE. I was invited to do a three-day workshop on Literary Analysis of Spanish-American stories because I had mentioned that I learned a lot on the topic in one of my classes. We are at the library, which is a relatively small room (32 feet by 32 feet). From the window, you can see the Andean forest combined with Eucalyptus trees, climbing

up to the top of Ungüí, hill on whose slopes INEPE lies. It is a bit cold and I notice tiredness in some attending faces. Remembering the pedagogy of PE, I propose to the classmates and teachers to say what it means to be sitting there, "taking" this workshop. I want to know if they are motivated. Gloria raises her hand and explains how, for her, training is a privilege, and remembers the women of Simiatug³⁴:

"Gaby, to me it is a joy to be here and that you can share this time with us. I always remember when we went to Simiatug; the first few times I complained at night, because after teaching all morning, traveling four hours on a Friday, I was tired and thought: What did I get into? (Laughs). The same day we arrived, we had to plan what we were going to do on Saturday. Then, I worked with the indigenous women there and they taught me a lesson. I saw that, with the only purpose of getting education, they walked three or four hours from their communities, to arrive at 7 am to the little town where we were meeting. Some came walking with their families, their husbands and children; others walked alone, carrying their babies on their backs. Some of my students (men and women) came to my workshops with their children in their arms. And they were good students, responsible. After I saw that, I never complained again. That is why I thank you and life to be in this space, which is only 5 minutes away from my house, where I can even bring my children to be reading or playing or whatever. I am grateful, despite the fatigue that I have, to sit and learn something new." (Eunice - Video 07/02/2015)

Returning to that moment and analyzing this discourse confirms my erroneous prejudice: there is no rejection of the indigenous women towards training; on the contrary: it is one of their desires. Training has not been imposed and it is not a "punishment" either. It is a sacrifice, but these women are fighters and accept it gratefully.

³⁴ Four years ago, ECUARUNARI requested educators of INEPE to go to more than 10 indigenous provinces of the country (those with greater educational needs) in order to start a program of literacy and national training. INEPE accepted and about 30 educators from Isoloma (among them Eunice) traveled voluntarily two weekends a month for three years to recreate the educational proposal with indigenous children, young adults and adults interested in completing their schooling and/or learning the office of teaching for their communities.

At INEPE, promotion is a kind of "prize" to the training and integral self-training, but above all, it is a form of solidarity that allows and motivates the agency of rebellion against the system, that means learning to think, feel and act the life in community through education.

Popular promotion is one of INEPE's most important achievements and contributions to society from my point of view. It has been forged based on the total trust in people and their capacity for self-transformation and development. Freire's methodology is the starting point; however, it has been enriched and creatively innovated in community, achieving an inclusive intersectional form of development (which considers the ethnic-cultural, geographic and gender particularities), in contrast and opposition to everything that Sarah Radcliffe denounced as characteristics of colonial development.

In conclusion, it was said that being a popular educator at INEPE is an agency act in itself that involves making significant decisions in the lives of my interviewees, who have decided to become part of INEPE as teachers, in an effort to transform themselves and transform their realities. On the other hand, the concept of agency implies resistance, and in that sense, it has been explained how, for the indigenous women of Isoloma, resistance is their struggle for self-training and training to serve their community.

CHAPTER 3:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND AWARENESS

I came (to INEPE) and it was something like an awakening of consciousness. Says Hilda, popular educator at La Dolorosa for fifteen years. She explained that being a daughter of illiterate parents (her father, a construction worker; her mother, a house keeper), during her first years of belonging to INEPE she felt "as if she was waking up and understanding her life". I wonder if that awakening of consciousness described by Hilda is what Freire called the transition from a non-reflexive consciousness to a critical one. Freire said that one thing is becoming aware, and another one, attaining awareness, because the first helps to identify oppression, but the second one includes the transformation of reality. And he looked at this transformation in phases; however, the main argument of this work affirms that the action is simultaneous to the awareness in the experience of the educators of Isoloma. Why does this happen?

It has been already explained how the action works, from PE in this case study, and how it promotes and pushes the agency. But the action is only one, of the seven dimensions, which I detected in the process of being an agent (see page 64).

In this third chapter, awareness is described and characterized as a collective, unequal, multidimensional road that occurs through solidarity, dialogue and participation in the experience of the indigenous women of La Dolorosa. And as a special focus, the development of gender awareness is analyzed.

3.1 The collective awareness is before the individual one

"One of the experiences that marked me when I just came to INEPE is that, in the workshops, awareness was a process in which we all participated together: my mom, my brothers, neighbors, children, girls, everyone", Gloria remembers.

Thus, at INEPE, the raising of awareness is a joint process that starts in existing problems, and the criteria of the neighbors themselves, of children and young people are collected to reach a consensus. Therefore, what each participant assumes as a "new consciousness" is the product of common reflection. Issues are discussed together and decisions are taken collectively, for example, when a *minga* has to be done to improve a road destroyed by the rain, or when it is necessary to change a student to another group, or whether punishment is a suitable way to improve kids' behavior. This is a daily practice in classrooms, in administrative meetings, teacher gatherings, parents meetings and neighborhood assemblies. And it is that starting from the other, as we have seen in previous pages, is a principle of PE (Popular Education), but also an ancestral practice in Chilibulo.

The first thing that astonished us when working with indigenous, black women, and particularly with people from La Dolorosa, is that this awareness of being oneself and of one's inner contents was given as a collective consciousness. Then the ways in which the indigenous women of La Dolorosa joined together to worship the Virgin, erasing all the differences they had, including fights over land, inheritances, etc., is very instructive in how one lives that collective consciousness in the indigenous world, and that, invitesus, the mestizos, to live that internal collectivity. (Ángela)

Thus, at INEPE, the development of awareness is collective, rather than individual. But this is not a unique discovery, nor a new discovery. The British anthropologist Marilyn

Strathern (1988) pointed out, for example, that "the naturalization -by researchers- of the concepts and assumptions of the Western scheme often makes it difficult to understand the cultural forms of others" (189) and explained that "the individual-society dichotomy is not a universal fact, but a particular cultural construction explicable in the context where it arises and is maintained". From this perspective, the individual is defined as a biological entity that has autonomy and therefore is possessor of himself, his personal attributes, his body and his mind; and is directly responsible for his own actions, which makes him an active subject. This subject arises in a pre-social, "natural" state, and needs to form social relations to achieve certain goals that are required to be submitted to the principles and values of the society in which he was born." (190) Therefore, Strathern explains that this construction of the person who opposes the individual to society is the product of an "economy of goods" and, of course, the notion will be different in a society with an "economy of gifts".

The distinction between "economies" is a radical difference between the cultural conception of objects, the production and exchange of objects, and the nature of the contractual relations that subjects define through objects and exchange. The "economy of goods" operates with the exchange in mercantile relations and the individual is alienated from the product of his work -the goods by a strict distinction between the things and the people who produce them, whereas in the "economy of gifts" - unlike the merchandise - the gift is not dissociated from its producers, therefore it implies relationships between people - the donor and the recipient - that are generated in a particular religious, moral and legal framework taking the form of "total benefit" Indicative of involving different areas of social life. (190)

Strathern points out another important difference; in a society of goods, people and things are idolized, whereas in an economy of gifts people and things are personified,

through a process that makes social relationships visible through objects. Among my interviews and observations, there are several examples of how the teachers and, in general, the inhabitants of Chilibulo live in community when preparing a funeral, accompanying sick people or when harvesting. Thus, when I ask Lilián about the greatest difficulties in the PE work at INEPE, she tells me that one of the greatest challenges in living the community relationship between indigenous and mestizo people is for the non-natives *"to understand (herself included) and strive to learn such collectivity, because it is a manifestation of the possibility of life in community"*. Commenting on this topic with Patricia, director of INEPE's health area, and another of the few non-indigenous compañeras, what she has seen is very similar:

"There have been times when native families have been upset over issues of inheritance, religion or because a hen went to the land that was not of its original owner and has damaged their sowing. The neighbors are really upset with each other, but when a death or a holiday occurs, and everything that involves (accompaniment, support, jokes, food preparation and service) the dislikes are set aside and they come together."

For these reasons, I believe that Isoloma can be considered a society in which the economy of gifts is still preserved, since **native** people do not conform to the model of individuals, and therefore do not define their conscience individually but rather collectively, since I do not find an individual-society dichotomy as Strathern claimed is the cases in some cultures.³⁵

³⁵ Strathern performed his fieldwork among the Melanesians and found that there the person is conceived as inherently social. The person contains the relationships and these relationships become visible, throughout their life, through action. In other studies, Strathern also argues that in

It's Friday, 11 am. I'm arriving to Isoloma to do interviews. Classes ended 2 weeks ago. I meet a large group of several of my interviewees and other compañeros (among them, the person in charge of the library, and the one attending the cafeteria). They are enthusiastically "peeling" peas that they have harvested while they talking. The person who accompanies me, a foreign friend, makes me notice that they are very happy. What do they do? I ask. "We are here, working" answers someone and everyone laughs. (Field notes)

The collective consciousness, being revalorized by Popular Education in its traditions, in its way of expressing its *cosmovision*, its cosmology, in respectful treatment, appreciation and appraisal, has been one of the most important elements that has allowed my interviewees to become subjects.

On the other hand, this collective consciousness has been important in personal awareness and development, because the act of perceiving "the whole", that each one of the community members are a different "me", has subsequently been transformed into a critical gender awareness, for example. But we will have the detailed explanation of this in the following chapter.

3.2 The seven dimensions in the awareness process

Although the argument in this thesis speaks of the agency or action being part of the awareness process, another of my findings in analyzing the data was that, as important as

this type of society social relations are part of the essence of the physical person (consubstantial), and then it and its relationships form a unit.

agency, for my group of interviewees there are six other interdependent processes that have occurred simultaneously and have made possible the transition between one consciousness and another:

1. Action / agency
2. Selfknowledge-Selfcriticism and recognition of one's value system
3. Critical understanding of personal history in local, national and global history
4. Appropriation of the methodology of PE
5. Therapeutic work
6. Political awareness and self-government
7. Gender awareness.

In other words, action or agency (which in this case occurs when educating³⁶) is one of the starting points and constant return to awareness, but it is propped up, sustained and energized by all other mentioned dimensions. Therefore, one can speak of an interrelation and interdependence with one another. And it can be said, then, that this multidimensionality is a characteristic of INEPE's indigenous educators' particular awareness experience, which answers the question of how they came to be conscious subjects.

And although there are several other categories and experiences within the discourse of the participants, the seven mentioned have been common in all, and could be understood as the dimensions in their process of awareness.

Let us look again at the testimony of Sisa, who recognizes a transformation that has been taking place in her for more than 20 years, the time she has been a teacher at INEPE:

When I came here (she refers to INEPE) I had ugly things inside me: I had bitterness, resentments that marked my life. Here I gained self-esteem, I learned to

³⁶ but it can also occur when becoming librarian, helper in the school cafeteria, auxiliary in the health department, or of the organic garden, as I have seen awareness from different types of activities at INEPE.

value myself as a person, as a woman ... Because before, when I was 18, I felt I was a bad woman and nobody could see me with appreciation.

When I ask her how this self-esteem and valuation gain that she mentions happened, Sisa tells me that as a child she suffered sexual abuse, abandonment by her father, domestic abuse, as well as the severe economic situation of poverty in which her family lived. When she married, the story was not very different as she was, again, a victim of abuse and domestic violence. But when she joined INEPE, the fact that she felt useful and important to the community and with the capacity to perform a job that gave her strength and at the same time challenged her, encouraging her to go beyond her resentments *"at the beginning for my daughters, and for the boys and girls, to become a better teacher"*, but later, for herself to become a better person.

Sisa notes that, as time passed by, solidarity and training experienced in the organization have managed to overcome cultural prejudices, such as, talking to a psychologist. "When speaking in my group of *compañeras*, we ALL had a story, we were all loaded with something," she says. And she explains that in the end seeking therapeutic professional support to face her bitterness was key because she *"managed to end the relationship with her husband, which was what most oppressed her"* despite her daughters and family blamed her for this, during years. And, although not directly on the political level, this is an experience of awareness. Thanks to her tenacity, the action of educating for freedom, the training, the therapy, the sisterhood seen as the accompaniment of her coordination in her life (and not only in their academic training), she was able to become aware of her situation of oppression and she realized that a large part of her personal limitations had to do with the bitterness that her marriage caused her. But she did not stop there, she made a decision,

acted and was able to free herself. That is to say, in the case of Sisa the separation was a form of liberation that was achieved through all the seven mentioned processes. I say this, because when she speaks of the relation of this experience with her task as an educator, she is very emphatic to say that this experience (probably together with several others she has faced) has been fundamental in her work as a woman, but also in her task as a popular educator.

I agree with her, I confirm it by looking at her: her new attitude (I say new, because she talked about having been a sad and weak woman) is now full of strength, energy, wisdom and resilience which she incarnates and shares in classrooms, and in each educational event, as I noted in my field diary: "*(...) I looked at Sisa several times in her Math workshops and noticed, in addition to her clarity in the subject matter, a balance in her tone of voice, in her posture when standing, walking, looking at the students³⁷, compassion, patience and maturity that allows her to peacefully approach the fight between two mestizo girls, despite they do not show much interest in her reflections.*" (Field notes).

³⁷ Another of my important findings has to do with body language, as it has served as an indicator to note the dignity and confidence of the compañeras. All my life I have had the opportunity to live and work with indigenous women for the social vocation of my family. But they also invited me to go to Simiatug (an isolated indigenous community in the Andean province of Bolívar) at one point of my stay during the fieldwork in Ecuador, since some INEPE educators had planned a workshop there. I decided to go and make a specific observation of comparison of this body symbolism among indigenous women who have much, less or little integral training. I noticed that there is a big difference that lies in the confidence of those with a higher level of training as they are characterized by actions such as raising the hand to participate, modulate and raise the voice, plant the gaze when necessary, pause, allow themselves to laugh, cry and ask questions. Their way of standing is also different. Indigenous women with less training are hiding behind their husbands when asked to participate, or do not participate. Their tone of voice is low and little vocalized; their head and eyes are low. Their posture tends to bend."

In short, this testimony has shown how for Sisa the transformation of her consciousness has been a product of evolution in the seven processes mentioned: the critical understanding of her personal history has allowed her self-knowledge; her self-knowledge led her to seek a therapeutic work that has contributed so much in her political consciousness, self-government and gender awareness, as in her teaching practice and in her life.

Isoloma's indigenous women's awareness experience is definitely different from that of their students, factory workers, the CoMadres Collective women, or the Simiatug peasants. And it is also different from the magical-naive-critic stages that Freire posed. However, if there is something that is characteristic of any process of this kind, it is the need to recognize, assume, and confront oppression.

Oppression and its faces

Freire understood oppression as "a form of violence that destroys and maintains in neutrality the concrete possibilities of thinking and questioning reality." All the women I interviewed spoke of their most intimate and personal stories when I asked them about their experiences of awareness. I must admit that I was expecting stories with a more "political dye" and that I wanted to hear more elaborate speeches about how they were or are understanding capitalism, neoliberalism, alienation or patriarchy, from their identity as indigenous women. But all of them, without exception, focused on their conflicts with their mother, in the absence of their father, in the relationship with their children, husband, students and only those who are twenty or more years working at INEPE mentioned those more scholarly concepts.

However, I ask myself: are an abusive marriage, the alcoholism of the parents, the migration and consequent abandonment of the husband or the imposition of macho rules of a mother (some of the stories that they have overcome) also forms of oppression?

Of course. In all these examples, we can identify different forms of violence that, if not demystified, destroy the possibilities of thinking and acting freely. Therefore, they must be understood in their historical dimension and they must be faced and overcome, in the same way as labor exploitation, racial, gender or social class discrimination. Otherwise, it is very frequent and probable that if a woman (indigenous or otherwise) fails to understand the migration and abandonment of the husband from those perspectives, she, instead, will understand them from the strongest socio-cultural ideologies of her surroundings, and assumes as true what is heard: that *"perhaps her husband abandoned her because she did not embellish herself enough for him"* or that *"he was not pleased/served as it is supposed to be because she was working."*

Paulo Freire also said that "oppression is not only material, but also spiritual", my observations allow me to affirm that in the case of these indigenous women it has been vitally important to attend to those primary spiritual needs of their emotional lives that oppressed them, and then to become aware of all other forms of violence and destruction that limit them. In other words, because they are women who have faced harsh realities since childhood, oppression has several faces and in a process of real awareness, all of them have to be recognized, understood and confronted in order for them to be subjects and agents of their lives.

3.3 Awareness is a different process for everyone

Each educator has developed her consciousness in a different way, despite belonging to the same project. I say the above because, from the narratives of my interviewees, I noticed that awareness is a different path for each person or group, because it starts in the personal or particularly unique experience and to live that transformation depends on the intensity of the decision.

Therefore, for example, while Amaya, who is very young, single and childless, wants to learn to be an independent woman, and is on a path of awareness as she has realized that the oppression of women comes from the cultural prejudices she has inherited from her mother; Bea, on the other hand, wants to be strong and learn to face and overcome the abandonment of her husband who two years ago left her with 4 children. Amaya and Bea are both teachers (not for a long time, less than five years) and very likely the action of educating and being popular educators led in both their personal quests and in their desire to be independent or strong to their becoming aware of their lives, as part of their training made them acquire that desire to be independent and strong. But Amaya has no partner, and then her chances of exploring and experiencing her independence are different from Bea's chances, who obviously has more responsibilities and speaks of one of her difficulties being that she must focus on the lives of her children, especially now, that their father is gone. Nina, who has older children and a more stable home has participated in youth political training activities since the age of 15 and is "raising awareness" in the classroom regarding children and teenagers desire of consumption, reflecting on this with the teachers she coordinates as well as, at home on what she learns from books and texts.

CHAPTER 4 GENDER AWARENESS AND ITS AWAKENING

At INEPE there is no special training on gender issues or training in women's rights, because "it was not a necessity," says Álvaro. *"The issue of gender inequality, as it is known in the Western world, has not been raised as a necessity in the team, so in Popular Education, for ethics we cannot impose a problem or a speech to the community"*, she says. Sarah Radcliffe explained how one of the problems of the imbalance in development in Latin America has to do with policies marked by colonial ways of knowing social categories and their interactions. Starting from there, it seems to me quite sensible that at INEPE, organizational policies are built (and not imposed) collectively, and based on local needs. However, inequality, as well as the difference in opportunities and inequality in women's resources, compared to men, are global problems and have affected the women in Chilibulo.

In my experience as a student, teacher, as well as in my field work, I could observe that INEPE indigenous educators are agents and aware in a non-traditional way. In fact, that particular energy expressed in the way of leading their groups of students, of coordinating and planning with other teachers, but also in the way of being leaders at home, being a reference for their children and other relatives, and especially watching them establish fair relationships with their husbands, on an equal basis with their spouses, attracted my attention for many years and were the main motivation of this research

In the present chapter, I will focus on the description of the development of gender awareness, experienced by the female educators of Isoloma. I therefore conceptualize gender as the "socially constructed cultural ideal through which masculinity is defined against a feminine 'other', which supports a patriarchal order and legitimizes social order and patriarchal power". (Tickner 1992 : 7). Therefore, awareness in this field includes the awareness of gender as a social and cultural construction in which the patriarchal order and power prevail. In other words, a woman is expected to reflect on this oppression and act in the effort to transform that reality.

In order to "measure" this "growth", awakening or transformation of gender consciousness, I looked for two moments in the speeches of my interviewees: a before and after; an old woman and a new conscience.

4.1 The old conscience

The analysis of the narratives of the educators showed how each of them comes from families in which, although their indigenous roots have given them a deep cultural richness, have also determined abusive ideologies and practices of gender caused by patriarchy. And so, several *cultural constraints* could be identified. In this work we will study the three most common ones as part of the old consciousness, as well as the mechanisms of agency and overcoming them, or the new awareness.

A woman must occupy the private space and serve

The fact that women cannot and should not be "exposed" in public space, as well as the idea that she exists to serve the husband and children and take care of household chores is the first argument, and one of the most common ones I found in the testimonies which referred to the traditions and family ideologies of the teachers.

"(...) before I was very restricted to leave the house by my mom who told me it is not right (...)" says Amaya, the youngest of my interviewees. And it shows the modest behavior and the obligation to stay home for being single that has been taught to her. But she expresses it within her self-description, and as something that she has overcome (since she is a free woman) when I ask her to tell me who she is.

I consider myself a free, hardworking woman. I am the last of my sisters and the only one who still lives with my mom, because the others are married. During the time, I have been taking more freedom, I have been going out of the house because before I was very restricted to leave the house by my mom who told me it is not right; but now I'm happy, I like to dance, I like to sing. I no longer close up; if I must talk, I say things. If there are things that bother me, I speak up.

Nina, another of my interviewees, and one of the oldest, more dynamic, educated and "professional" ones and the director of the Educational Area mentioned in one of our conversations: *"My mother thought that women were for service"*. As it turns out, her life as an agent and conscientious woman directly contradicts the rule her mother had taught her. This was the most popular patriarchal idea among family discourses, followed by the idea of the superiority of man.

Superiority of man and decision making

It used to be that, if he is the husband, even if he kills or beats me up, he is the husband. And that the woman always has to respect what the husband says and be with the husband no matter what he does.

Curi says, whose story we narrated in chapter 2 as an example of agency "per se". Curi's husband is an alcoholic, she tells so with tears in her eyes. But she has decided to keep her relationship because her first teacher coordinator, when realizing about this situation, suggested her husband to seek treatment, as Hilda's husband did earlier. Curi's husband accepted and went to rehab, supported by a fundraising carried out at INEPE, as such treatments are impossible to afford even for middle-class families in Ecuador. Curi did not accept the alcoholism of her husband. Curi supported and led her home the entire time her husband was a patient; she has not fought for her independence, but has conducted her life from gender solidarity. The husband is a construction worker and for more than 4 years has continued attending addiction meetings and support groups. *"Curi is one of the most committed, active and talented teachers"* says Nina, a time when I asked about her.

This practice of solidarity support to the recovery of addictions through the intervention of a neighbor happened again later with Flor's husband, also an alcoholic, and has happened with some other young people (especially males) in the sector.

The power and benefit of man

A last and third idea in the construction of family and cultural gender of the interviewees has to do with the conception that men should have privilege over women.

This is what Flor says when we talk about her life:

I come from a humble family, my mother's family, where she was taught that the woman has to be subjected to what the husband says. (...) In the context of my mother's mindset there was abuse, I remember that as a young woman she physically punished me if I did not take care and look after my brothers.

The above quotation confirms the affirmation in the previous section, because in Flor's family (as well as in the case of several other teachers) the idea that the father or the husband is the one who makes the decisions exists. But, in addition, the very typical conception is added that the man must get the services and cares of the woman, in the relationship and at home.

One of the questions I asked all my interviewees who have a relationship is how they believe that household chores should be assigned or shared. All, without exception, understand and express that the unbalance distribution of chores is unjust. An example of this is the testimony of Eunice, who reproaches the disrespectful attitude of her brothers towards the work of their mother at home:

As time passed, I realized that my brothers did not understand the great value and work that my mother had done by staying home. A typical expression of theirs was: - And you worked?! Then, the fact that she was there when we needed her was not valued at all! Suddenly, she was not valued, but even more than that, there was no empathy towards my mother who belonged to a rural sector. I have always recognized her work and effort, sometimes even greater than my own. My mom used to raise pigs, so we together cleaned the piggery, slaughter the animals and she would run to sell the meat. Of course, I never remember having found my brothers doing so for the family.

In this narrative, there is an awareness of the importance of the care provided by the mother as a fundamental axis of the growth and development of human beings, and not for payment, which shows care not as a work of alienation, but of very high importance for human existence³⁸.

³⁸ Feminist critique identifies domestic labor as a fundamental economic part of the capitalist system, emphasizing care as labor. In this sense, conceiving the home chores and the caring of children in particular as "work", allows us to make visible the role of women in the production of capital. Thus, women's activity subsidizes the system free of production by producing labor (children) and reproducing the man (husband) for labor exploitation (Nash, 1988). (P.13)

And there is also the recognition of the sacrifice and effort made by women who stay home to do domestic chores, and especially of the harshness of women's work in the countryside, which includes physically intensive tasks. On the other hand, there is a reflection and appreciation of both the work done at home and the field, such as educating (or professional work) in opposition to the vision of the male brothers, who demean and disqualify the mother for being dedicated her efforts to the home and not to work outside.

In addition, I must report that having been able to enter four different homes and talk with husbands and children, I noticed a more balanced distribution of domestic chores such as cooking, washing, ironing and child care. However, in their narratives and day-to-day lives I also notice that, except for a couple of cases, it is not possible to speak of a totally equitable distribution, because these *cultural constraints* weigh heavily on and still leave women very loaded. In addition, discourses are not necessarily clear on rights issues, nor is there a rationalization of concepts. Thus, Yanara, speaking about the importance of being an indigenous woman in the community says, for example: *"Being a woman is something beautiful. Without us there would be no humanity"*. And that is all the understanding that she rationally has from her logic on the subject. However, when asked about her role in the community she says, *"I think my role in the neighborhood and in our community is to support young women who have become pregnant and are judged by their families, because I have done it several times"*. That is, she acts what she believes, but the orality and rationalization of that is more difficult. I also observed this with three other young compañeras in the project.

I realize, then, that achieving this balance is a whole process of training and life, since it is very complex. This is how Nina makes an analysis when asked if it is easy to have a

relationship different to that of her mother's: *"No. It has been difficult to look at myself as a woman from another perspective; it is difficult because in the society in which we live we are not accepted. However, I fight because having a different experience has allowed me to have greater opportunities in my life, as a woman, mother, wife and professional and that has benefited us all."*

Anyway, and as we have seen, there is a leap between what these women learned from their mothers and what they say, think, feel and do, as the following testimony demonstrates, that somehow synthesizes what is going to be explained later as characteristics of the new awareness:

When I entered the institution, I cannot say that I was a woman who valued everything I had, everything I did, or everything I was. But I say that if I had not suddenly entered INEPE, I would have been gotten married outside of INEPE, I would have been one of the many abused women in Ecuador specifically because there is much abuse in our country, and when I entered the institution to the training classes, workshops, the fact of sharing experiences led me to understand that yes, I am a valuable person and that no one has the right to mistreat or humiliate me, no matter how much knowledge they have or how much money they can own. I understood that because before I used to say 'I'm going to marry an old millionaire man that is good'. But I believe that joining INEPE allowed me to see life in a different way. And I learned this through a daily practice, beyond the master classes and demanding curricula, which we have, as we have a lot of training in the institution.

4.2 The new awareness

It was explained in the previous chapter how gender consciousness is not independent, but has been achieved in the simultaneous work of several dimensions or aspects of the formation and integral self-formation of the women of Isoloma in their

efforts to become educators. However, I wanted to delve into this topic because it is a very current need. Consequently, I was able to identify in the discourse and life of the compañeras four concrete elements that have pushed their agency and new gender awareness:

Leaving home and traveling to educate

Aware that one of the cultural ideas is that women must take charge and occupy the private space, the idea of working outside the home as a teacher and "leaving" home supposes a level of feminine action. However, there are many cases in which women do so out of economic necessity, and even pushed by their partners or husbands, while preserving the patriarchal structure. In these cases, women's burdens are doubled and even tripled, as work becomes one of the responsibilities since man continues to demand fulfillment of roles understood as "feminine".

In that sense, the task of educating the indigenous compañeros of Simiatug and of several other provinces of Ecuador, as discussed in previous chapters, was one of the greatest female rebellions to patriarchal structures and practices. Nine of my twelve respondents commented on how voluntarily signing up to travel for two of the four weekends per month involved a total reorganization of household chores and responsibilities in their homes.

The fact that they have been able to make that decision voluntarily and in solidarity already speaks a lot about their options and freedoms; but also speaks of support and family solidarity towards the community project and other indigenous sectors in need. Or could an oppressed woman, uniquely in charge of her home sign up to travel?

The mentioned campaign of literacy and national formation lasted three years, not weeks nor months. And the result was the achievement of a high level of intra-family organization, in which husbands, children, grandparents and even in-laws became involved. How did they do with all the responsibilities of traveling, teaching and running the house? I ask them. *"My mother-in-law helped us do our laundry and cook,"* says Eunice, who enrolled with her husband, who also worked at the institution and decided to travel with her 2 young children. *"My brothers-in-law were going to sleep in our little house because although we do not have much, there is always the risk that someone can get in and steal,"* says Yanara.

"My husband stayed home with our two children. It helped us to miss each other and to make my children aware of everything that the mother does in the house" says Nina. And so they all talk about how there was never an economic reward but a great satisfaction that came from the experience of contributing, going out to see other realities, feel supported by their families and several emphasize how this even contributed to their relationship with their husbands. And it is because they know how to dialogue.

The dialogue

Talking about the same experience of traveling to the provinces, Gloria tells me how once, when there was gossiping on the husband's side of the family, as they were doubting her honesty and saying to him that *"she must be traveling so much because she is cheating on him with someone else"*. Then, she started an honest and open dialogue with her husband, during which he explained that, despite his family comments, he did not have any doubts about what she was doing when she traveled to teach literacy.

It is known how important communication is in a couple, but communication is part of the dialogue, as this implies knowing how to say what you think and also how to listen. When I talked to several of my interviewees, I noticed how all their relationships, including the ones with their husbands, had changed from learning to dialogue, as part of the PE methodology. And, although, the subject has been analyzed, I want to emphasize the importance of this dimension for the construction of relations of equality at all levels. Let us remember the quote from Amaya in which she explains, *"I no longer close up, if I must talk I say things. If there are things that bother me, I speak up"*. This is a learning that happens when being a teacher and a member of INEPE, for this is what I and all children hear from our teachers at this school: *"If there are differences we dialogue, if there is something delicate to say to somebody, we say it with respect and in the presence of the teacher and the person in question; we do not talk about someone when they are not present; and when there is a serious problem, we dialogue among all to find the solutions."*

(Field notes)

I cannot sleep without having talked to my husband about the things that I noticed that bothers me or something he said to our children and is not right. I do not disavow him, at that moment, but neither can I sleep without talking and agreeing on that.

Nina says the above in a group interview and I notice how most of her colleagues nod; the youngest takes notes and others nod their heads as if saying "that's a great idea." My last observation is that dialogue is learned in practice and by example.

The example

I want to point out that “by example” was another of the very common answers to the question, *what inspired you, who claimed to have previously lived in a traditionally women-oppressed-type of relationship to morph your lives and relationship into a more just and nonconventional one?* "At the beginning watching how other co-workers who are married and working here live their relationship was for me something like *'how lucky my compañera is to have a husband that understands her'* but over time and talking to her I realized that we all can and must fight for that mutual support", says Hilda.

INEPE is composed of a network of families; therefore, there are several couples involved in the community-based project. The example of couples who live their relationships in a committed and supportive way has motivated the younger or new couples in the project to fight for it.

Gender solidarity

Popular Education is a philosophy of otherness, because it comes from the other. *"In our proposal we strive to make education and training a construct with the other. Then, as a woman, I build myself with the child, I build myself with the young person in the classroom, I build myself with the male, I build myself with the different, not only with the feminine self, the feminine self has to dialogue and build with others. That is why our struggle is neither solitary, nor in sect, nor in a particular group of women alone"*, Álvaro says and I understand that in the end what has developed among the women with whom I have spoken, is an action which could be called gender solidarity.

Returning to the example of Curi and Flor, those who have decided to stay in the relationship, even though their husbands are alcoholic, I can see agency and conscience in all these decisions, because there is a struggle to go beyond what is established as "correct" between men and women, even when the decision is to stay "in any way" with him, even if he suffers from an incurable disease like alcoholism, even though the burden is greater and although perhaps deep down, this responds to that cultural mandate of "he is the husband". Despite all this, I insist that this is a great demonstration of conscience, agency, but above all of gender solidarity, since part of the unconditional love, of the resistance that involves maintaining a structured home in these times, and the meditated decision of seeking an alternative and joint healing "*because alcoholism is a problem that affects the whole family*" says Hilda, whose husband also had the same addiction. In addition, it shows that these women have understood alcoholism as a social problem, and I know it because we talked about it in some of the interviews.

Sabah Mahmood (2005) said that the agency "entailed not only those acts that *resist* norms but also the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms³⁹." (16) Based on this, I see that the accompaniment of Curi, Gloria and Hilda in the alcoholism of their husbands is a

³⁹ Mahmood uses this reflection to analyze the study case of Janice Body on Muslim women who have formed groups to do czar practices. "Body proposes that in a society where the 'official ideology' of Islam is dominated and controlled by men, czar practice could be understood as a space for subordinate discourse - as 'a means for cultivating the consciousness of women'. He argues that Czar's possession acts as "a type of counter-hegemonic procedure (...): a feminine response to hegemonic praxis, which ideologically means privileging men, who, in the final analysis, do not escape their categories or their Restrictions". She ends by stating that the women she is studying "perhaps unconsciously, perhaps strategically, use what in the West we prefer to consider instruments of their oppression as a means of reaffirming their value both collectively, through the ceremonies they organize and carry as individually, in the context of their marriage, thus insisting on their dynamic complementarity with men. This in itself is a means of resistance and a way of setting limits to domination."

way of overcoming the norm, staying in it. But it goes beyond that, because in that solidarity that has begun in them, their husbands have learned to value and respect them, and to see them as subjects and referents for their lives. Therefore, solidarity has been fundamental for them to achieve new and more just relationships, but also, as a husband of one of them told me, to " *deeply understand INEPE's project in their own skin*"; since being together and fighting shoulder to shoulder has also been an ancestral characteristic of the indigenous and peasants.

Violeta Paredes said "we do not want to think ourselves in front of men, but to think of us as women and men in relation to the community" (Paredes, 2008: 8). Although there was not much knowledge of the work and approaches of this Bolivian feminist, it seems that solidarity of gender is a quest that is being built in the lives of INEPE's compañeros and compañeras as well as other spheres in Latin America. And although I cannot claim that it exists in all of them, I have already seen many glimpses of that light that implies that quantum leap, as defined by Lilián:

*Gender solidarity is a qualitative leap of consciousness (as we would say from physics) in which there are no opposites; because it is one hundred percent ethical. That is why we seek non-confrontation and fundamentally non-competition between women and men. For us as women do not want to feed the competition system with a speech that denies the other. Knowing that gender is a historical construction that is changing, from PE we shape one another in the dialogue of knowledges with the awareness that we as women have to learn to dialogue with knowledge, that is, with wisdom. With the student, with the father, the mother, as well as with the husband or children, we must seek dialogue from our own wisdom and our own strength. That is why the dialogue of knowledges is a dialogue of recognition, and knowledge is a part of wisdom, but **it is not** wisdom (emphasizes). Wisdom in itself is created in the integrality of knowledges, that is, of responding ourselves and responding to the historical needs of the other, of nature and of the universe.*

If the category of gender is built on the idea of woman, man and relationship between them and is determined according to the meanings of the same in social relations, as stated by FAO (Online), the solidarity of gender is a way to overcome discrimination, violence and all other consequences caused by the patriarchal order and power, since it innovates, by avoiding placing men in opposition to women. And therefore, this local creative practice of Isoloma, it is an emerging category of study on which we should learn and deepen much more.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this work, it was argued that solidarity makes awareness possible (awareness is conceived by Freire as the transition from *being* in the world in a non-reflexive way to experiencing it in a critical way) and agency (defined by Giddens as the ability of action or resistance within the social structures) of INEPE's indigenous educators. The analysis of the narratives and lives of the *compañeras* has shown how the practice of a critical teaching is a way of conscience and resistance, moved by solidarity. However, it should be added that, as well as solidarity, the practices of dialogue and equality in the classroom -and elsewhere- have made it possible for Isoloma's indigenous women to become agents and subjects.

Regarding Agency

Thus, it was noted that striving to learn how to live dialogue, solidarity and equality in classrooms is a way of agency for women, since it is a struggle to resist and overcome structures of domination, through a non-conventional action. Thus, not imposing, valuing diversity and starting from it, not competing and actively participating, as well as orienting these actions to the community and not the individual, are practices of resistance as they are opposed to the practices of imposition, anomie, discrimination, competition and individualism that shape the structures of the (capitalist) system in human beings. Therefore, it is affirmed that being a popular educator is being an agent.

But also because training in the PE methodology, from its beginnings (dialogue, participation and solidarity) and its dimensions (pedagogy of the question, collective construction of knowledge, participatory action research, love of the common household

called Earth) become significant learnings for these indigenous teachers. That is, they are learnings that go beyond the classroom and progressively move to all the spaces of their lives.

In short, in the experience of Isoloma's educators, work itself has become a form of agency "within the norm", because the practitioner transforms the structures of domination, even though, currently, teaching is a structured action which starts in the labor system. Sabah Mahood explained how agency in certain cases can be achieved by reproducing the "rules" and in this case, it is so, especially because this work is not alienated (the product of the teacher's work is in the collective and there is no owner of the surplus). In fact, it has become an element that promotes human development.

Regarding Awareness

Freire (1973) looked at awareness as a three-phase process: magical, naive and critical. In each of these phases, the oppressed defines his problems, then reflects on the causes and, finally, acts; this means, he fulfills the tasks necessary for accomplishing the objectives that have been proposed. The experience of INEPE's indigenous *compañeras* has not occurred in these phases. Nor is it a linear or progressive process. It is a different process, as it is composed of seven other simultaneous processes that start from agency (action of educating critically). Therefore, agency is not a cause of awareness, but it is a part of that process.

Also, Paulo Freire spoke of awareness as the increase of being conscious. And he said that a person can become aware through frank dialogue, but, first and foremost, demystified (1973). The experience of the women of Isoloma, analyzed in the previous

chapters, shows how this demystification does not occur only in dialogue or speaking. In this educational experience, demystification is lived collectively from the beginning by acting (not only by thinking), and starting from the needs of the community. The latter is exactly what Freire proposed. Thus, while the Freirean proposition which states that "the liberation that produces awareness demands a total demystification" is fulfilled, that demystification is incarnated while it is reflected on it.

In other words, for the Brazilian educator, demystification is a work of humanization which requires two things: knowledge and critical look at reality, and identification of the myths that deceive and help maintain the reality of the dominant structure. In the experience of my interviewees, this new knowledge of reality has not come from the reflection on a new discourse, but from opposition in everyday action: to feel a dignified treatment, to be seen as equals, as well as support, caring, affection and solidarity. All of this has motivated them to keep looking for demystification in every space of their lives. That is why PE is spoken of as an integral practice that includes not only processes of the mind, but of the whole body: thinking, feeling and acting.

Freire also affirmed that the purpose of awareness is the liberation from oppression, and the deepest sense of this postulate is fulfilled in the case of the educators of Isoloma. I could see that their individual and collective awareness process has led them to identify internal oppression (fears, anguish, depression, lack of self-esteem), rather than that of the system. However, these causes are a reflection of what domination structures produce (abuse, discrimination, mistreatment, machismo) and therefore, this awareness and resistance, are ways to face oppression from everyday life.

Finally, something more to be said is that in the INEPE indigenous women's awareness experience, oppression has different faces, not just that of the classic oppressor (a boss, an industry, or exploitation). In the process of integral awareness of these teachers, resistance, but above all, facing, understanding and transcending those other unconventional faces of oppression (a gang, the husband's alcoholism, the migration of parents or lack of self-esteem) have been fundamental achievements that should be regarded as transitions, as leaps of consciousness.

For all this, I speak of the fact that these women are conscious (and continue in that process, which is infinite), because they have learned to know themselves and thus have come to know the reality that dominated them. Moreover, they are in a constant seeking of the mechanisms to appropriate this reality from their daily work in order to make it their own and their communities'.

This is how we can conclude that the process of ideological emancipation or freedom, in the experience studied, is possible thanks to solidarity, dialogue and participation.

Regarding gender awareness

Chandra Mohanty, in her famous essay *Under the Eyes of the West*, raised an acute criticism of the victimizing construction of *Third World women*, built by hegemonic Western feminism (117). The victimizing concept of Western feminism, as pointed out by Mohanty, as well as other folkloristic visions, frequently leads us to imagine indigenous women as women-statues: culture-drenched, tenacious farmers, fertile and physically strong, but also weak victims and subjected (to her husband, to tradition, to the system,

etc.). However, the testimonies of the group of indigenous women I interviewed demonstrate in various ways that they are special, agents "per se", precisely because they are legitimately human: with pain, fears and hard stories on their backs, but also with all the courage to make decisions at their own risk. Or as Magdalena León said in explaining the concept of agency: *able to define their own agendas*.

One of the objectives of this work was to determine the relationship between what I observed and the decolonial feminism. Observation and interviews with the women in question have shown how these women identify themselves as strong, hard-working, as well as caring and dedicated. This directly contradicts the view of the woman as a victim, and for this reason one can speak of a feminine practice different from that of Western feminism. Aída Hernández said that Decolonial Feminism is "a new attitude that involves considering feminist practice as not necessarily opposed to tradition, but sometimes closely linked to it, where we will probably find new ways of addressing local, national and global articulations of power" (67). The experience of the women of Isoloma is very close to this new vision, for, as has been shown, there is a communion in many ways with traditional practices to reach agency. Thus, I see this case as a form of decolonial or community-based (undeclared) feminism in many ways because indigenous educators have succeeded in "establishing loyalties with themselves and their sisters of struggle, without ignoring their brothers and sisters of race, ethnicity, and in fact, it has been a mutual and collective construction.

Therefore, the development of gender awareness, in this particular case, has gone beyond the monolithic category of sexual difference or "repositioning to developmental and civilizing conceptions, as a backdrop to the emancipatory possibilities of women"

(Alvarez) as has been the characteristic of classical-western programs of women's development. It has been an inner search for self-knowledge, which becomes agency and collective awareness.

APENDIX

Location: Andean highlands area in the south of Quito - Ecuador



The neighborhood and its habitants:



Everyday life in the school: 7am daily morning workout:



Afternoon teacher's biweekly workout (yoga)



Teachers working in the class in the mornings and planning in the afternoon





Mingas comunitarias (teachers, students and neighbors working together)



Dolorosa Virgin celebration (Isoloma neighborhood annual festivities)





Campana nacional de formación indígena – Simiatug, Ecuador.





The compañeras in INEPE







Group interview



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